

The New Adulthood: Ideas and Questions

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20th century theories of human development

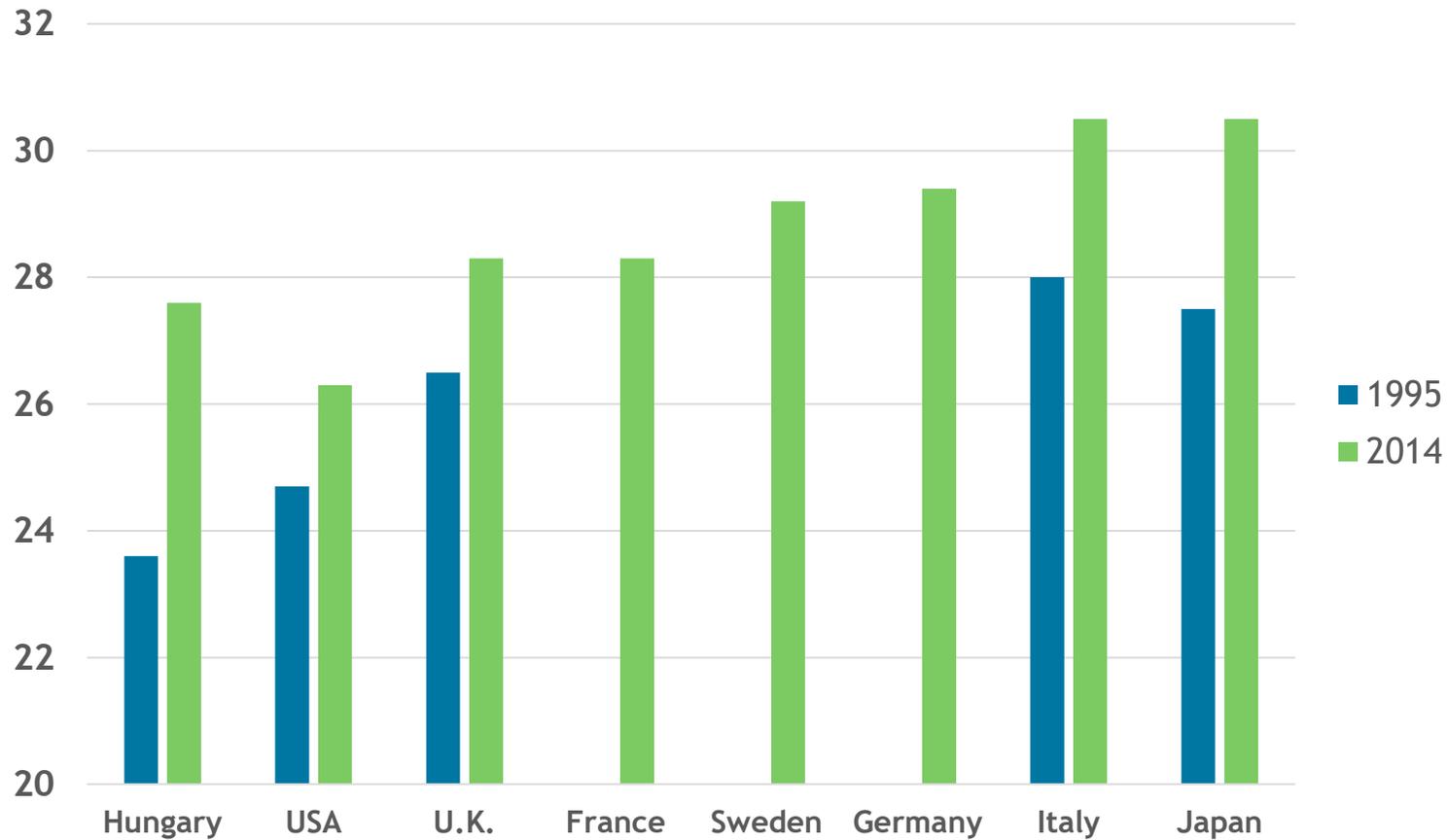
- ▶ Most dominant theories ignored adulthood: Freud, Piaget, Bowlby
- ▶ Childhood was crucial “sensitive period” in all respects; adulthood could only continue or “fix” childhood trends
- ▶ Some late-20th c. theories included adult development: Erikson, Loevinger, Levinson, Carstensen
- ▶ Most adult development research focused on later years, ageing
- ▶ No attention to cultural variations: all “universal”

New times: Structure of adulthood is much different now

- ▶ Rise of the emerging adulthood life stage:
- ▶ Later entry to adulthood: in “knowledge economy,” more people get more education/training than ever before
- ▶ Later entry to marriage and parenthood, lower fertility rates, more people stay single and/or childless
- ▶ High divorce rates, more people single in later life (“gray divorce”)
- ▶ Longer life expectancy—at age 65, at least 20 more years across developed countries
- ▶ Also healthier for longer, in 60s and 70s
- ▶ Cultural variations? E.g., decline of filial piety in Asia?

Age of entering parenthood is rising...

Mean Age First Birth, Females, 1995 and 2014



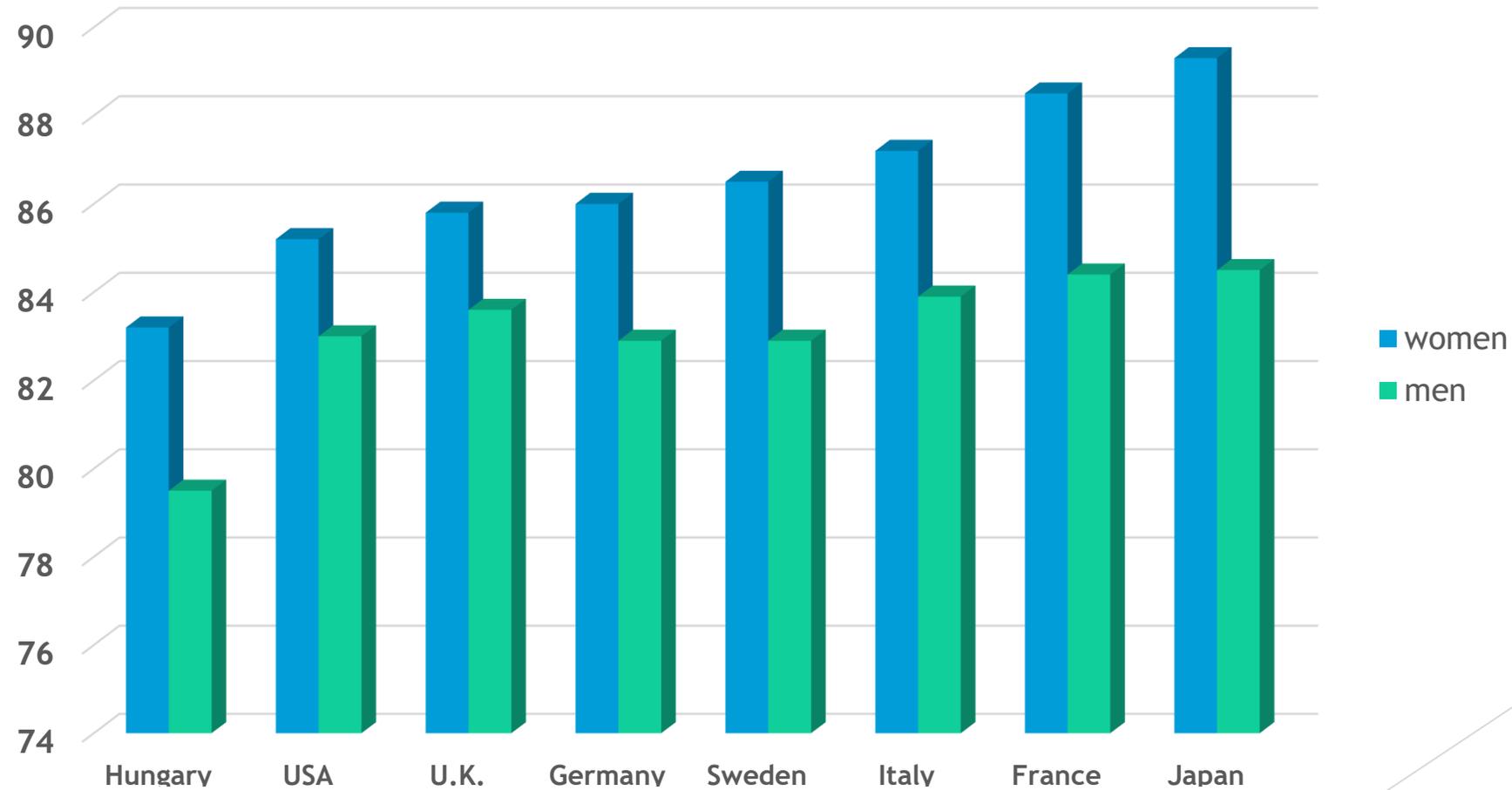
More people are having no children...

Women without children by ages 40-44,
1990 and 2010



Life expectancy is increasing...

Life expectancy at age 65



What will 21st century adulthood be like?

- ▶ **New family patterns:**
- ▶ Fewer children + longer life = Parenthood/family roles no longer dominate adult life
- ▶ Parenthood has become (potentially) **volitional**; fewer people will choose it
- ▶ Partners' family roles will become (more) equal, less gendered

What will 21st century adulthood be like?

- ▶ **New work patterns:**
- ▶ Quality and meaning of work is changing: from necessary drudgery to identity-based work
- ▶ **The sixties** are now the most rapidly-changing decade: from retirement & leisure & decline to freedom and re-emergence of identity issues: Who am I *now*? Including shift to identity-based work?

What will 21st century adulthood be like?

- ▶ **Other important questions:**
- ▶ How long will life expectancy extend? So far, a year per decade...
- ▶ New life stage(s) past age 60? Young-old, old-old, oldest-old... we can do better!
- ▶ New cultural forms and ideologies of adult development?

Storm clouds on the horizon...

- ▶ Inequalities within countries: knowledge economy workers seeking identity-based work vs. low-wage service workers
- ▶ Growing demographic disparities between countries: More and more affluent adults in developed countries; more and more poor children in developing countries; 80% of people in Uganda are under age 30
- ▶ Life-extending interventions will be available mainly for the wealthy?
- ▶ Generational tensions: fewer and fewer young workers supporting more and more “retirees”

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- ▶ Editors: Jeffrey Arnett, Margie Lachman, Oliver Robinson
- ▶ Deadline for 500-word proposals November 30, 2018 (to arnett@jeffreyarnett.com)
- ▶ Details coming soon!