If you believe the data, becoming a parent is a terrible idea

And yet, the human race lives on.

From the 1950s to present day, studies have shown that having a baby is worse for your happiness than divorce or unemployment, that children weaken marriages, parents prefer just about any activity — including cooking, shopping and cleaning — over child care.

And yet, the human race lives on. Today, we’ll explore the complex psychology and sociology of childrearing in All Joy and No Fun: The Paradox of Modern Parenthood by Jennifer Senior.

Senior concludes that, while the negative headlines are valid, they don’t tell the full story of the psychological transformation of parenthood. In fact, one of the most striking changes seen in new parents is that both the highs and the lows of life become more extreme. It’s often the first time in a person’s life that they’re stricken with chronic sleep deprivation, constant uncertainty and a host of new and unusual demands on their time, thus creating an extreme swing toward unhappiness.

But when you get out of the day-to-day and start asking broader, existential questions, parents report increased purpose, meaning and overall joy in their lives. This backs up the adage that the years are short and the days are long. Raising a child comes with very high physical, emotional and financial costs — and very high long-term rewards.

The most fascinating analysis in this book is the contrast between modern parenting and that of a century ago. Until the first half of the 20th century, children were inherently valuable because they could provide financial gain to a family at a very young age. They worked in farms and factories and contributed to the bottom line as soon as they could.