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## "I Kid You Not, I am Asked a Question about Children At Least Once a Week": Exploring Differences in Childbearing Habitus in Pronatalist Fields

Alyssa Mullins  
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"I KID YOU NOT, I AM ASKED A QUESTION ABOUT CHILDREN AT LEAST ONCE A  
WEEK": EXPLORING DIFFERENCES IN CHILDBEARING HABITUS IN  
PRONATALIST FIELDS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando Florida

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Major Professor: Fernando Rivera

## **ABSTRACT**

In the United States, childbearing remains part of the typical life course. However, evidence suggests that men and women, on average, are having fewer children and having them later in life. Additionally, public and academic outlets are increasingly acknowledging some adults' decisions to intentionally forego childbearing completely, with an emphasis on the reasons why individuals choose to abstain from childbearing. However, further research is needed to identify the ways in which voluntarily childless adults actively negotiate the social world among structural influences that simultaneously values parenthood and place complex burdens on parents. Utilizing the Bourdieuan concepts of habitus, capital, and field, the present study contributes to a shift in the conversation from "why" individuals remain childless toward an understanding of "how" childbearing preferences impact individuals' lives in practice.

This research compares experiences and characteristics of non-parents in relation to childbearing preferences. In particular, this research suggests measures to identify deeply rooted childbearing habitus, the relationship between access to various forms of capital and the habitus, and explores how this identity relates to experiences in various social fields. The Bourdieuan perspective poses that individuals' access to capital simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the habitus. Similarly, habitus and capital both shape and are shaped by experiences in various social arenas. Thus the research presented here consists of an exploratory analysis finding support for the use of the concepts associated with this theoretical framework, in order to encourage future research to establish a more complete understanding of the decision (not) to become a parent.

The current study includes a sample of 972 childless men and women between the ages of 25 and 40 years old. Purposive sampling techniques were used to oversample voluntarily childless adults (n=573) to be compared to adults that intend to have children in the future (n=399). Respondents completed an online questionnaire with open- and closed-ended questions addressing personality traits and motivations for childbearing preferences, as well as the structural and interactional impact of these preferences – including measures of social support, cultural norms, and economic resources. In utilizing Bourdieuan concepts of habitus and field as they relate to the complex interplay between individual agency and external structures, this study offers a more comprehensive grasp of the complex reasons for and experiences of a voluntarily childless lifestyle. This shift in emphasis also suggests contributions to a greater understanding of the perceived impact of structural forces, including the health care industry's gatekeeping of reproductive technologies and the work/family life balance in relation to voluntary childlessness as well as broader decisions or processes of becoming a parent, by identifying the similarities and differences between groups.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Childbearing remains part of the typical course of life for most people in the United States. As of 2013, approximately 50% of American adults between 18 and 40 years old have children and 86% of Americans 45 years and older have children (Newport and Wilke 2013). Estimates of childless adults that intend to have one or more child at some point generally range from 90-95% of the population (Newport and Wilke 2013; Yaremko and Lawson 2007). Similarly, Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, and Steelman's (2010) research identified children as a common factor in public perceptions defining what counts as family. However, a growing portion of academic research also acknowledges changing patterns in childbearing. Evidence suggests that men and women, on average, are living longer, having fewer children, and having them later in life (Martinez, Daniels and Chandra 2012; Skolnick and Skolnick 2009). Yet this trend is not consistent across all groups (Martinez, et al. 2012; Gibson 2015) and does not mean that childbearing is less culturally valued overall (McQuillan et al. 2012).

Particularly within the past half a century, Western societies have become characterized by ideologies of individualism and rational choice (Cherlin 2009). Also, men and women have been given greater access to reliable reproductive technologies and women are entering the workforce and higher education in greater numbers due to economic necessity as well as personal desire (Cain 2001; Dye 2010). This has resulted in an overall trend in which men and women alike are delaying marriage and childbearing and having fewer children than previous generations (Cherlin 2005; Sassler and Miller 2014; Veevers 1973). While a majority of childless Americans still intend to have children at some point in their lives, academic studies increasingly acknowledge some adults'

preferences and decisions to intentionally forego childbearing completely (Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Gillespie 2003; Koropecj-Cox, Romano, and Moras 2007; Secombe 1991; Veevers 1973).

Existing research on voluntary childlessness tends to focus on uncovering the reasons adults, often women in particular, remain childless as well as the public perceptions of childlessness (Koropecj-Cox et al. 2007; Powell, et al. 2010). Additionally, some academic and public discourses are increasingly acknowledging the ways in which childbearing preferences are neither strictly limited to individual nor structural factors, but rather a combination of factors in an ongoing process (Heaton, Jacobson, and Holland 1999). However, these approaches tend to focus on the decision to remain childless as an outcome of numerous components, often neglecting the ways in which voluntarily childless adults actively negotiate the social world among structural influences that simultaneously value parenthood while placing complex burdens on parents (Coontz 2005; Gerson 2010; Hays 1996; Kimmel 2012). The current study adds to existing approaches by applying concepts associated with a Bourdieuan theoretical model to initiate a discussion of voluntary childlessness as a complex interplay of structural and individual level factors lived out in practice. This research addresses this gap in literature by utilizing Bourdieu's conceptions of habitus, capital, and field to contribute to a shift in the conversation from "why" men and women choose to remain childless toward an understanding of "how" they act as social agents to simultaneously shape the social world while also being shaped by external social realities. In this research, habitus refers to the deeply rooted dispositions within individuals that are shaped by external structures while also allowing members of society to actively engage

with and shape the social world around them. It is important to consider childbearing preferences as a deeply rooted habitus in order to identify the complex interaction between individuals as active agents with deeply rooted ideologies as well as the interplay between personal preferences and external structures. Additionally, this deeply rooted habitus shapes and is shaped by different forms of capital, including the economic, social, cultural, and symbolic resources available. Individuals then carry their habitus into social spaces, or fields, where individuals and their habitus interact.

Previous studies have made efforts to compare voluntarily childless adults to other groups, including parents (Abma and Martinez 2006; Callan 1983; Somers 1993; Veevers 1973), the involuntarily childless (Abma and Martinez 2006; Letherby 2002), and adults that intend to have children or are undecided (Abma and Martinez 2006; McQuillan, Grier, and Shreffler 2011). Within this literature several differences between groups emerge. For instance, voluntarily childless adults tend to be more educated, have higher incomes and careers in professional or leadership positions, and indicate less conventional gender role ideologies, and less religiosity compared to parents (Abma and Martinez 2006; Frejka and Westoff 2008; Park 2005; Pew Research Center 2015b). Similarly, voluntarily childless couples report higher relationship satisfaction, as having children tends to correlate with marital strain (Cowan and Cowan 2009; Kimmel 2012; Senior 2014). Yet despite the known burdens of childrearing, most adults intend to (and do) become parents at some point (McQuillan, Griel, Shreffler, and Bedrous 2014; Newport and Wilke 2013; Yaremko and Lawson 2007). Thus, voluntarily childless adults remain viewed as non-normative, arguably in part due to pronatalist ideologies that remain deeply rooted within American culture. These ideologies view childbearing as normative and desirable, and

permeate a number of institutions, including religion, government, media, and communities (Scott 2009). However, rather than attaching a “deviant” label to this lifestyle choice, as previous discourse contends (Bartlett 1994; Cain 2001; Park 2002; Rovi 1994), academic and popular literature increasingly pose ways to view this lifestyle as simply one of many choices available in the modern world (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004; Burnell 2015; James 2015; Plank 2015). While pronatalist perspectives remain the cultural and behavioral norm in the United States, it is arguable that American attitudes toward voluntary childlessness – much like divorce, non-marital childbearing, extramarital sex, and cohabitation, are becoming less negative over time (Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007; Thornton and Young-Demarco 2001).

It is also important to note that, as more research emerges to address the concept of intentionally forgoing childbearing, a number of terms have been used to describe this group. Some refer to them as *childless by choice* (Park 2005), while others may use the term *voluntarily childless* (Abma and Martinez 2006; Callan 1983; Mosher and Bachrach 1982). Even further, other researchers, members, and activists prefer the term *childfree* (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004; Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Cain 2001) or *voluntarily childfree* (Koropeckyj-Cox, Romano, and Moras 2007; Mollen 2006), shifting the language to avoid the negative connotation of an absence or void of something (Gillespie 2003; Scott 2009). However, as Scott (2009:19) describes, these labels are not consistently used among the men and women the terms represent and “in a pronatalist society, ‘childfree’ can be a loaded term... inviting people to ascribe motives – such as a dislike of children – that may not apply...” Additionally, while not all childfree persons may identify as *childless*, the process of intentionally forgoing childbearing may arise from a number

of different standpoints not necessarily consistent with a *childfree* label. Unfortunately, each potential term to describe this group can be viewed as problematic (Lisle 1996; Morell 1994). Therefore, while the current research favors the term voluntarily childless in order to remain consistent with the comparison group of temporarily childless adults (Martinez, Daniels, and Chandra 2012; Mosher and Bachrach 1982), I also use each of these terms interchangeably to avoid endorsing any particular term (Scott 2009). This study argues that it is more important to focus on the *experiences* of those forgoing (or planning) childbearing rather than the labels used to define them, thus for the purpose of this research, the terms voluntarily childless, childless by choice, *childfree*, and *childfree* by choice are considered synonymous.

Additionally, Scott (2009) suggests that there are deeply rooted personality differences between individuals that choose to remain childless and those that intend to become parents. Her research identified the *childfree* as more introverted, logical, and “planning” oriented than people who become parents, which supports claims that remaining childless is an active and ongoing process of decision making (Cain 2001) while also supporting claims that significant proportions of adults become parents through more of an ambivalent “whatever happens, happens” or unplanned experience (Sassler and Miller 2014; McQuillan, Grier, and Shreffler 2011; Shreffler, Greil, Mitchell, and McQuillan 2015). Scott (2009) also notes that *childfree* adults are more actively attuned to the powerful forces of pronatalist pressures within American culture, which encourage childbearing and consider parenthood as the expected path toward adulthood. Similarly, the experiences of voluntarily childless adults draw attention to the informal social sanctions or punishments that arise from challenging this social norm. As Scott

(2009:174) describes, “[i]t’s non-normative to say ‘I don’t have children, and I don’t want any,’ and if you say that in several different environments, you will feel the sanctions.”

However, academic discussions of common patterns among the voluntarily childless tend to remain limited to a linear path in which individuals actively choosing to remain childless develop a preference for childlessness as a result of particular factors (e.g. prioritizing professional development and personal relationships over childbearing) or become influenced by forces of the external social world (e.g. the high demands of the workforce or the increased access to reproductive technology). Oftentimes, research on the decision to delay or abstain from parenting utilizes a life course perspective (see Hagestad and Call 2007; Keizer, Dykstra, and Jansen 2008; Umberson, Pudrovska, and Reczek 2010), which considers biographical experiences, historical timing, social identities, and the influence of various pathways on “marital and parental trajectories” (Hagestad and Call 2007:1344). This perspective attempts to consider the element of agency in influencing parenting decisions. However, this approach also remains relatively linear with childlessness situated as an outcome despite its emphasis on the interdependence of factors. Scott’s (2009) identification of personality characteristics among the childfree and the influence of cultural forces impacting the motivations for voluntary childlessness, paired with existing efforts to consider the interdependence of factors further supports the need for a new perspective in future research on this population.

The current study intends to contribute to deeper understandings of the complex interaction between perceptions of childbearing as a personal choice and experience and the structural forces that influence the varied patterns and experiences of parenting,



including the decision to delay or abstain from childbearing. Previous research often views voluntary childlessness as either an outcome of structural or personal factors, or a contributing factor to a number of interpersonal or structural strains, such as stigma or care for an aging population. However, shifting the conversation toward understanding voluntary childlessness as a complex and recurring interplay between structural forces and active agents, may shed light on factors contributing to *and* resulting from the decision (not) to become a parent, as well as how these factors co-exist in a recurring and evolving manner. The current study intends to serve as the first step in this shift by utilizing elements of the Bourdieuan theoretical perspective. Bourdieu (1990) emphasizes the complex and recurring interplay between acting agents and external structures, arguing that the objectivist or subjectivist perspectives in sociological research create a false dichotomy in our understanding of the social world. This shift in the theoretical orientation that guides research on childbearing patterns and voluntary childlessness may provide a more complete understanding of the complex interplay between individual preferences and the structural influences of social arenas within which these actors interact.

The current research also expands our understanding of the active choices and characteristics as well as the cultural influences related to childrearing. Through a comparison of the childbearing habitus of voluntarily childless adults and temporarily childless adults, or those that intend to become parents, as well as an exploratory look into their perceptions and experiences in practice, this research attempts to identify the impact of the decision (not) to have children in relation to the structural fields in which they interact. This shift may contribute to a broader understanding of childbearing and family life as it relates to the ways in which individuals simultaneously structure and are

structured by societal forces as well as the contradictory ideologies within social arenas that shape members' access to resources and identities associated with (non-) parenthood (Cherlin 2009).

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

While childbearing remains a cultural norm for most men and women in the United States, several macro- and micro-level factors have contributed to more active decision-making among individuals regarding when (or if) they plan to have children. Although becoming a parent, as well as forgoing childbearing, is not always decided actively and rationally (McQuillan, Greil, and Shreffler 2011; Morgan and King 2001; Sassler and Miller 2014; Shreffler, Greil, Mitchell, and McQuillan 2015) the purpose of the current analysis is to provide a snapshot of the structural and agentic patterns that childless adults experience as they actively engage with the decision to (or not to) become a parent in the future.

### The Social Construction of Childbearing and Childhood

Patterns related to childbearing decisions, including delaying or abstaining from having children, can in part relate to the social construction of childhood and the structural and cultural implications of this definition as it relates to individuals' transition into adulthood as well as what is expected of adults that are parents. In earlier generations, when power and production were centered among the home, childbearing was viewed as an economic necessity for labor. During this premodern time, children were seen as incomplete 'adults in training' (Mintz 2009). Parents were expected to rush their child toward adult status, giving children work responsibilities in and out of the family home. However, manufacturing technologies and economic prosperities brought on by the Industrial Revolution decreased the need for child labor, making children less of an incentive, and arguably more of a burden for adults working outside the home and living in urban areas. Parents' attitudes shifted toward a view of children as innocent and fragile

beings in need of protection and special care. Additionally, adolescence became a middle period between childhood and adulthood, emerging as a result of the decreased the need for young people to join the labor force (Sternheimer 2013).

Between 1800 and 1900, marital childbearing dropped by approximately 50% in the United States (Coontz 2005). Shifts in women's access to education and the work force assisted in decreasing the association between a woman's fertility and her value and survival in a patriarchal society (Lisle 1996). Changes in fertility rates have also been attributed to economic patterns, as evidenced by a steep decline during the Great Depression as well as the 1950s "Baby Boom" fueled by post-World War II economic prosperity. The structural and economic developments of this era further shifted ideologies, including a "breakdown of dominant norms about the family, gender roles, age, and even reproduction" (Mintz 2009:297). A particularly important development during this period was the introduction of the first birth control pill in 1960. The pill, and subsequent advancements in contraceptive health, has afforded women unprecedented access to control the timing or forgoing of childbearing (Bailey 2006). Access to birth control has also been directly and indirectly linked to women's expanding access to the labor force and economic autonomy, Women's Liberation and the Sexual Revolution, decreases in teen pregnancy and the prevalence of abortion, changing family dynamics and the characteristics and resources available to those who can control when they become a parent (Ananat and Hungerman 2012; Bailey 2006; Cain 2001).

Additionally, stages of youth continued to expand, becoming more distinct from adults as well as one another (e.g. childhood, preteens, teens/adolescence). Jeffrey Arnett (2000) poses an argument for an additional phase of life before adulthood,

asserting that extensive demographic shifts in the past fifty years have “made the late teens and early twenties not simply a brief period of transition into adult roles but a distinct period of the life course” (Arnett 2000:469). Today the 18 to 25 age range is seen as a period of changes, exploration, semi-autonomy, and self-discovery and development. Arnett (2000) argues that this ‘emerging adulthood’ period of life is empirically distinct from adolescence *and* young adulthood as people in this age group neither exclusively consider themselves an adolescent or an adult, but in many respects see themselves in an ambiguous period of neither and both. Thus, today the thirties are more characteristic of ‘young adulthood’ as most people in their thirties have a stable career, are married, and have at least one child while these patterns are much less likely among those between 18 and 25 years old (Arnett 2000). As Scott (2009: 21) contributes, “[t]he bulk of today’s eighteen- to twenty-five-year old single non parents... have yet to seriously contemplate marriage or having kids,” arguing that many are still financially dependent on their parents, in school, and many do not yet view themselves as an adult. Of course it is important to note that this period of self-exploration, transition, and continued training is not universally available to everyone across cultures or within the United States, as different patterns suggest people transition into adulthood differently, for a variety of reasons (Arnett 2000). However, this research maintains that emerging adulthood is a distinct period of life and may become more pervasive based on increased access to a globalized economy.

The cultural shifts that have lengthened the time before adulthood contribute to the timing of whether and when men and women decide (or are able to) to become a parent as well as the expectations held for them as parents if that time comes. Sassler and

Miller's (2014:544) research contributes to an understanding of the transition into adulthood via childbearing as respondents often cited delaying childbearing until they were ready for the 'parenting lifestyle' which was defined as "being less selfish, going out on the town less, or developing more patience." The average age of respondents within this sample was approximately 27 for men and 25 for women, indicating additional ways in which cultural ideologies of independence and individualism as well as the lengthening of adolescence has shifted away from the model of adulthood prevalent only a few decades ago. As Skolnick and Skolnick point out (2009: 99), "[a]s recently as 1970, young people grew up quickly. The typical 21 year old was likely to be married or engaged and settling into a job or motherhood. Now the road to adulthood is much longer." Additionally, while there are increasingly more choices and opportunities available to younger cohorts in the United States, there are also increased demands and expectations making these choices incompatible with each other, leaving many adults to feel as though "they must either make a choice or compromise" (Scott 2009: 37). This contradictory climate and unmanageable expectations may contribute to the increased rates of delaying or forgoing childbearing.

#### Structural contributions and consequences of the decision (not) to become a parent

While viewing childbearing as a distinct and active *choice* offers only a limited perspective on this complex reality, it is not uncommon for individuals to actively maintain an *intention* to have children or to avoid having children, indicating that for many, identities associated with having (or not having) children can be perceived as an active, personal 'decision' (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004; Houseknecht 1987; Rovi 1994). In fact, many researchers consider how individuals' decision (not) to become a parent engages an

active cost/benefit analysis. For instance, Senior (2014) and Yaremko and Lawson (2007) identify how adults that intend to have children often cite expressive, personal *rewards* of being a parent (i.e. happiness, pride, and accomplishment) as outweighing the instrumental *costs*, including financial strain and responsibility, which seem to be accepted without detailed consideration. On the other hand, adults that do not intend to have children tend to cite similar factors as pushing or pulling them into childlessness, oftentimes identifying happiness and accomplishment in different terms than those that anticipate becoming parents. For instance, Gillespie (2003) identified personal autonomy and freedom, including finding happiness in travel, hobbies, and more fulfilling relationships with other adults as a pull toward a childfree lifestyle. Similarly, adults may experience a push away from childbearing based on a perceived inability to balance work and family (Andrade and Bould 2012; Regushevskaya et al. 2013), or a preference to “opt for economic stability and upward mobility ahead of having a child” (Xu 2013:152).

However, concerns about economic stability and upward mobility are not limited to those that prefer to remain childless. Rather, a commonly held reason for delaying childbearing, even among those that do desire to have children someday, is the need to achieve financial stability – although distinct meanings of achievement emerge based on social class (Dye 2010; Sassler and Miller 2014). For instance, working class respondents in Sassler and Miller’s (2014) sample often prioritized finishing school and owning a home before having children, while middle class respondents emphasized accomplishing professional goals, climbing the career ladder, and getting (and spending time being) married prior to having children. As Mahaffey and Ward (2001) argue, childbearing plans remain correlated with outcomes, including the ways in which these intentions orient

individuals toward particular experiences and opportunities compared to others. Expectations about the timing or intention to have children, career or educational plans, and other structural barriers or advantages provide insight into the complex interplay between an individual's personal decision about childbearing and the factors that contribute to this decision.

Other institutions and structural factors may also play a role in the decision to (or not to) have children, as well as the experiences that individuals have as a result of this 'choice'. For instance, many young (and emerging) adults identify professional achievement or work status as a goal prior to, or instead of, having children. The workforce is a 'greedy institution' (Sullivan 2014), and success in one's career oftentimes requires complete dedication, including time spent in training and education. Similarly, competitive advancements at work are most common during individuals' childbearing years. This negatively impacts women more directly than men, as women are more likely to experience career interruptions due to pregnancy, childbirth, or to care for a child or family member. According to a study by Pew Research (2013), 39% of mothers report taking a significant time off work to care for a family member, compared to 24% of working fathers. Pew also reported that working women that are not (yet) mothers were more likely to perceive negative consequences of childbearing, with almost two-thirds of the respondents (63%) reporting that they believe children will make it harder for them to advance in their careers or job.

These perceptions of the impact of childbearing on personal achievements are not limited to adult women. In their research on the relationship between gender and the intended timing of childbearing, Mahaffey and Ward (2001) identified gender differences



in educational goals and the timing of childbearing among adolescent girls and boys. Particularly, adolescent girls were more likely to consider the incompatibility of work and family roles while adolescent boys perceived parenting as having no impact on their educational or professional plans. Thus, the authors conclude that delaying childbearing is associated with increased educational goals for girls, while boys' educational plans remain influenced only by their academic success, rather than their intentions to balance these various roles. Similarly, Waren and Pals (2013) also identified educational attainment as having a specifically gendered interaction with voluntary childlessness. In this sample, increased education correlated with a higher probability of voluntary childlessness among women while education was not correlated with childlessness among men.

Furthermore, in the professional world broad ideologies about mothers' competency and commitment to their work as well as actual career interruptions experienced disproportionately by women negatively impact their career paths and wages, while men on the other hand tend to receive more financial and professional benefits from being fathers (Bernard and Correll 2010; Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012). A complex interaction between public support and broad gender ideologies influence the employability and wages of mothers compared to childless women as well as men, and the options available to mothers to support their ability to balance work and family. Greater differences among mothers and other women as well as between men and women emerge in cultures with dominant gender ideologies that idealize the role of the stay at home mother. According to a cross-cultural analysis by Budig et al. (2012), mothers earned lower wages compared to childless women in 60% of the countries

examined, after controlling for other factors including experience, hours worked, and education. “This [motherhood] penalty is an important source of inequality among women and between women and men that is well documented and appears to vary significantly cross-nationally” (Budig et al. 2012:165).

For instance, motherhood in the United States is characterized by a culture of ‘intensive mothering,’ or the belief that mothers are responsible for the primary caretaking of children and this task should take priority over all other interests and desires and should involve “copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources” (Hays 1996:8). Essentially, intensive mothering is a process of putting her children at the center of her life in front of all other identities or ‘selves’ at every moment of the day. From this perspective, to be a *good* mother is to be an intensive one, and being a paid working woman is expected to be secondary. This suggests that while cultural and structural transformations have made most families reliant on the economic contribution of wives and mothers (Skolnick and Skolnick 2009), motherhood ideologies have not caught up to this reality. (Hays 1996; Kricheli-Katz 2012).

Thus, women experience a particularly gendered ‘double bind’ that pits the cultural obligation for motherhood against the cultural standard of the ideal worker (Hays 1996). These contradictory pressures further pit working ‘Super Moms’ against traditional, stay at home mothers into an exaggerated, ideological ‘mommy war’ where “there is no way for either type of mother to get it right” (Hays 1996:149). This may make some women hesitant to become mothers, while technological advancements in reproductive health and increased autonomy for women make it easier to ‘decide’ *not* to have children, as this is something they can control more readily than an increasingly globalized economic

structure. However, women that opt to have no children in order to alleviate the tension between these conflicting identities are oftentimes viewed as “cold, heartless, and unfulfilled as a woman...” (Hays 1996:133), further contributing to the no-win scenario that individuals must oftentimes negotiate through their own creative measures.

In addition to the toll that childbearing can have on mothers’ mental and physical well-being and wages and hireability, the culture of ‘intensive mothering,’ and a lack of public support for families can impact intimate relationships. Parents tend to report lower marital satisfaction compared to non-parents (Kimmel 2012; Senior 2014), and “the transition to parenthood presents different and more confusing challenges for modern couples creating families than it did for parents in earlier times.” (Cowan and Cowan 2009:257). For instance, Senior (2014:60) identifies one way in which intensive mothering can impact intimate relationships with a spouse. As one interviewee puts it, “[i]t’s still kids on my brain... even our date nights, when I’m supposed to be 100 percent wife.” New egalitarian ideologies within a marriage paired with lagging structural and interpersonal realities also creates conflict in relationships that affects and is affected by the decision to have children (Cowan and Cowan 2009; Gerson 2010).

One such interpersonal reality creating conflict is the gendered division of labor in families that disproportionately leaves women with child care and household duties, which may make it more difficult for women to ‘decide’ to have children compared to men. Research suggests that since the 1980s popular conceptions about fatherhood are shifting toward an ideology of the involved father that not only provides for, but also spends quality time with his children (Wall and Arnold 2007). However, the reality of actual fathering behavior suggests that the persistent influence of “family policies and workplace

cultures that discourage men from taking on parenting responsibilities, the gender gap in earnings and earnings potential, and persistent social expectations that fathers have a greater responsibility for breadwinning and mothers for caregiving” (Wall and Arnold 2007:510-511). Additionally, while fathers do spend more time with their children than fathers of previous generations, this time spent seems to be more affiliated with leisure or mentorship (Townsend 2009; Wall and Arnold 2007), rather than the intensive and tedious caretaking of “every moment of everyday” (Wade and Ferree 2015:255).

In addition to exacerbating or mitigating the ‘motherhood penalty’ through work-family policies (Budig et al. 2012), the state is a major stakeholder in regulating childbearing patterns. In each society, economic and institutional structures depend on a particular population ‘replacement rate’ that is neither too high to burden the education and health care system nor too low to deplete Social Security or Medicare funds or diminish the workforce (Kimmel 2012). This impacts the accessibility of policies that incentivize or de-incentivize childbearing as well as the broader views of families in institutional settings. For instance, the One Child Policy in China intended to reduce the growth rate of the nation’s population (Pletcher 2015) by regulating the number and gender of children born to families. On the other hand, faced with a diminished fertility rate and rising infant mortality rate in the 1930s, the Finnish began distributing ‘baby boxes’ filled with items necessary for pregnancy and infancy (Austere 2014) as a part of a policy to encourage childbearing and provide all families with an equal start at life, regardless of income.

Access to reproductive technologies has also been a major contributor to the control over childbearing, particularly in the past forty years. The post-World War II

economic boom allowed more people to experience increased leisure time during their youth, shifting the meaning of childhood and adolescence toward a time of fun (Sternheimer 2013). Similarly, the growth of cities, increasing availability and affordability of automobiles, the emerging nightlife, and parents' increased movement into the urban, public settings for work also contributed to a decline in parental supervision over adolescents, allowing youth to explore dating and sexuality more openly. (Sternheimer 2013). Subsequently, the sexual revolution of the 1960s ignited public discussion of sex for purposes other than reproduction (Cain 2001; Sternheimer 2013) including the legal developments that expanded access to contraceptives and abortion rights. For instance, in 1965 case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Supreme Court overturned a ban on the use of contraception among married people, making "birth control more widely available and helped weaken the chain linking sex and marriage" (Sternheimer 2013:186). In 1972, access to birth control became legal regardless of marital status (Gibson 2015).

Today, almost every sexually active American woman of childbearing age has used at least one form of family planning method at some point (Fennell 2011; Gibson 2015). Current research on contraceptive use within the US tends to focus on understanding parenting and fertility plans and goals, while also identifying differences in the access, methods, and consistency of use based on class and race. For instance, Sessler and Miller (2014) found that working class respondents engaged in more risky sexual behavior with limited contraceptive measures, while middle class adults more often reported multiple forms of contraceptives. However, middle class respondents in this sample were also more likely than their working class counterparts to view childbearing as an active rational choice while the latter group was more likely to hold a 'whatever

happens, happens' attitude. Similarly, all of the couples in this sample that reported not wanting to have any children *at all* fell into this middle class category. None of the working class respondents reported hesitation about whether they would have a child at some point.

Edin and Kefalas (2005) also note that low income women of color may experience reduced motivations to prevent unplanned pregnancies as economic prospects and identities associated with professional careers are often limited. Thus, becoming a parent can have a substantially different meaning for these women that, when paired with structural barriers to contraceptives and education (National Institute for Reproductive Health n.d.), explain higher rates of childbearing among these groups. While the poor women in Edin and Kefalas' (2005:6, emphasis added) sample report seeing marriage as a revered luxury that they may never achieve based on economic barriers, "they judged children to be a necessity, an absolutely essential part of a young woman's life, the *chief source of identity and meaning*." Similar sentiments emerge about fatherhood among low income men. Edin and Nelson (2013) identify the structural influences of low income neighborhoods, racial prejudice, poverty, and limited education and opportunity that impact the options available to young men to establish a successful masculine identity. Respondents in this sample often reported wanting to become a father, with delaying fatherhood resulting more from limited opportunity rather than desire or intention (Edin and Nelson 2013). Thus, while many middle class Americans report delaying childbearing in order to establish a solid marital relationship with their partners (Sassler and Miller 2014) and identify children as an achievement within a SuperRelationship (Senior 2014),

“[f]or these couples, children aren’t the expression of commitment; they are the source” (Edin and Kefalas 2005:17).

A Pew Research study identified similar trends, noting that Hispanic fathers are more likely than white and black fathers to agree with the statement that people cannot really be happy unless they have children, as well as a negative correlation with this attitude and both income and education levels (Livingston and Parker 2011). According to this research, almost twice as many fathers (22%) with less than a high school diploma agreed with this statement, compared to those with more education (12%). Additionally, only 9% of fathers with incomes greater than \$50,000 agreed with this statement while 24% of fathers with incomes below \$30,000 agreed that people cannot really be happy unless they have children (Livingston and Parker 2011). Overall, childless men (8%) were less likely than fathers (14%) to agree that people cannot be happy without children, yet “the vast majority of all men, whether fathers or childless, believe that the rewards of being a parent are worth it despite the costs and the work that goes into it” (Livingston and Parker 2011, para. 4).

Religion and religiosity can also play an important role in becoming, or the preference to become, a parent. While a more in-depth understanding of the link between religiosity and childbearing is beyond the scope of the current research, it is important to note the consistent pattern of non-religiousness among those forgoing childbearing. Voluntarily childless adults are often identified as having the lowest rates of religiosity while the most devout among the religious tend to have the most children (Abma and Martinez 2006; Frejka and Westoff 2008; Hayford and Morgan 2008; Mosher and Bachrach 1982; Pew Research Center 2015b). Additionally, religious activities can be a

major source of cultural and social support in favor of parenthood, and may contribute to social sanctions for deviating from childbearing norms (Abma and Martinez 2006; Zhang 2008). Arguably, the institutional influence of religion can be felt in various levels of interaction including the larger society, various communities, and at the individual level (Frejka and Westoff 2008; McQuillan 2004).

These patterns provide substantial evidence that, despite variation in intentions among individuals, childbearing decisions are likely rooted in class based habitus, influenced in large part by access to resources and cultural identities in various fields or social arenas. Working class and poor adults face higher rates of unplanned pregnancies early in life (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013; National Institute for Reproductive Health n.d.), have less access to reproductive preventative technologies, and are more likely to experience socialization in ways that elevate childbearing as one's most important life accomplishment (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013). On the other hand, middle and upper class populations have greater access to health care and control over reproduction, higher education and professional arenas, and greater leisure time, granting them more autonomy in childbearing decisions.

### Reasons for Choosing Childlessness

In addition to identifying the personal and structural factors related to the decision to have children, current literature attempts to identify the patterns in reasoning among individuals who do not intend to have any children at all, as well as those that end their reproductive years childless. Early research into parenthood and the family typically ignored the topic of childlessness or limited its inclusion to the experiences of infertility and other involuntary forces (Veevers 1973). However, making an active choice to remain



childless is arguably a relatively new phenomenon, as widespread access to abortion and highly effective birth control measures became available only since the 1960s and 1970s, respectively (Cain 2001; Gibson 2015; Thompson 2013). Veevers (1973) argued that the study of voluntary childlessness is important to sociology as it complicates perceptions of an inherent 'instinct' to parent in favor of specific socialization, while also uncovering the motivations and disadvantages of childrearing, including informal social pressures. She also argued that the sociological study of voluntary childlessness allows insight into the potential effect that children have on marital relations and personal growth, as childless couples essentially act as a control group in this research (Veevers 1973). Additionally, the study of voluntary childlessness provides insight into the impact of structural and cultural changes including urbanization, reproductive technological advancements, and the changing status of women in society (DeVellis, Wallston, and Acker 1984; Veevers 1973).

In response to the call for the sociological study of voluntary childlessness, researchers began using terms such as 'childfree' or 'childless-by-choice' (see: Blackstone and Stewart 2012) to further differentiate the voluntarily childless from the involuntary childless (Rovi 1994), and began questioning the reasons for this preference among individuals. Public and political discourses attribute the rise in voluntary childlessness to macro-structural factors including feminism and women's increased autonomy, increased access to contraceptives, and the expanding rates of women entering the workforce and pursuing higher education. However, despite the widespread impact of these social and structural changes, childfree adults tend to account for only a small portion of the population in the United States (Gillespie 2003; Livingston and Cohn

2010). While the true prevalence of childfreedom is difficult to measure, it is estimated that even with delayed entrance into parenthood, approximately 90% of childless adults remain motivated to have children in the future (Yaremko and Lawson 2007). Thus this research also considers subjective realities and characteristics of this group (DeVellis et al. 1984). Houseknecht (1979) identified socialization patterns and experiences in one's family of origin as contributing to this decision, particularly among what she terms the 'early articulators', or those that began favoring a voluntarily childless lifestyle early on. She also distinguished this group from 'postponers', or those whose decision to remain childless followed a series of delays in childbearing due to ambivalences, limited opportunities, or to establish other career and lifestyle goals (Houseknecht 1979).

However, reasons for delaying or abstaining from childrearing may overlap and not necessarily require a dichotomous categorization between subjective factors or external forces (Heaton, Jacobson, and Holland 1999; Mason 1997). Therefore, further research highlights the importance of considering the *interplay* between structural and social changes with the personal ideologies and factors that push and pull women into a childfree lifestyle (Gillespie 2003). For instance, many of the women in Gillespie's (2003) sample were pulled toward voluntary childlessness as they enjoyed the freedom and autonomy associated with non-motherhood, including additional time for travel and hobbies. These respondents also noted the burden that motherhood would have on their personal identities and relationships with partners and other adults (Gillespie 2003). Similar research identifies factors that push women away from becoming parents, including the perceived inability to balance the competing roles of work and family

(Andrade and Bould 2012) and preferences to pursue alternate forms of personal fulfillment, including upward mobility and economic stability (Xu 2013).

### Prevalence and Demographics of Childlessness

In addition to the reasons associated with choosing childlessness, existing research attempts to identify the prevalence of voluntary childlessness and characteristics of the “childfree.” The prevalence of voluntary childlessness is, in part, determined by how this concept is defined. In general, childlessness is defined as “the absence of children, either by intention (voluntary) or by circumstance (involuntary)” (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004: 116). More specifically, voluntary childlessness includes individuals who have never had a child, do not expect or want to have any, but are biologically capable of doing so (Posten 1976). However, as Mosher and Bachrach (1982) contend, this phenomenon can actually be quite complex and multidimensional. For instance, women who are biologically incapable of bearing children but also do not want to have any children complicate this definition of childlessness, as do those who were ambivalent or intended to have children but postponed childbearing beyond their reproductive years, or those that do not want biological children but have assumed the role of adoptive, foster, or step-parent (Kelly 2009). Similarly, experiences of childlessness may vary among those that have experienced a miscarriage or abortion, have had a sterilization procedure, and those that have never been pregnant (Koropecj-Cox 2003). Sociological research remains divided on sample inclusion based on these complex criteria, so significant gaps in the literature remain regarding differences among the childfree (Mosher and Bachrach 1982). Thus, “[f]uture research on women’s (and men’s) experiences would benefit from greater

recognition and thoughtful exploration of these multiple definitions and their implications (Koropecj-Cox 2003:264).

Some researchers oppose the inclusion of adults of childbearing ages in the study of voluntary childlessness as intentions may change over time, arguing that women beyond their reproductive years offer the most valid measures of childlessness (Christoffersen and Lausten 2009). These researchers instead argue that sufficient measures of voluntary childlessness should involve longitudinal analyses and adults outside of their reproductive ages, a method that is beyond the scope of the current analyses. Instead, this research acknowledges that while intentions, plans, and behaviors can shift, it can be argued that intentions to remain childless may be more stable with overestimations of future childbearing occurring more frequently than underestimations (Rovi 1994). For instance, in one longitudinal study, Bram (1985:61) found consistency in subjects' childbearing intentions and self-identification, indicating support for "researchers' utilizing subjects' self-definitions to study ... voluntary childlessness." At the second wave of data collection, seven years after the first, two-thirds of the voluntarily childless men and women still intended to remain that way, while "[t]he others who state that they plan to have children in the future seem uncertain in this regard..." (Bram 1985: 61). Similarly, Rovi (1994:344, emphasis in original) argues that negative intentions tend to be more stable than positive ones, and we should take "no [I do not want children]" for an answer, "regardless of the reason, and that *this response is of interest in and of itself.*"

Research on voluntary childlessness is particularly limited in the consideration of men's experiences, due to an overemphasis on women or couples as a collective (Waren and Pals 2013). However, research suggests that childfree men tend to consider financial

reasons, rather than more commonly cited reasons among women, including an inability to balance parenthood and careers or a lack of parental 'instinct' (Waren and Pals 2013). Additionally, Waren and Pals (2013) argue that there are similarities among men and women's voluntary childlessness in terms of demographic and socialization variables, but identify education as a major gendered difference. This research found that men's decision to remain childfree is *not* linked to education, while women's increased education is linked with higher likelihood of voluntary childlessness. However, recent evidence suggests that while childlessness remains commonly associated with highly educated women, these rates are declining among women with advanced degrees (Livingston and Cohn 2010).

Similarly, the literature suggests that the choice to remain childless is most prevalent among middle class women. Poor and working class men and women are more likely to associate parenthood as the central source of one's identity or personal achievement (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013). On the other hand, middle and upper class men and women have greater access to higher education and professional goals, health care and effective reproductive technologies, and additional identities to feel accomplished in life (Abma and Martinez 2006; Gillespie 2003). However, Christoffersen and Lawson (2009) argued that certain social disadvantages also contribute to the likelihood of childlessness at the end of the reproductive age. This longitudinal research suggests that delayed childbearing among women who become mothers is associated with stable family backgrounds and higher education, while parental unemployment or disability and poverty are precursors of both early pregnancies and childlessness (Christoffersen and Lawson 2009). This indicates one way in which

childlessness may be caused by poverty and a lack of security and stability (Christoffersen and Lawson 2009) providing insight into the complexities of this identity outside of the perspective of autonomous, career or hobby driven, middle class adults. However, this research does not distinguish the extent to which childlessness was actively chosen within this sample, although additional evidence suggests that some adults may decide to forego childbearing as a result of an unstable family background, including family discord or parental divorce (Cain 2001; Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee 2000).

The prevalence of childlessness is increasingly common among younger cohorts (Kelly 2009; Livingston 2015a). Compared to previous generations, more than half of young Americans enroll in higher education after high school, prolonging periods of youth, exploration, and instability, and the age of marriage and first childbirth have increased for both men and women (Arnett 2000). However, on average, older women are currently more likely than younger women to state that they intended to remain childless, suggesting that for some, the meaning of voluntary childlessness can arise through life experiences rather than a shared, static identity (Houseknecht 1979; Kelly 2009; Rovi 1994). Research also commonly identifies voluntary childlessness as most prevalent among white Americans. However, literature is significantly limited in terms of identifying racial and ethnic differences among childfree adults, indicating that little is known about the true prevalence or experiences of childlessness among women of color (Kelly 2009). For instance, Pew Research suggests that Hispanic women are much less likely (10%) to remain childless compared to non-Hispanic whites (17%) or blacks (15%) at the end of their reproductive years (Livingston 2015a). Yet this research also suggests that the gaps

in childlessness based on race and ethnicity are narrowing, varying by no more than a few percentage points compared to previous decades. Similarly, marital status is of interest to researchers as the experience of voluntary childlessness among married or cohabitating adults is likely to be a different experience than that of unmarried or unattached adults, whose opportunities may be constrained by “social norms and the absence of a partner” (Mosher and Bachrach 1982: 521).

### Experiences of Childlessness

An emphasis on the reasons women (and men) make the choice to remain childless provide an often oversimplified and limited understanding of this identity. Instead, reasons for choosing childlessness and the meanings associated with this identity vary widely across these men and women as well as over the course of each person’s life. “These pathways may not necessarily represent clear choices or preferences; instead they reflect the changing influence of relationships, economic opportunities, and personal developments” (Koropecj-Cox 2003:263) Because of this, the sociological study of voluntary childlessness would benefit from a shift from understanding ‘*why*’ some men and women intentionally remain childless, toward an understanding of ‘*how*’ these men and women negotiate the structural, interpersonal, and individual factors in their everyday lives. Among the literature that intends to address *how* childless adults negotiate the social world, the consequences of childlessness on individuals or the broader society or the distinct characteristics and experiences of childless adults in middle or old age are most often emphasized.

Research on the consequences of childlessness later in life tend to focus on variations in psychological well-being, social isolation or social supports, and the

utilization of health care services and assisted living services among childless adults (Koropecyj-Cox and Call 2007; Wolf and Laditka 2006). For instance, childless adults may have fewer support systems, increasing their reliability on Medicare and nursing home stays. However, research supporting this argument has been inconsistent and points to other contributing factors outside of parenting status, including age, education, income, comorbidities, and more (Wolf and Laditka 2006). In a cross-cultural analysis of the experience of childless aging adults compared to those that have children, Koropecyj-Cox and Call (2007) identify ways in which broad cultural ideologies about responsibility of care for the elderly interact with public support systems to create variations in these experiences. For instance, in cultures that assume adult children are responsible to care for their older parents, greater disparities between childless adults and parents will emerge, particularly when paired with limited formal public support.

On the other hand, cultures characterized by individualism, greater advancements in control over reproductive health, and broader definitions of family and public acceptance of diverse family types provide a number of opportunities for men and women to experience voluntary childlessness in different ways than previous generations, and thus may have different implications for the long term care services and social support networks available as they age (Koropecyj-Cox and Call 2007). Middle aged, childless women tend to experience anxieties related to the stereotypes about aging without children, yet they also engage in active efforts to establish additional emotional and social support systems that will aid them in the aging process (Koropecyj-Cox 2003). Commonly cited stigmas include perceptions of childfree adults as selfish, self-centered, materialistic, strange or taboo, cold, heartless, and unfulfilled (Hays 1996; Lisle 1996;



Park 2002), and recent literature suggests varying levels of stigma experienced among and about childless adults. For instance, an overall public acceptance of delayed childbearing may contribute to less stigma experienced by (and toward) younger childfree adults, as public perceptions assume they can and will change their minds (Koropecj-Cox and Call 2007). On the other hand, according to this research, the more unlikely it becomes that couples will have children, the more negatively they are viewed, due to “persistent normative expectations that favor parenthood in the adult life course” (Koropecj-Cox and Call 2007:426).

Park (2002) also identified a variation among childless adults regarding their experiences of stigmas and direct social pressures to have children. She highlights some of the active techniques that childfree adults use to manage these stigmas and pressures including masking or substituting the identity or providing justifications or explanations for not wanting kids. The types of techniques used varied by the degree to which the respondents valued voluntary childlessness as central to their identity. For instance, some of the participants in Park’s (2002) study would hide this identity or mask their voluntary childlessness as involuntary, while others were more proactive in providing explanations about a lack of maternal instinct or condemning those that condemn childlessness. However, this research tends to focus on *perceptions* of stigma and coping strategies in “internal conversations and social interactions” and the way *information* about childlessness is conveyed (Park 2002:39). Thus, further research is needed regarding active experiences and strategies related to these normative expectations within social or institutional interactions. Particularly, more research is needed on *how* these strategies vary based on the different audiences or contexts, ranging from relationships with

parents, friends, and intimate (or potential) partners to experiences in the workplace or health care settings.

Current efforts to understand the experiences or consequences of childlessness among men and women in their reproductive years may be limited for a number of reasons. First, the aging population with (potentially) limited informal systems of care are of greater interest to political and public discourse due to their economic and structural consequences corresponding with an overall aging population (Wolf and Laditka 2006). Demographers, for instance make efforts to track fertility trends and identify the reasons for childlessness in order to predict future societal trends and needs (Koropecj-Cox and Call 2007). Next, academic and public discourses tend to minimize the need to explore experiences of childless adults that may change their mind, as more men and women are delaying childbearing while most continue to have children at some point in their lives (Christoffersen and Lausten 2009; Koropecj-Cox and Call 2007; Rovi 1994). However, regardless of whether individuals intending to remain childless will do so in practice, it is important to identify the potential interactions or institutions that contribute to the longevity of this decision, as well as the agentic tools and actions that individuals use to negotiate this identity temporarily or as they age, when the decision to avoid childbearing is most actively experienced in terms of controlling procreation and negotiating external pressures and social norms (Gillespie 2003).

Additionally, this shift in conversation is important as it not only provides insight into the experiences of childlessness and the social norms and expectations associated with this identity, but also potential patterns related to the process of becoming a parent. As Veevers (1974:398) argues, “in many cases becoming a parent may not be a

conscious decision at all, but rather an inadvertent consequence of ... a multiplicity of motives at different levels of awareness” including effective, informal controls that are “both reflected and reinforced by more formal controls involving official population policy.” Therefore, identifying the ways in which voluntarily childless adults negotiate the informal and formal social norms and structures in which they encounter may provide greater insight into understanding identities related to childbearing more broadly. Additionally, while research on voluntary childlessness often explores the reasons *why* some men and women prefer to have no children, findings continue to suggest a wide range of possible explanations (Cain 2001). Thus, sociological research could benefit from a shift toward understanding *how* men and women negotiate this identity, both in relation to the structural and personal factors that led to this identity as well as the structures and relationships encountered in their everyday lives. The current study contributes to this shift in conversation toward an understanding of how childfree men and women experience the complex interplay of active, individual efforts and intentions to remain childless and the societal and familial pressures to conform to parenting norms, with an emphasis on adults of childbearing ages.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus, Capital, and Field

As previously stated, existing literature on voluntary childlessness tends to emphasize either structural or subjective forces as contributing to childbearing decisions and preferences. However, some researchers contend that the decision (not) to have children is likely impacted by overlapping factors, thus a dichotomous categorization may be an oversimplification of this identity (Gillespie 2003; Heaton, Jacobson, and Holland 1999; Mason 1997). The current research addresses this oversimplification by posing a shift toward Bourdieu's "third way" theoretical and methodological orientation. Bourdieu argued that sociology emphasizes a false dichotomy between the influence of structure over an individual and the ability for individuals to make active, free choices and instead claimed that the social world consists of a complex interplay of individual and structural factors (Bourdieu 1990).

In recent years, researchers began utilizing the Bourdieuan perspective to theoretically and empirically address a number of topics in social science, including education (Edgerton, Roberts, and Peter 2013; Lehmann 2007; Samuel, Bergman, and Hupka-Brunner 2013), sexuality (Green 2008; Powell 2008), religion (Winchester 2008; Yafeh 2007) and health (Dumas and Laberge 2005; Dumas, Robitaille, and Jette 2014). For instance, Powell (2008) used a Bourdieuan framework to theoretically examine young people's negotiations with sexual pressures and sexual consent. Her research identified the complex interaction between structural gender norms and the creative acts of individual agency that correspond with the changing nature of the field of love/sex relationships in recent times. Powell's respondents cited both the unwritten rules and

pressures to engage in unwanted sex as well as creative techniques such as nonverbal body language used to regain control of a sexual encounter when 'just saying NO' is an unrealistic response in context (Holtzman and Menning 2013; Powell 2008).

Green (2008) also supported the use of Bourdieu's concepts, arguing that the habitus addresses micro-level and macro-level problems in the topic of sexual desire. Green (2008) argues that despite its usefulness, Bourdieu's conceptualization of the interplay between macro- and micro- level forces remains latent in existing sociological literature. Both the claims of Powell (2008) and Green (2008) can be supported further by viewing Park's (2002) research on stigma management among childfree respondents. In reaction to pronatalist assumptions and norms, the respondents in Park's (2002: 39) sample utilized a number of creative techniques to negotiate their stigmatized identity in various social interactions. These techniques varied depending on "the degree to which they accept or challenge pronatalist ideologies... confronting pronatalism with parallel culturally resonant themes." While Park (2002) relied on the concepts of impression management (Goffman 1963) and identity work (Snow and Anderson 1987) to explore these strategies among voluntarily childless women, further exploration utilizing Bourdieuan concepts of habitus and field may provide a more complex understanding of the relationship between internalization (and impact) of structural norms and the creative acts of individual agency among this group.

However, since this theoretical model has not yet been linked to the study of voluntary childlessness, the findings of this study are exploratory in nature. Although it can be argued that any research utilizing Bourdieu's meta-theoretical perspective is inherently exploratory as this theory is "intended to guide research and to elicit research

questions, and thus is not considered a theory to be validated, as Bourdieu himself has used the concepts to both theorize and conduct empirical research regarding a variety of social phenomena” (Hurtado 2010: 54). Additionally, some researchers have argued that it is rare for a Bourdieuan oriented analysis to include all three of his main concepts – habitus, capital, and field (Hurtado 2010; Swartz 2008). Hurtado (2010: 60) also argues that “there is still a considerable range of interpretations ... of the unit of analysis... and of the appropriate research methodologies to be used” when engaging with Bourdieu’s theoretical perspective.

The emphasis of the current study involves initiating the link between Bourdieu’s major concepts (habitus, capital, and field) and academic discussions of childbearing preferences and voluntary childlessness. This research contributes to the limited use of Bourdieu’s concepts in quantitative studies (Edgerton et al. 2012) and contributes to the growing body of research on childfreedom by providing quantitative measures of childbearing habitus and capital. Yet inductive, qualitative analyses will also be included in the exploratory shift away from “why” some individuals choose to remain childless, toward an understanding of “how” childbearing preferences interact in various social fields. Thus, the main goal of the current analysis is to provide examples of quantitative and qualitative measures of habitus, capital, and field as they relate to childbearing preferences and experiences of voluntary (or temporary) childlessness, in order to support a shift toward a more complex understanding of voluntary childlessness currently lacking in existing research.

Using this perspective, the individual choice and process of remaining childless would be conceptualized in relation to what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*. The habitus is the

set of durable dispositions deeply rooted within individuals (Bourdieu 1990) that can be characterized as our subjective identities. The habitus is informed or structured by the social world, but also grants individuals the freedom to perceive the social world in varied ways and shape their actions toward that world. The habitus generates 'common-sense' behaviors from our deeply rooted and typically unconscious, taken for granted ideologies or identities, which will allow this research to explore how individuals negotiate this choice as most practical or logical for their lives. For instance, some voluntarily childless adults cite a lack of a maternal or parental 'instinct' as guiding their opposition to childbearing (Park 2002; Waren and Pals 2013) indicating ways in which this decision is perceived as a natural, deeply rooted identity. However, while the habitus is seen as a deeply rooted, subjective identity among individuals, it is important to consider the ways in which it is structured by the external world. This results in the formation of similar habitus based on cultural norms and similar experiences, as well as the typically successful interactions among individuals in shared social arenas (Bourdieu 1990). This relates to the assumption that childfree men and women are influenced in some way by a cultural belief that it takes an inherent, biological drive or skill to parent a child, while modifying this belief in that some people just do not have it. This may highlight the potential influence of the social world on shaping or contradicting the subjective reality that these individuals experience.

It is also useful to conceptualize voluntary childlessness in relation to the habitus as it allows for exploration into how individuals formulate this identity in relation to their personal preference as well as external childbearing norms and expectations for adults, often women in particular (Gillespie 2003; Hays 1996; Mosher and Bachrach 1982).

Conceptualizing childlessness as the habitus provides a new perspective on “the way in which individuals are able to exercise choices within the limits of a specified social structure” in the literature on voluntary childlessness (Bourdieu 1990:53). The decision to remain childless, while increasingly acceptable in recent years (Koropecj-Cox and Call 2007), contradicts social norms, indicating the agency of individuals to exercise a freedom of choices. However, childbearing decisions may not necessarily remain static or unchanged (in one direction or another) throughout the life course, highlighting potential structural or interpersonal influences as well as the individuals’ continued agency to modify their habitus when new ideas are learned or new experiences are interpreted in relation to these meanings and identities (Bourdieu 1990).

Bourdieu posed that class-based tastes, preferences, and practices are influenced by an interaction between habitus and a configuration of capital. Expanding on Marx’s theory of the influence of economic factors in shaping class relations, Bourdieu argued that there are more symbolic forces influencing one’s preferences and behaviors (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1990). For instance, Bourdieu supported Marx’s claim that economic capital, or the money and objects that can be used to produce goods and services, remain important while interacting with other, more symbolic forms of capital. Research on voluntary childlessness tends to find that those choosing to have no children report higher incomes, on average, than those that intend to (or do) have children (Park 2005; Sassler and Miller 2014). This negative relationship may seem counterintuitive with the average cost of raising a child in the United States exceeding \$245,000 (Lino 2014), but provides a prime example of the interplay between forces. For example, someone with a more high-status job may make more money but may find more difficult, or even



less desirable, to balance their career and childcare. Additionally, those with greater access to quality and affordable health care are more likely to have the agency to control their reproductive health, which can delay or prevent childbearing to pursue other interests. However, as existing research contends, changing patterns toward delaying or preventing childbearing all together among the groups with greatest access to these resources have not prevented most adults from having or intending to have children at some point in their lives (Newport and Wilke 2013; Yaremko and Lawson 2007).

In addition to economic capital, Bourdieu stressed the importance of social capital, or the social groupings and ability to network to gain status or material goods. In terms of childbearing preferences, social capital may include the social and family support networks that encourage or support individuals' preferences and/or contribute to their chosen lifestyle. The third type of capital that Bourdieu considers is cultural capital, or the interpersonal skills or knowledge associated with styles and practices valued by society. In relation to childbearing preferences, this relates to the cultural ideology of pronatalism. Members of society with more cultural capital are likely to have more success interacting in valued social arenas, thus maintaining their status or granting them access to additional material goods and social networks. As Cain (2001: 19) argues, "[the pronatalist] society condemns those who do not reproduce." Thus, it may be argued that individuals that comply with or subscribe to pronatalism as a culturally valued ideology may fare better in terms of access to other forms of capital, such as a wider social support network and fewer experiences of shame and stereotyping in relation to this identity.

Lastly, Bourdieu discusses symbolic capital as one's access to prestige and reputation. Symbolic capital is typically referred to as the automatic process of

transforming economic, social, and/or cultural capital within social fields. Within the current examination, symbolic capital would refer to the cultural prestige or social well-being that an individual has access to when their capital and habitus interact in ways that comply with the culturally valued norms and expectations of that field. Since pronatalist ideologies permeate through most social arenas, including family life and intimate relationships (Cain 2001; King 1998), health care (Denbow 2014), and even the workplace (Heitlinger 1991) and social interactions/leisure activities (Parry 2005), intentions to remain voluntarily childless can impact one's access to and experiences of symbolic capital. In this research, symbolic capital is represented by an aspect of social well-being, perceived social contribution (Keyes 1998), in support of the pronatalist principle that having children corresponds with greater social value. Social contribution, as defined by Keyes (1998: 122), refers to the "evaluation of one's social value" including "the belief that one is a vital member of society, with something of value to give to the world." Measures of well-being are typically limited to the individual, including psychological measures of personal attributes. However, as Keyes (1998:122) argues, "individuals remain embedded in social structures and communities, and face countless social tasks and challenges..." Thus, in order to adhere to a Bourdieuan model addressing the interplay of external forces and individual identities, particularly as they relate to personal internalization of the cultural values related to pronatalism, it is important to consider individuals' feelings of social well-being.

As mentioned above, habitus and capital interact within various *fields*, or the external social structures or institutions (Bourdieu 1990). According to Bourdieu, the habitus both structures and is structured by the fields or social arenas that exist before

us, and simultaneously shape the habitus through an interactive process. In many fields, including family life, romantic relationships, friendships, the workplace, health care, and so on, adults (often women in particular) are assumed able, willing, and desiring to have children at some point in their life. Thus, it is important to explore the negotiation between the voluntarily childless habitus and these various fields. For instance, how do childfree adults negotiate relationships with romantic partners, parents and family members, friends, etc.? Are the experiences gendered or structured in ways that indicate perceptions or experiences of childlessness are more acceptable for some than others? How does one's access to forms of capital shape these experiences?

For instance, Denbow's (2014) research exemplifies the interaction between cultural norms/capital and deeply rooted habitus within the field of health care. She argues that health care providers act as gatekeepers, and may restrict individuals' access to particular contraceptive measures based ethical obligations in the medical field that favor the pronatalist social norms encouraging childbearing. Some voluntarily childless women even report being turned away by some doctors when seeking the highly effective and completely reversible IUD or implant as a long term birth control measure (Denbow 2014; Pearson 2014; McKinley Health Center 2008), since doctors assume they will change their mind about childbearing during the five to ten years that this implant is effective. This may also relate to Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence, a form of oppression exercised with the complicity of active agents through norms and discourses that justify domination and become misrecognized as natural or normal (Bourdieu 1992).

Bourdieu claims that the gender hierarchy is a particularly exemplary form of symbolic violence, and this becomes particularly relevant to childrearing. Women

experience a disproportionate burden of child care with significant perceived impacts on the work-family balance and personal identities (Andrade and Bould 2012; Gerson 2010; Gillespie 2003; Kimmel 2012). However, since most women continue to have children at some point in their lives (Christoffersen and Lausten 2009; Koropecj-Cox and Call 2007; Rovi 1994), and those that do not acknowledge experiencing stigmas associated with women without children (Park 2002), gathering insight into the experiences of voluntarily childless adults may contribute to the perspective on broader gender and family ideologies, as well as the active resistance to this symbolic violence among some childless adults (Park 2002).

Understanding the negotiations between active agents and external structures can also provide insight into the broader social norms about the decision to become a parent. Early calls for the study of voluntary childlessness argued that these individuals may act as a control group to understand the causes and effects of parenthood (Veevers 1973). For instance, what kinds of social pressures and obstacles do parents encounter within social arenas that simultaneously privilege parenthood while imposing complex burdens on people with children (Coontz 2005; Gerson 2010; Hays 1996; Kimmel 2012)? By identifying differences between individuals actively choosing to avoid parenthood and those that intend to comply with this social norm, this exploratory analysis provides preliminary insight into parenthood as less of an active conscious decision, but rather a consequence of an interplay between social sanctions/supports and personal accomplishments and identities (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013; Veevers 1974).

### Methodological Approach

Bourdieu argues against a methodological dichotomy within sociological research that situates subjectivism, or the emphasis on the subjective realities formed by individual interactions in society, as oppositional to objectivism, or the belief that one true reality that exists outside of individuals and imposes itself on members of society. In fact, Bourdieu (1990:25) argues that this is the “most fundamental, and most ruinous” dichotomy to artificially divide the study of the social world. Instead, Bourdieu (1990) acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, arguing that sociologists must move beyond this divide while preserving what can be gained from each approach. For instance, objectivism provides insights into the structural conditions that make possible the development of shared doxa, or assumedly universal aspects of the social world, while ignoring the role individuals play in shaping these structures. On the other hand, subjectivism provides insights into the ‘feel for the game’ that members have while negotiating meanings objectified in institutions, while also minimalizing objective meanings in the social world, placing too great of an emphasis on individual or collective agents (Bourdieu 1990). Thus, Bourdieu’s ‘third way’ approach considers both objective conditions and subjective agents through a theory of practice.

In the study of voluntary childlessness, existing research tends to emphasize this identity as either an *effect* or outcome of the influence of interpersonal and/or structural forces (e.g. Hagestad and Call 2007; Christoffersen and Lausten 2009), or it is viewed as a *cause* of other social concerns – including matters related to the needs of an aging population (Lisle 1996; Wolf and Laditka 2006). While developing a complex model that adheres to Bourdieu’s call for a “third way” methodology is beyond the scope of the

current examination, this research intends to provide preliminary support for a Bourdieuan approach. The current model utilizes quantitative and qualitative measures of the motivations and experiences of non-parenthood to initiate the discussion toward a movement away from viewing childlessness as strictly a subjective experience, or as an outcome of objective forces. Instead, this approach argues in favor of the complex interplay between these forces as they are experienced in an ongoing fashion. For instance, voluntarily childless adults frequently report being asked “But who will care for you when you’re older?” (James 2015; Park 2002; Wolf and Laditka 2006). This concern highlights a number of interacting factors, including the cultural norms that assume adult children will take care of their aging parents, the quality and accessibility of structured care for aging adults, as well as the variations in individuals’ agentic and subjective negotiations of this concern either in favor or in opposition to childbearing. This brief example provides some insight into the ways in which external factors may shape the childbearing habitus, while structures and cultural norms continue to be simultaneously shaped by these changing practices, as evidenced by Medicare allocations and assisted living facilities (Wolf and Laditka 2006).

### The Current Study

While existing literature on voluntary childlessness makes efforts to identify the reasons *why* women (and men) identify as “childfree by choice”, little attention has been placed on *how* this decision affects their experiences in various social arenas. Veevers (1973:201) argues that a number of “social pressures [are] exerted on women to have and to rear children... and may have some influence in individual decisions regarding fertility” and poses a need for sociological research to “examine the numerous informal

social sanctions directed toward childless couples.” Within the last forty years, efforts have been made to understand this identity in more detail, including uncovering public perceptions of voluntary childlessness (Koropeckyj-Cox et al. 2007; Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007; Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, and Steelman 2010) and experiences of stigma management within this group (Park 2005). However, a significant gap in the literature remains in terms of addressing Veever’s (1973) original call for an examination of informal social sanctions and experiences. The current study is an exploratory effort to shift the conversation toward a more complex and complete understanding of these experiences by highlighting the interplay between active, individual experiences of voluntary childlessness and the informal and formal sanctions or supports in the social world.

As stated above, previous research has framed the decision to remain childless as a *response* to structural forces, including feminism, technological and legal advancements in contraceptives, economic necessities, and the cultural contradictions between the family and the workplace (Cherlin 2009; Gerson 2010; Hays 1996; Thompson 2013). Additional research has questioned how the decision to remain childless impacts formal structures and population concerns (Kimmel 2012; Wolf and Laditka 2006) or how voluntarily childless individuals convey this identity to others (Park 2002). However, the current research attempts to highlight the *experiences* of voluntary childlessness as it relates to both interpersonal and structural social arenas. By providing a comparison of the experiences of adults that intend to have children and those that identify as voluntarily childless within various social arenas, this research attempts to identify if the non-parent identity is experienced differently between individuals whose preferences are more consistent with pronatalist norms and those challenging these

ideologies. This study intends to consider structural and individual factors affecting childbearing preferences as a complex interplay, emphasizing Bourdieu's call for the abandonment of the false dichotomy between agency and structure within sociology. This exploratory research considers the experiences of voluntarily childless adults in social arenas including intimate relationships, family life, leisure/social relationships, health care, and the work place and poses the following questions:

- Is there an identifiable shared habitus among voluntarily childless adults, distinct from those that want to have children?
- How does access to different forms of capital (social, cultural, economic, and symbolic) interact with childbearing preferences?
- Does the preference/intention to have no children impact individuals' experiences in various social arenas, in ways distinct from non-parents that intend to have children?

The current research model emphasizes the ways in which one's access to capital shapes and is shaped by a habitus of personal childrearing preferences/identifications. As discussed earlier, one's access to social, economic, and cultural capital may influence personal preferences regarding childrearing. Additionally, childrearing preferences will also influence the capital resulting from these choices and practices. For instance, pronatalist ideologies related to the importance of parenthood can become internalized by an individual, thus shaping identities and preferences in favor of childrearing. On the other hand, increased economic capital in the form of quality and affordable health care may contribute to individuals internalizing childrearing as more of an active and personal choice, with the assistance of effective birth control measures. An individual's preference



to have no children may also simultaneously shape their career path, which can result in greater economic resources.

As Bourdieu argues, the habitus (and capital) is carried into various fields and will simultaneously shape and be shaped by the “rules of the game” within each of these arenas. This recurring process represents the complex interplay between external structures and subjective identities. The current research begins to identify this interplay within five social fields relevant to childbearing identities, particularly family life, intimate relationships, leisure/social interactions, work, and health care. Measures of experiences in social fields include closed-ended questions “What type of health care coverage do you have?” and “How often do you spend time with friends?” as well as open-ended questions including “Have you ever experienced any disagreement with a partner about whether or not to have children? If so, how did/does this impact your relationship?” and “Have you ever been denied access to health care coverage, procedures, or a contraceptive method because you do not have children? If so, what?” Additional open-ended questions were left intentionally vague to allow respondents to indicate specific fields or interactions that are memorable to their experiences, for instance “Are there certain times or places that you feel pressured to have children? If so, can you give a few examples?”

In short, this research initiates the shift toward a more complete picture of the structural, interpersonal, and individual contributors to childbearing preferences. Focusing on *how* childfree individuals interact with the social world will contribute to broader understandings of the informal and formal social pressures, sanctions, and support systems available as well as the *perceived* impact of structural forces on childbearing decisions. Additionally, this project poses a shift toward an underutilized

theoretical paradigm that may assist researchers in resolving the complexities of the structural and subjective forces seemingly at odds in existing literature (Gillespie 2003).

## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

### Sample and Design

The target population of the current study includes childless men and women residing in the United States with childlessness defined as having no biological or adopted children, as well as no step children that the participants consider “like their own.” Adults who are currently expecting a child/pregnant were also excluded. Participation was limited to adults between the ages of 25 and 40 years old in order to target adults within their reproductive years who represent the most common time in which adults are either having children, thinking about having children, or experiencing social pressures regarding childbearing (McQuillan et al. 2012). Both men and women were included in the sample selection.

This study utilized non-representative, purposive and convenience sampling approaches, while also oversampling individuals that identify as voluntarily childless. As current research suggests, voluntarily childless adults make up a small portion of the United States population (Gillespie 2003; Livingston and Cohn 2010). Thus, this approach allows for greater variance among the population of interest and may allow for a more equivalent comparison to adults that intend to have children, which is oftentimes limited when utilizing random, representative sampling techniques. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that non-representative sampling techniques cannot guarantee generalizability or the representativeness of the broader target population of interest (childless adults in the United States). However, the main purpose of this study was to pose an exploratory shift toward a new model within the scope of available resources to see what kind of responses and patterns arise within the sample (Babbie 2013). From

this point, future research can continue to incorporate understandings of “how” adults experience childlessness in their everyday lives, in addition to the motivating factors in favor or opposition to childbearing.

In November 2015, an online questionnaire (see Appendix B) was posted on websites targeting or frequented by adults meeting the purposive sampling criteria, particularly utilizing social media outlets as well as online support and social communities targeting childfree adults. Within 48 hours of posting the survey link online, the total number of participants approved by the University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board (n = 1000) was exceeded, and the survey was made inactive. Most respondents came from posts on the website Reddit.com, particularly, the subreddits (or forums): /r/Childfree, /r/TryingForABaby, /r/OneY, /r/StillTrying, /r/TTC30, /r/BirthControl, /r/Natalism, /r/Sociology, /r/Family, /r/TwoXChromosomes, /r/waiting\_to\_try, and /r/SampleSize. Some of these forums specifically target childless adults not intending to have children, and others include those trying to conceive or hoping to conceive in the future. Others target groups more broadly. For instance /r/SampleSize is a forum specifically designed to share and participate in online survey research, /r/OneY targets men or those interested in matters related to men, and /r/TwoXChromosome targets women or those interested in women’s issues.

Generally speaking, approximately fifteen percent of all internet using adults visit Reddit.com (Duggan and Smith 2013). A majority of Reddit users are between the ages of 18 and 35 years old (Morris 2011) and users represent a wide range of income categories and a normal, or u-shaped distribution of education attainment (Madrigal 2013). Additionally, as of May 2016, Alexa (2016) ranked reddit.com as the 29<sup>th</sup> most

visited site, globally, and the 9<sup>th</sup> most visited site in the United States, indicating its popularity and widespread use. Alexa (2016) also indicates that males and females visit reddit.com at similar rates as the general internet population, although men are somewhat more likely than women to use this site (Duggan and Smith 2013; Madrigal 2013). On the other hand, one survey of the /r/Childfree forum suggests that women represent approximately two-thirds of the visitors to this particular forum, and that approximately 46% of the members of this group are between the ages of 26 and 40 (“Childfree Demographics” n.d.). While some participants were recruited from forums that specifically target adults interested in the topic of having (or not having) children, the purpose of the study remained broad during recruitment. The link to the study was accompanied by IRB approved text including the statement “Writing my PhD dissertation on experiences of adults that do not have children at this time... (US residents, 25-40 years old).” At the onset of the survey, screener questions were used to limit the sample to respondents between the ages of 25 and 40 years old and to exclude adults that already have children, including biological children, step children that respondents consider to be like their own, or adopted children. Respondents were asked about their individual preference to have children at some point in the future, with follow up options of “probably want” or “probably do not want children” for those that were uncertain. Respondents that were completely undecided were excluded from analyses in the current study, while the “probably want” respondents (n = 45) were grouped with the temporarily childless, and “probably do not want” respondents (n = 45) were grouped with the voluntarily childless in order to dichotomize the habitus variable. This resulted in a total

sample size of 972 respondents, with a slightly larger proportion of voluntarily childless adults (n = 573) than the temporarily childless (n = 399).

The questionnaire consisted of open- and closed-ended questions related to demographics, childbearing preferences and motivations, and experiences in the social world as they relate to one's status as a non-parent. These measures intend to identify the shared experience or shared habitus of individuals that identify as voluntarily childless within particular fields that typically promote childbearing on a broader level while comparing these experiences to those of adults whom are also not parents, but intend to adhere to pronatalist expectations. For instance, questions included measures of motivations regarding childlessness, attitudes about the importance of parenthood, personality traits, social support, economic resources, and gender ideologies. Open-ended questions encouraged respondents to share experiences of feeling pressured to have, or not to have, children, as well as interactions in intimate relationships, health care settings, and in the workplace.

Since little sociological research has addressed voluntary childlessness from a perspective of how men and women experience childlessness, particularly through a Bourdieuan lens, this research is relatively exploratory. Closed-ended questions were analyzed using bivariate and multivariate regression models to identify patterns in experiences among and between the voluntarily childless and adults that intend to have children. Open-ended question were coded inductively for emerging themes related to the interaction between agency and structure within various fields. While current literature emphasizes the structural and personal reasons for voluntary childlessness as an active and/or recurring decision, this research typically does not address experiences in the

social world among the childfree. In utilizing Bourdieuan concepts of habitus and field as they relate to the complex interplay between individual agency and external structures, the current research sets the tone for a more comprehensive grasp of the complex reasons for and experiences of a voluntarily childless lifestyle.

### Analyses

The current study consists of three main sections of analyses, performed using Stata13 and Microsoft Excel software. The *first* section identifies characteristics of respondents and offers comparisons based on childbearing preferences. Respondents were categorized into one of two groups based on their childbearing intentions (categorization process described in the following section). The two childbearing habitus groups were compared using univariate and bivariate analyses of demographics, motivations regarding remaining childless, and personality traits. The purpose of this section is to address the first research question, particularly: is there an identifiable “shared habitus” among the voluntarily childless, distinct from those that want to have children? The *second* section incorporates measures of capital to identify how access to these resources interact with childbearing preferences (research question two). This section includes bivariate analyses and a nested logistic regression to initiate a discussion of the interplay between capital and habitus, despite being unable to fully measure the complexity of this interaction directly as access to capital may *lead to* or *result from* particular childbearing preferences. Additionally, a brief exploration into the interaction between gender and significant measures of capital was conducted to initiate the need for further investigation into the potential for difference in differences between groups. The *third* section serves as an exploratory shift in the discussion from “why” to “how”

voluntarily childless people experience the social world. Section three consists of inductive coding of five open-ended questions to address the third research question, “does the preference/intention to have no children impact individuals’ experiences in various social arenas, in ways distinct from non-parents that intend to have children?”

It is important to note that while men and women were both included in the current sample, it is beyond the scope of the present analyses to provide more detailed comparisons that directly measure difference between men and women beyond the initial interaction terms described below. While some of these differences become evident through the open-ended discussions, such as the gendered experience of tokophobia (the fear of pregnancy and childbirth) or the disproportionate access to reproductive health procedures, specific analyses extending beyond these observations using the present dataset are reserved for analyses in future research.

### Variables and Measures

#### *Measures of Habitus*

*Childlessness Intentions.* Respondents were categorized into a dichotomous group related to their childbearing habitus based on their answers to the following question: “As of now, (if it were possible) do you want to have any children in the future?” Respondents answering yes were considered in the temporarily childless habitus, while respondents answering no were categorized as voluntarily childless. A third option of “I don’t know” was also available. These respondents were shown an additional question, “(If it were possible) do you think you would probably want or probably not want to have any children at some time in the future?” Respondents answering “probably want” were considered temporarily childless, and respondents answering “probably do not want”



were considered voluntarily childless. Respondents that were “completely undecided” were eliminated from the current analyses.

*Childbearing Motivations.* Measures of respondents’ motivations and preferences regarding their childlessness were modified from Scott’s (2009) Childless by Choice Project, which consisted of eighteen motive statements related to the decision to abstain from becoming parents. The current measure consists of fifteen motive statements including “I love my life as it is, and having a child won’t enhance it,” “I have more to accomplish/experience in life that would be difficult to do if I were a parent,” “I believe I have a maternal/paternal instinct,” and “I want to pass my genes/family name to the next generation.” Responses were measured on a scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with higher values indicating greater agreement. Not sure/I don’t know responses were recoded to the central point on the scale. Approximately half of the questions were worded to positively correlate with intentional childlessness, while approximately half are worded to correlate with temporary childlessness. Two questions, including “I value freedom and independence” and “I want to focus my time and energy on my own interests, needs, or goals” were considered childlessness-neutral statements to measure the culture of individualism as it indirectly relates to childbearing preferences (Cherlin 2009).

*Personality Traits.* After completing the Childless by Choice Project, Scott (2009:71) devised a theory that “certain personality types are more inclined to remain childless than others.” Following her suggestion that future research should include a personality assessment within this literature to further understand the interplay between individuals and structures in the decision to remain childless, the current study includes measures of personality traits, rooted in Scott’s (2009) observations but created

particularly for this project, including eight statements such as, “I consider myself a ‘planner’,” “I often feel that I need to be alone to ‘recharge’,” “I worry I may regret it in the future if I do not have any children,” and “I worry I may regret it in the future if I do not have any children.” Half of the measures consisted of a five point Likert scale ranging from Very unlike me to Very like me with higher scores indicating greater concurrence, while the other half included statements on a five point Likert scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with higher values indicating greater agreement. For the latter questions, not sure/I don’t know responses were recoded to the central point.

### *Measures of Capital*

*Economic Capital.* Measures of economic capital address tangible monetary capital available to respondents, including a measure of annual household income which included nine categorical responses ranging from “Less than \$20,000” to “\$160,000 or more.” Each category was recoded to the midpoints for bivariate and multivariate analyses. Other economic resources measured include type of health care coverage, satisfaction with the amount of spending money available (five point likert scale, higher values indicate greater satisfaction), and three measures of economic troubles. The composite measure ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ) of economic hardship was modeled after questions from the National Survey of Fertility Barriers, and included “During the last 12 months, how often did it happen that you... (1) had trouble paying bills, (2) did not have enough money to buy food, clothes, or other things your household needed, and (3) did not have enough money to pay for medical care” (Shreffler, Greil, Mitchell, and McQuillan 2015). Response options consist of a five point Likert scale ranging from Never to Very Often with higher values indicating greater frequency. Creation of the composite measure consisted of an

additive method with scores ranging from 3 to 15 and higher scores indicating more frequent financial hardship in the past twelve months. Any cases missing values for one or more of the three measures was excluded from the composite variable and coded as missing.

*Social Capital.* The current study included eight measures of social capital including respondents' perceptions of the social networks and support systems available to them (Sarason and Sarason 1985; Zimet et al. 1990), satisfaction with leisure time, frequency of time spent with friends, the number of friends with children, and agreement/disagreement with the statement "I do not have much in common with my friends that have children." A composite measure ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ) was created to measure perceived social support including responses to the questions, "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family," "I have people I can count on to support me in major life decisions," "I have people I can count on during difficult times," and "I feel there is no one I can share my most private worries and fears with." The composite measure was created using an additive measure. Cases that were missing data for two or more of the four measures were excluded and coded as missing. Responses for the composite measure ranged from 4 to 20 with higher values indicating greater social support.

*Cultural Capital.* Measures of cultural capital include two broad categories, cultural gender ideologies and pronatalist ideologies of the importance of parenthood. Measures of gender ideologies include five statements assessing agreement or disagreement with traditional and egalitarian statements including, "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family" and "If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally" (McQuillan,

Greil, Shreffler, and Bedrous 2014). Due to low reliability ( $\alpha = 0.55$ ) and high scores indicating significantly independent effects of each of the five measures of gender ideologies, a composite score was not created for analyses, and each measure is explored independently in all statistical models to follow.

The second measure of cultural capital, the importance of parenthood, addresses respondents' commitment to pronatalist ideologies. This measure includes four questions from the National Survey of Fertility Barriers, including agreement or disagreement with the following statements: (1) Having children is important to my feeling complete as a woman/man, (2) I always thought I'd be a parent, (3) I think my life will be or is more fulfilling with children, and (4) It is important for me to have children, as well as (5) rating the importance of raising children to their life (McQuillan, Greil, Shreffler, and Bedrous 2014). Due to high correlations among these questions ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ), these four measures were combined into a composite variable for multivariate analyses. The composite variable was created using an additive method, with scores ranging from 4 to 20, where higher scores indicate more positive pronatalist views. Cases missing data for more than one of the four measures were excluded from the composite measure and coded as missing.

*Symbolic Capital.* Symbolic capital is measured using Keyes' (1998) measure of social contribution as an element of social well-being. Respondents rated their agreement with the following statements: (1) I have something valuable to give to the world, (2) My daily activities do not produce anything worthwhile for my community, and (3) I have nothing important to contribute to society. A fourth measure was added to assess overall feelings of value within society, particularly "Overall, I feel I am valued for my role in

society.” A composite variable was created for multivariate analyses. To create the composite variable, the two negatively worded variables were reverse coded, and variables were additively combined resulting in a variable with higher values indicating greater symbolic capital. Cases missing data for more than one of the four measures were excluded from the composite measure and coded as missing. Scores for the composite measure ranged from 4 to 20.

#### *Measures of Experiences in Fields*

*Social Experiences.* Experiences in social arenas were measured using five open-ended questions including (1) “Are there certain times or places that you feel pressured or encouraged to have children? If so, can you give a few examples?” (2) “Are there certain times or places that you feel pressured or encouraged NOT to have children? If so, can you give a few examples?” (3) “Have you experienced disagreement with a partner about whether or not to have children? If so, how did/does this impact your relationship? (4) “Have you ever been denied access to health care coverage, procedures, or a contraceptive method because you do not have children? If so, what?” and (5) “In what ways has not having children at this time impacted your success in the workplace, both positively and negatively?”

#### *Measures of Demographics*

Multiple demographic variables will be included as controls as well as variables of interest to identify patterns related to respondents’ backgrounds and characteristics. These measures include race/ethnicity, age, gender, relationship status, educational attainment and future educational plans, occupation, hours worked per week, income,

current religious affiliation, number of siblings, number of pets, and region (recoded from state level data using the US Census (2010) region categories).

## CHAPTER 5: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

### Sample Characteristics

Among the 972 childless adults in the current study, approximately 59% are voluntarily childless, including those individuals who identified as not wanting, or probably not wanting, to have children in the future. The remaining 41% represent the temporarily childless, or those who indicated that they want, or probably want, children in the future. Among the total sample, approximately 82% are women, 17% are men, and less than 2% identify with a non-binary gender. There is more gender diversity among voluntarily childless respondents, with men and non-binary participants representing approximately 21% of the sample, compared to 14.5% of the temporarily childless group. Respondents' ages ranged from 25 to 40 years old. The average age among temporarily childless respondents is 29 years, and the average age among voluntarily childless respondents is approximately 30 years. A majority of respondents identified as white (88.6%), although approximately 5.8% of respondents within this group identified with at least one other racial/ethnic background. Almost three-quarters of the respondents that do not want, or probably do not want, any children are heterosexual/straight (73.3%) while heterosexual respondents represent 86.5% of the respondents that want or probably want children in the future. Among the entire sample, approximately 48% of respondents are married, although a larger proportion of temporarily childless respondents (65.7%) are married, compared to the temporarily childless participants (35.8%). Additionally, the proportion of voluntarily childless adults that are single/never married (23.4%) is more than twice the proportion of single respondents among the temporarily childless (10.0%). Similarly, the proportion of respondents cohabitating with an unmarried partner (15.7%) or unmarried

but in a long term relationship (18.7%) is greater among the voluntarily childless than among the temporarily childless (10.5% and 10.8% respectively).

Income was measured using a 9-point scale ranging from “Less than \$20,000” to “\$160,000 or more,” with values increasing in increments of \$20,000. Each income category was recoded to its midpoint for all analyses to follow. Temporarily childless respondents have a higher average income ( $M = \$66,997$ ) than the voluntarily childless participants ( $M = \$57,654$ ), and neither distribution is symmetrical. The average income of temporarily childless and voluntarily childless respondents have moderate positive skews, with the voluntarily childless being slightly more skewed than the former (skew = .65 and 1.00 respectively). As such, it is helpful to note that the median income among the temporarily childless is \$70,000, which is \$20,000 more than the median income of the voluntarily childless respondents (\$50,000). In relation to the highest level of education obtained, approximately three-quarters of the overall sample have a bachelor’s (four year) degree or more. However, the proportion of respondents with at least a bachelor’s (four year) degree is greater among the temporarily childless (82.5%) compared to the voluntarily childless (69.5%). Additionally, less than one quarter of the respondents in the current sample are currently enrolled in/attending school. The average number of hours worked by both the temporarily and voluntarily childless respondents is approximately 40 hours.

Atheist respondents are disproportionately represented among both groups in the current sample, with approximately 34.8% of temporarily childless and 50.6% of voluntarily childless respondents identifying as Atheist. A greater proportion of temporarily childless identified as Christian (13.3%) and Catholic (8.0%) compared to 6.8% and 2.6%



of voluntarily childless respondents, respectively. Approximately three quarters of respondents in both groups report having at least one pet, and more than 80% respondents report having at least one sibling. A greater proportion of voluntarily childless respondents report having no siblings (14.5%) compared to 9.5% of temporarily childless participants. Each region, as outlined by the US Census (2010), is represented in the current sample with approximately 33% of the sample living in states in the South quadrant. Similarly, various fields of work are represented in the current sample with less than 5% of the sample being unemployed. Additionally, approximately 7% of the sample consider their primary occupation to be a student. Lastly, a substantially greater proportion of temporarily childless adults report currently using no form of birth control (29.8%) compared to the voluntarily childless respondents (5.1%). Among those using some form of contraceptive for the purpose of pregnancy prevention, condoms and birth control pills are the most frequently used (34.2% and 32.4% respectively), although approximately 20% of voluntarily childless respondents report that they and/or their partner are sterilized or naturally unable to reproduce.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults. N = 972

	All N = 972 %	Childbearing Preference	
		Temporary N = 399 %	Voluntary N= 573 %
<b>Gender</b>			
Woman	81.8	85.5	79.2
Man	16.8	14.0	18.7
Other	1.4	0.5	2.1
<b>Average Age</b> <sup>a</sup>	29.7 (4.1)	29.0 (3.3)	30.1 (4.5)

	All N = 972 %	Childbearing Preference	
		Temporary N = 399 %	Voluntary N= 573 %
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>b</sup></b>			
Black or African American	1.9	0.5	2.8
Asian	3.1	3.0	3.1
White (Caucasian)	88.6	89.7	87.8
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.8	0.5	1.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3	0.3	0.4
Hispanic or Latino	6.3	4.3	7.7
Bi- or Multi-Racial	4.0	3.3	4.5
Other	1.4	2.0	1.1
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			
Heterosexual/Straight	78.7	86.5	73.3
Gay/Lesbian	2.5	1.0	3.5
Bisexual	14.4	9.8	17.6
Asexual	2.2	0.5	3.3
Other	2.0	1.5	2.3
<b>Relationship Status</b>			
Single, never married	17.9	10.0	23.4
Unmarried, living with a partner	13.6	10.5	15.7
Divorced or separated	1.4	0.5	2.1
Married	48.1	65.7	35.8
In a long term relationship	15.4	10.8	18.7
Dating one or more partners	3.3	1.8	4.4
<b>Average Total Annual Income</b>	61,479.17 (40,951.91)	66,997.46 (40,300.43)	57,654.32 (40,998.58)
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>			
Some high school, no degree	0.3	0.3	0.4
High School Diploma/GED	2.7	2.0	3.1
Some College, no degree	14.0	8.0	18.2
Associate's (Two Year) degree	7.9	6.8	8.7
Bachelor's (Four year) degree	44.3	45.9	43.3
Master's degree or equivalent	22.8	28.8	18.7
Doctorate Degree (PhD, MD, DDS, etc.)	7.6	7.8	7.5

	All N = 972 %	Childbearing Preference	
		Temporary N = 399 %	Voluntary N= 573 %
<b>Currently enrolled/attending school</b>	22.9	22.3	23.4
<b>Average Number of Hours Worked <sup>c</sup></b>	39.7	40.4 (13.3)	39.2 (14.9)
<b>Religious Preference</b>			
Christian	9.5	13.3	6.8
Catholic	4.8	8.0	2.6
Jewish	1.1	1.8	0.7
Latter Day Saints or Mormon	0.2	0.5	0.0
Muslim	0.2	0.3	0.2
Buddhist or Hindu	1.3	0.5	1.9
Agnostic	21.7	22.8	20.9
Atheist	44.1	34.8	50.6
Spiritual but not religious	10.4	11.0	10.0
Not at all religious	1.3	1.5	1.2
Other	4.3	4.3	4.4
<b>Number of Pets Owned</b>			
Zero	24.4	24.3	24.4
One	33.4	32.3	34.2
Two	24.4	24.8	24.0
Three or more	17.4	17.8	17.1
<b>Number of Siblings</b>			
Zero	12.5	9.5	14.5
One	45.1	46.9	43.8
Two	22.7	21.8	2.4
Three or more	18.9	20.6	17.8
<b>Region</b>			
Northeast	17.9	19.1	17.1
Midwest	18.8	18.3	19.2
South	32.9	33.6	32.5
West	28.5	27.3	29.3
<b>Field of Work</b>			
Administrative Support	6.5	5.8	7.0
Arts & Entertainment	5.6	4.3	6.5
Business & Management	13.1	13.0	13.1
Communications	2.5	3.0	2.1
Education	13.8	16.8	11.7
Engineering & Computer Science	10.7	9.3	11.7

	Childbearing Preference		
	All	Temporary	Voluntary
	N = 972 %	N = 399 %	N= 573 %
Government	3.8	2.5	4.7
Health & Medicine	13.8	16.3	12.0
Hospitality & Tourism	3.7	2.8	4.4
Law & Public Policy	3.4	2.3	4.2
Non-profit	4.2	6.8	2.4
Sciences – Biological & Physical	5.6	5.3	5.8
Student	7.0	6.8	7.2
Unemployed	4.1	3.0	4.9
<b>Birth Control Method(s) used in last 12 months<sup>d</sup></b>			
I am sterilized or naturally unable to reproduce	6.7	1.0	10.7
My partner is sterilized or naturally unable to reproduce	6.0	1.0	9.4
Condoms	34.2	31.3	36.1
Birth control pills	32.4	34.8	30.7
Hormonal patch, ring, or injection	3.9	4.5	3.5
IUD or Implant	18.1	13.3	21.5
Withdrawal or Rhythm method	17.0	16.8	17.1
Other <sup>e</sup>	7.4	6.5	8.0
Not currently using any birth control	15.2	29.8	5.1

<sup>a</sup> Reported as mean (standard deviation)

<sup>b</sup> Sum will not equal 100% as respondents were able to select more than one option

<sup>c</sup> Reported as mean (standard deviation)

<sup>d</sup> Proportions may not equal 100% as respondents could select more than one method

<sup>e</sup> Other methods specified include, but are not limited to abstinence or celibacy, spermicides, fertility monitoring, or same sex relationships

### Bivariate Results – Childlessness Motivations

Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare temporarily childless adults (those who want or probably want to have children in the future) to the voluntarily childless (those who do not want or probably do not want children) in relation to commonly cited motivations for childbearing or childlessness. Fifteen ordinal motivational measures were included, with each ranging from a scale of (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree

along with one open-ended measure which allowed respondents to identify any additional motivating factors that influence whether or not they will have children in the future. Six of the measures were worded in a way that support motivations for intended childlessness, while seven measures correlate with views in support of having children. The remaining two measures (I want to focus my time and energy on my own interests, needs, or goals and I value freedom and independence) were selected as “neutral” motivations targeting a broader culture of independence (Cherlin 2009). Since exploration of these measures did not expand beyond bivariate analyses, recoding of the responses was not necessary. Instead, for each measure, higher scores indicate greater agreement with the statement which is categorized into one of the three categories described above, as indicated by the headings in Table 2 (below).

T-test analyses were calculated to test the relationship between childbearing preference and each of the fifteen motivational predictor variables. The results of the t-test analyses described in Table 2 indicate that all of the variables were statistically significant in relation to the outcome variable. First, temporarily childless adults have lower average scores for each of the measures that viewed childlessness more positively. The statement with the greatest difference in group averages was “I do not want to take on the responsibility of raising a child.” For this statement, temporarily childless adults report an average of 2.1 (approximately a “Disagree”) while the voluntarily childless report an average of 4.8 (approaching “Strongly Agree),  $t(700.37) = -39.54, p < 0.001$ . There was also a substantial significant difference regarding the statement “the costs outweigh the benefits of having a child, financially or otherwise.” Temporarily childless adults report an average of approximately 2.1 and voluntarily childless report an average of 4.4,  $t(969)$

= -33.81,  $p < 0.001$ . Additionally, temporarily childless respondents report an average of 2.3 for the statement “I love my life as it is, and having a child won’t enhance it,” compared to an average of 4.5 among the voluntarily childless,  $t(541.42) = -48.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

In terms of the motivational measures that view childbearing more positively, the statement “I intend to have a child when I am more financially stable” revealed the most substantial difference between group averages. For this statement, temporarily childless adults report an average of 3.5 (approaching “Agree”) while the voluntarily childless adults report an average of strongly disagree ( $M = 1.4$ ),  $t(574.84) = 32.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Additionally, temporarily childless respondents report an average of 3.6 for the statement “I want to pass my genes/family name to the next generation, compared to an average of 1.5 among the voluntarily childless,  $t(714.61) = 31.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Temporarily childless adults were also more likely than the voluntarily childless to report having a maternal/paternal instinct ( $M = 4.1$  and  $2.4$ , respectively),  $t(967.47) = 24.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Lastly, voluntarily childless respondents were significantly more likely to report greater agreement with the neutral, culture of independence statements. For instance, voluntarily childless adults report an average of 4.8 for the statement “I want to focus my time and energy on my own interests, needs, or goals,” compared to an average of 3.1 among the temporarily childless,  $t(511.32) = -27.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Additionally, voluntarily childless adults report an average of 4.8 for the statement “I value freedom and independence” compared to an average of 4.1 among the temporarily childless,  $t(614.37) = -15.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

Table 2: Bivariate Analyses Comparing Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults' Motivations for Childbearing/Childlessness. N = 972

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
<b><u>Childlessness Motivations</u></b>					
I do not want to take on the responsibility of raising a child	2.07 (1.04)	399	4.79 (0.53)	572	0.000 ***
The costs outweigh the benefits of having a child, financially and otherwise	2.09 (1.07)	398	4.38 (1.02)	573	0.000 ***
I love my life as it is, and having a child won't enhance it.	2.31 (.95)	398	4.54 (0.72)	573	0.000 ***
My lifestyle/career is incompatible with raising children.	2.03 (1.07)	399	3.72 (1.34)	572	0.000 ***
I have more to accomplish/ experience in life that would be difficult to do if I were a parent.	3.16 (1.24)	399	4.70 (0.70)	573	0.000 ***
I am concerned about bringing a child into the world we live in.	3.28 (1.30)	399	4.27 (1.08)	572	0.000 ***
<b><u>Neutral Motivations</u></b>					
I want to focus my time and energy on my own interests, needs, or goals	3.11 (1.13)	399	4.76 (0.51)	573	0.000 ***
I value freedom and independence	4.12 (0.77)	397	4.81 (0.49)	572	0.000 ***
<b><u>Childbearing Motivations</u></b>					
I intend to have a child when I am more financially stable	3.50 (1.19)	399	1.35 (0.67)	573	0.000 ***
I want to pass my genes/family name to the next generation.	3.63 (1.12)	399	1.53 (0.87)	573	0.000 ***
I believe I have a maternal/paternal instinct	4.12 (0.94)	399	2.38 (1.31)	571	0.000 ***
I enjoy being around children	3.92 (1.03)	399	2.28 (1.27)	573	0.000 ***

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
I think I would make a good parent	4.37 (0.68)	398	2.96 (1.38)	573	0.000 ***
It is my job to help continue the human race by having children	2.17 (1.22)	399	1.12 (0.39)	573	0.000 ***
I prefer to let nature, the Universe, or God decide if it's time for me to have a child	1.95 (1.15)	398	1.17 (0.54)	572	0.000 ***

Note: Each item scale ranges from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

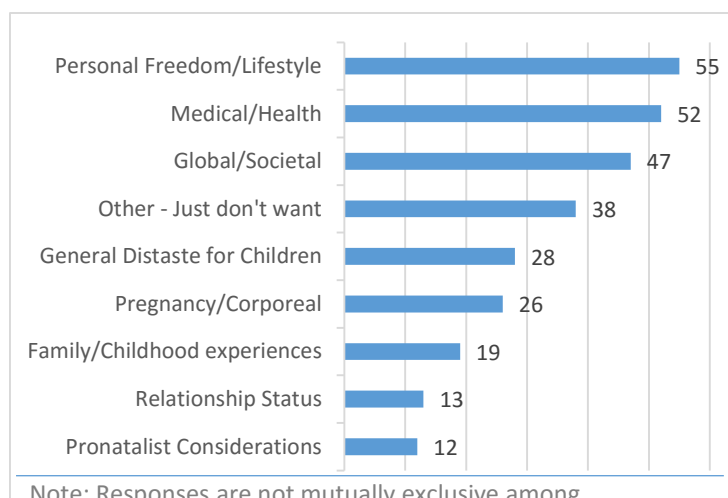
\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

### *Other Motivating Factors*

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question regarding any other motivating factors that they believe influence whether or not they will have children in the future. Both groups cited a number of individual level and structural factors contributing to this decision or preference, with 152 temporarily childless and 238 childfree participants providing examples.

Among the childfree or voluntarily childless sample, the most commonly cited reasons relate to personal freedoms or lifestyle preferences, with 55 responses fitting this category (See Figure 1). This category includes factors related to personal goals and leisure including “I like sleep too much” (Woman, age 30), “my education and future career” (Woman, age 37), “sleep, travel, money, free time...” (Man, age 40). However, this also includes more structural or interpersonal responses, including one respondent’s statement that “I am Asexual. I have no desire for sex, let alone the children that can result from it” (Woman, age 35).





**Figure 1: Count of Other (non-)Childbearing Motivations among Childfree Sample**

The second most commonly cited motivating factors related to medical or health concerns. Respondents reported they did not want to pass on “bad genetics” including an “autoimmune disease [that runs] in the family. I will NOT pass this curse on any farther” (Man, age 30). Some respondents stated they were not healthy enough to have a child, including both physical and mental ailments, as well as the potential health ailments of the child that they would be unable or unwilling to deal with. Thirdly, the childfree sample cited factors related to global or societal factors including climate change and overpopulation. As one 39 year old woman described, “Having children seems incredibly selfish and immoral in light of the fact that our planet is grossly overpopulated and has limited resources. I refuse to compound the problem by reproducing.” Others cited societal pressures for childbearing as sexist (Woman, age 30), or too difficult to “have a life outside of being a parent” (Man, age 29).

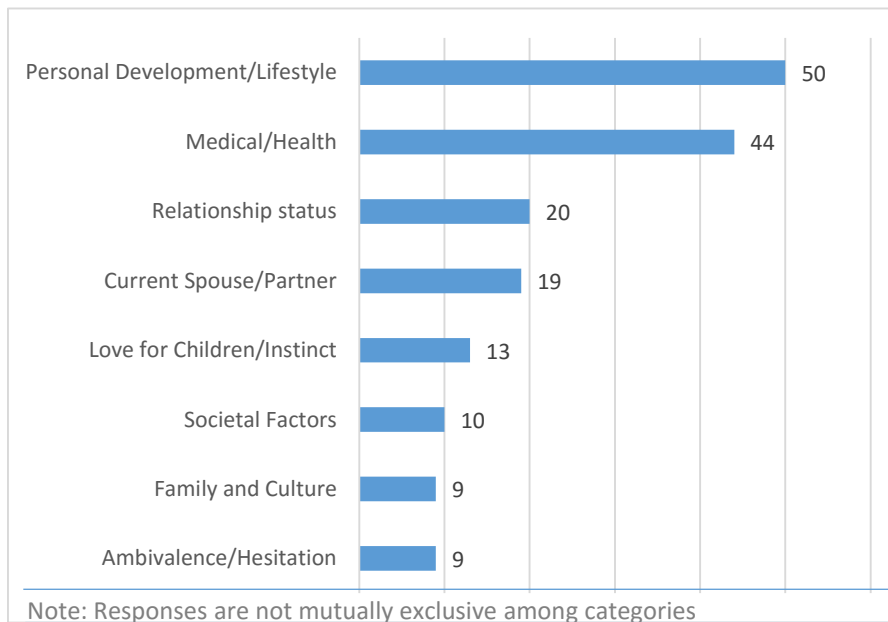
Additional motivating factors pulling respondents toward a childfree lifestyle include a general dislike of children, as well as physical or corporeal explanations such as tokophobia, the fear of pregnancy and childbirth (Hofberg and Brockington 2000),

transgender or non-binary identities, and body dysphoria. This group also cited difficulties in their own childhood or issues with their family of origin as motivating factors deterring them from childbearing, and matters related to their relationship status. For instance, one 26 year old woman noted “I like my husband too much to ruin our marriage,” while another 28 year old woman stated “Kids ruin lives. They tear relationships apart...” More structurally oriented explanations relate to sexual orientation. A 25 year old gay male indicated that “having children would have to be a conscious effort; no ‘surprises’ would happen.” Another 26 year old woman in a same sex relation also stated “Even though my partner and I likely couldn’t conceive on our own, we would both still choose to remain without children.”

A small proportion of respondents identifying as voluntarily childless did indicate some pronatalist considerations, indicating some ambivalence in their preference. One 28 year old woman reported she would consider having children “if I find myself in a long term relationship with someone who wants children and would balance out my weaknesses...” Another cited wanting to pass on their husband’s family name as a motivating factor in favor of having children (Woman, age 29), while another 26 year old woman indicated that their parents would “absolutely love for me to have a child and I hate disappointing them... However, that is absolutely not a good enough reason to bring a child into the world.”

The additional childbearing motivating factors that were most common among the temporarily childless respondents also related to personal lifestyle preferences (see Figure 2). Within this group, respondents frequently cited the need to be financially stable, including “waiting to buy a house” (Woman, age 28), paying off student loan or credit card

debt before trying to conceive, or obtaining more stable work. As one 31 year old man puts it, “Kids are expensive. Working two shitty retail jobs won’t cut it. Need to get my life sorted before I bring another into this world.” Respondents also cited education reasons, such as “I won’t try until I am done with my degree” (Woman, age 30) and “whether or not I complete my PhD before menopause” (Woman, age 36). Another 26 year old respondent reported that she and her husband would like to accomplish other goals before trying to have a child, stating “we’re hoping to start trying in about 3 or 4 years.”



**Figure 2: Count of Other Childbearing Motivations among Pro-Child Sample**

The second most common motivating factors related to health barriers and access to medical resources. This frequently related to a reliance on “successful fertility treatment” (Woman, age 32), as well as respondent’s or their partner’s experiences with cancer delaying or hindering their efforts to conceive. Respondents with health concerns indicated a desire or plan to overcome the barriers using medical intervention or adoption, such as one 25 year old woman who stated “I have had three late-term miscarriages. I

can't go through that again. Family formation will happen by way of adoption." However, some respondents also indicated concerns with the uncertainty or difficulty of these methods. For instance, one woman indicated that she has always wanted children and is "very intent on having them..." yet she faces barriers due to bipolar disorder, and understands the risks of children inheriting her mental illness, while also stating that she is terrified her medications may lead to birth defects. However, she continues, "... but when that is lowered to an acceptable level, we most likely will have children as soon as possible."

The third most commonly cited additional motivating factor among the temporarily childless respondents was their current relationship status. Many of these respondents indicated that they need to find the right partner and/or get married prior to having children. One respondent noted that "not having a partner/SO is a significant reason for not currently having children" (Woman, age 36). Additionally, some of the respondents noted structural matters related to their sexual orientation. One 27 year old male stated, "I'm gay, which will make things logistically difficult (would prefer adoption)." Similarly, a 28 year old woman respondent that she is a lesbian so "[t]here are some extra logistical issues involved in making a baby." Similar to motivating factors related to relationship status were those concerning the needs and wishes of their current spouse or partner. One woman reported she is waiting for her husband to say they can finally have kids. Another is waiting on "whether my husband will be able to contribute equally to raising the child..." (Woman, age 30), and another indicated that her husband is "not ready yet, but I was born ready" (Woman, age 25). Additionally, some temporarily childless respondents indicated a love for children or an instinct for parenting as a motivating factor,

such as wanting the closeness of family, having “a lot of love and life experience... to share with a child of my own” (Woman, age 28), and a “personal desire or instinct that is hard to say exactly why, just drives me to want to have kids someday” (Woman, age 30).

Societal factors and family or cultural explanations were less common but include varying forms of motivation including an obligation to “help improve the world by raising my (eventual) kids to be productive members of society and also to be kind and empathetic” (Woman, age 30) or the societal need for “more critical thinkers and problem solvers” (Woman, age 31). A 26 year old man also stated that “it is a failure as an organism, not a sentient being, to not pass on your genes...” also noting that he wants “to shape a child into essentially a better version of myself, which would be most fulfilling if it was my biological child.” On the other hand, some respondents noted structural factors such as “whether or not maternity leave becomes a reality in the US” (Woman, age 25). Those citing family and cultural explanations include religious influences, pressures from families, and parents’ desires to have grandchildren.

Lastly, a small proportion of respondents in this group responded with some ambivalence or hesitation, including one 32 year old woman’s statement that she does want children but is “a bit ambivalent about whether it will be a good or bad thing...” adding, “I think I will make a good parent but I’m certain it will disrupt my happy DINK [Dual Income No Kids] life. We are in the not really trying but not really preventing camp now.” Another 28-year-old woman indicates that she want’s children in the near future but does not “NEED to have children to enjoy my life. They are two separate but equally enjoyable paths in life.” One other respondent summarized her perspective as wanting children to “spread awesomeness by molding another person into awesome” while also

being comfortable with adoption as “genes aren’t important” and highlighting her fear of pregnancy as a barrier for childbearing (Woman, age 25).

### Bivariate Results – Personality Traits

Bivariate analyses were conducted to identify potential differences in personality traits between temporarily childless, or those who want or probably want to have children in the future, and voluntarily childless, including those who do not want or probably do not want children in the future. Personality measures consisted of nine (9) statements with responses ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree or (1) Not at All Like Me to (5) Very Like Me. T-test analyses indicate significant differences between the group means for all of the predictor variables measured. For instance, adults that want to have children reported greater agreement with the statement “I worry I may regret it in the future if I DO NOT have any children” with an average response of 4.3, or “Agree,” compared to an average response of 1.6 (approaching “Disagree”) among the voluntarily childless,  $t(970) = 45.16, p < 0.001$ . In contrast, voluntarily childless respondents reported greater agreement with the statement “I worry I may regret becoming a parent” ( $M = 4.0$ ) compared to their temporarily childless counterparts ( $M = 2.5, t(968) = -17.13, p < 0.001$ ). Voluntarily childless adults were also significantly more likely to consider themselves “childfree” ( $M = 4.7, p < 0.001$ ), and more likely to consider pets to be family ( $M = 3.3, p < 0.001$ ), compared to the temporarily childless adults ( $M = 2.6$  and  $2.3$ , respectively). On the other hand, temporarily childless adults were statistically more likely to consider themselves to be a “planner” ( $M = 4.1, p < 0.01$ ), and consider themselves “outgoing” ( $M = 3.1, p < .05$ ), although there was little substantial difference between these means and those reported by the voluntarily childless respondents ( $M = 3.9$  and  $2.9$ , respectively).

Similarly, there were statistically significant differences in the group means for the statement “I’d rather do almost anything than spend an evening by myself,” [ $t(970) = 3.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ], although both the temporarily childless ( $M = 2.0$ ) and voluntarily childless ( $M = 1.8$ ) were likely to disagree with this statement. Similarly, temporarily childless respondents ( $M = 3.4$ ) were more likely than the voluntarily childless respondents ( $M = 3.0$ ) to indicate their actions are frequently influenced by their emotions [ $t(900.784) = 4.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ] although the group means were not substantially different. Lastly, both groups indicated an average of “Like Me” for the statement “I often feel that I need to be alone to ‘recharge,’” although the temporarily childless reported an average score ( $M = 3.9$ ) lower than the voluntarily childless respondents ( $M = 4.4$ ),  $t(763.278) = -7.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Table 3: Bivariate Analyses Comparing Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults' Personality Traits. N = 972

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
I worry I may regret it in the future if I DO NOT have any children	4.29 (0.91)	399	1.57 (0.93)	573	0.000 ***
I worry I may regret becoming a parent	2.51 (1.32)	398	4.04 (1.39)	572	0.000 ***
I consider pets to be family	2.34 (1.12)	398	3.26 (1.19)	573	0.000 ***
I consider myself "childfree"	2.63 (1.35)	398	4.65 (0.71)	573	0.000 ***
I'd rather do almost anything than spend an evening by myself	1.99 (0.93)	399	1.76 (0.92)	573	0.001 ***
I consider myself a "planner"	4.14 (0.96)	398	3.90 (1.03)	572	0.003 **
My actions are frequently influenced by my emotions	3.35 (0.99)	398	3.02 (1.09)	572	0.000 ***
I often feel that I need to be alone to "recharge"	3.92 (1.09)	399	4.42 (0.92)	573	0.000 ***
I consider myself "outgoing"	3.06 (1.07)	399	2.88 (1.18)	573	0.015 *

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

NOTE: For each measure, higher scores indicate greater agreement (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) or (1 = Not at all like me to 5 = Very like me).

### Bivariate Results – Economic Capital

Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare measures of economic capital between temporarily childless adults, including those who want or probably want to have children in the future, to voluntarily childless adults, including those who do not want or probably do not want children. Six measures of economic capital were included in this analysis, including three ordinal measures of financial difficulties, as well as satisfaction



with the amount of spending money available after bills are paid, total annual income, and type of insurance coverage. T-test analyses were used to compare group means for continuous variables and a chi square analysis was conducted to identify differences between groups regarding type of insurance coverage. Results indicate statistically significant differences for five of the six of measures of economic capital. There was no significant difference between groups regarding satisfaction with the amount of spending money available after bills are paid. Both groups reported an average of moderate agreement.

There were statistically significant differences in each of the three measures of financial hardship in the last twelve months. The voluntarily childless group reported greater agreement, on average, than the temporarily childless regarding difficulty paying bills ( $p < 0.05$ ), not having enough money to buy food, clothes, or other household necessities ( $p < 0.01$ ), and not having enough money to pay for medical care ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, these differences were not substantially significant as both groups reported averages between Strongly Disagree and Disagree. In contrast, there was a substantial difference in the average income reported between groups. Temporarily childless adults report an average income of approximately \$67,000, while the voluntarily childless report an average total income of approximately \$57,600 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, there were significant differences between groups regarding types of insurance coverage ( $p < 0.001$ ). While private, employer based insurance appears to be the most popular form of coverage, a greater proportion of the temporarily childless (79.7%) report having this type of coverage, compared to 64.1% of the voluntarily childless. Voluntarily childless adults were more likely to have private individual coverage (14.3%) or public insurance

programs (9.4%), compared to temporarily childless participants (10.0% and 2.8% respectively). Voluntarily childless adults were also more likely to report having no insurance (8.7%) than those in the temporarily childless group (4.5%). Approximately equal proportions of the respondents in each group have some other form of insurance, such as student or military health care plans, Tri-Care, or coverage under a parent's plan.

Table 4: Bivariate Analyses Comparing Measures of Economic Capital among Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults. N = 972

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
During the last 12 months...					
... I had trouble paying the bills	1.57 (0.78)	398	1.70 (1.62)	573	0.020 *
... I did not have enough money to buy food, clothes, or other things my household needed	1.32 (0.69)	398	1.47 (0.83)	573	0.002 **
... I did not have enough money to pay for medical care	1.43 (0.84)	398	1.63 (1.10)	573	0.001 **
I am satisfied with the amount of spending money I have after my bills are paid	3.18 (1.41)	399	3.32 (1.35)	572	0.118
Average Income	66,997.50 (40,300.40)	393	57,654.30 (40,998.60)	567	0.000 ***
Insurance Coverage <sup>a</sup>	%	399	%	573	
Private (individual)	10.0		14.3		
Private (employer)	79.7		64.1		0.000
Public Program	2.8		9.4		***
Something Else <sup>b</sup>	3.0		3.5		
No insurance	4.5		8.7		

NOTE: With the exception of Average Income and Insurance Coverage measures, scores indicate greater agreement with statements (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree); <sup>a</sup> categorical variable reported using frequencies and chi square analysis; <sup>b</sup> Responses include, but are not limited to, student health care plans, military health care plans, Tri-Care, and parents' health care plans

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

### Bivariate Results – Social Capital

Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare temporarily childless adults, or those who want or probably want to have children, to voluntarily childless adults, including those who do not want or probably do not want children in the future in relation to measures of social capital. Eight measures of social capital were included in this analysis, with higher scores representing greater agreement, increased frequency, or increased quantity. T-test analyses were used to identify statistical differences in group means. Results indicate statistically significant differences in six of the eight measures. There was no significant difference between temporarily childless and voluntarily childless in terms of the number of friends they have that are parents or the frequency in which they spend time with children. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant difference between groups regarding the statement “I do not have much in common with my friends that have children,” with voluntarily childless respondents ( $M = 4.3$ ) reporting greater agreement with this statement than the temporarily childless ( $M = 4.1$ ), on average [ $t(970) = -3.69, p < 0.001$ ]. However, this difference did not appear substantially significant.

Similarly, voluntarily childless respondents were significantly, but not substantially, more likely to agree that they are satisfied with the amount of leisure time they have ( $M = 3.7$ ) compared to the temporarily childless group ( $M = 3.5$ ), [ $t(970) = -2.51, p < 0.01$ ]. The temporarily childless group reported greater agreement with the statements “I get the emotional help and support I need from my family” ( $t(926.483) = 5.47, p < 0.001$ ), “I have people I can count on to support me in major life decisions” ( $t(922.055) = 2.38, p < 0.05$ ), and “I have people I can count on to help me during difficult times” ( $t(908.241) = 2.19, p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, the voluntarily childless group ( $2.0$ ) report greater agreement with the

statement “I feel there is no one I can share my most private worries and fears with,” compared to the average score of temporarily childless respondents (1.9), despite the fact that both groups disagree with this statement ( $t(970) = -2.29, p < 0.01$ ).

Table 5: Bivariate Analyses Comparing Measures of Social Capital among Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults. N = 972

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
I get the emotional help and support I need from my family	3.81 (1.17)	399	3.37 (1.36)	573	0.000 ***
I have people I can count on to support me in major life decisions	4.41 (0.78)	397	4.28 (0.90)	573	0.018 *
I have people I can count on to help me during difficult times	4.44 (0.79)	399	4.32 (0.87)	572	0.029 *
I feel there is no one I can share my most private worries and fears with	1.87 (1.11)	399	2.05 (1.20)	573	0.009 **
I am satisfied with the amount of leisure time I have	3.45 (1.24)	399	3.66 (1.27)	573	0.012 **
How often do you spend time with friends?	2.91 (0.68)	399	2.98 (0.72)	572	0.120
Approximately how many of your friends have children?	2.54 (1.02)	399	2.42 (1.03)	573	0.088
I do not have much in common with my friends that have children	4.07 (1.06)	399	4.32 (1.03)	573	0.000 ***

NOTE: Higher scores indicate greater agreement (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). For time spent with friends, higher values indicate greater frequency (1 = Never to 4 = Very often). For the number of friends with children, higher values indicate larger quantity (1 = None of them to 5 = all of them)

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Bivariate Results – Cultural Capital

Bivariate analyses were performed to compare temporarily childless adults, or those who want or probably want to have children, to voluntarily childless adults, including those who do not want or probably do not want any children, regarding measures of cultural

capital. Two types of cultural capital were considered, including gender ideologies and parenting, or pro-natal, ideologies. The results of t-test analyses indicate statistically significant differences in each of the five measures of gender ideologies as well as each of the four measures of parenting ideologies.

Three of the measures of gender ideologies were worded for greater agreement to indicate more traditional gender role ideologies. For each of these measures, the temporarily childless adults report an average score greater than the voluntarily childless adults. Temporarily childless ( $M = 1.8$ ) report greater agreement with the statement “it is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family” when compared to voluntarily childless adults ( $M = 1.3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), although both groups averaged between Strongly Disagree and Disagree. Similarly, temporarily childless adults report greater agreement on average ( $M = 1.4$ ) with the statement “I believe that the woman’s place is basically in the home,” compared to the voluntarily childless ( $M = 1.2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), although these differences between group averages was not substantially significant. On the other hand, temporarily childless adults report more moderate agreement that mothers should prioritize their children above all else ( $M = 2.7$ ), compared to an average score of 1.9 among the voluntarily childless ( $t(756.434) = 10.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The remaining two measures of gender ideologies were worded in a manner that greater agreement indicates more egalitarian perspectives. When asked if household tasks should be shared equally among a dual income couple, both groups were leaning toward Strongly Agree, although voluntarily childless adults report an average score ( $M = 4.6$ ) statistically significantly greater than the temporarily childless ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $t(754.065)$

= -2.2,  $p < 0.05$ ). Lastly, temporarily childless respondents report an average score statistically greater than the voluntarily childless regarding the statement “fathers should play an active role in raising children, compared to the voluntarily childless group (M = 4.4 and 4.3 respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ), although there was no substantial difference between the averages.

Four measures of pronatalist ideologies were also included. Temporarily childless adults report significantly more positive responses on average for each question, when compared to voluntarily childless adults. For instance, temporarily childless respondents report an average score of 3.1, compared to 1.1 from voluntarily childless respondents regarding the statement “having children is important to my feeling complete as a woman/man,” ( $t(449.968) = 28.5, p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, temporarily childless adults report greater agreement with the statements “I have always thought I’d be a parent” (M = 3.9,  $p < 0.001$ ), “I think my life would be or is more fulfilling with children (M = 3.8,  $p < 0.001$ ), and “it is important for me to have children” (M = 3.9,  $p < 0.001$ ), compared to those identified as voluntarily childless (M = 1.1, 1.3, and 1.2 respectively).

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Table 6: Bivariate Analyses Comparing Measures of Cultural Capital among Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults. N = 972

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
<b>Gender Ideologies</b>					
It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family.	1.77 (1.03)	399	1.31 (0.67)	572	0.000 ***
If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally.	4.51 (0.74)	399	4.61 (0.62)	573	0.027 *
I believe that the woman's place is basically in the home.	1.39 (0.74)	397	1.16 (0.46)	573	0.000 ***
Fathers should play a more active role in raising children	4.41 (0.69)	399	4.30 (0.72)	572	0.026 *
A mother should prioritize her children above all else	2.69 (1.23)	399	1.92 (1.03)	571	0.000 ***
<b>Parenting Ideologies</b>					
Having children is important to my feeling complete as a woman/man	3.09 (1.34)	399	1.11 (0.41)	573	0.000 ***
I have always thought I'd be a parent.	3.86 (1.27)	398	1.58 (0.93)	573	0.000 ***
I think my life would be or is more fulfilling with children.	3.82 (0.99)	398	1.29 (0.63)	572	0.000 ***
It is important for me to have children	3.93 (1.04)	398	1.16 (0.40)	572	0.000 ***

Note: Each item scale ranges from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

### Bivariate Results – Symbolic Capital

Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare temporarily childless adults, including those who want or probably want to have children, and voluntarily childless adults, or those who do not or probably do not want children in relation to measures of symbolic

capital. Four measures of symbolic capital were included in the current analysis, three of which were worded for greater agreement to indicate more positive symbolic capital while the fourth was worded in a way that greater agreement indicated a decreased amount of symbolic capital. T-tests were conducted to compare the group mean scores. There were no significant differences in group averages for any of the four measures of symbolic capital. Regardless of group, respondents reported moderate average scores for the statements “my activities contribute something worthwhile to my community” and “I have something valuable to give to the world” and low scores for the statement “I have nothing important to contribute to society.” Similarly, both groups reported moderate responses to the statement “Overall I feel I am valued for my role in society.”

Table 7: Bivariate Analyses Comparing Measures of Symbolic Capital among Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Adults. N = 972

	Childbearing Preference				Sig.
	Temporary		Voluntary		
	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	
My daily activities contribute something worthwhile to my community	3.29 (1.23)	398	3.39 (1.24)	572	0.242
I have something valuable to give to the world	3.93 (0.95)	399	3.90 (1.07)	571	0.578
I have nothing important to contribute to society	1.78 (0.89)	398	1.89 (1.02)	573	0.077
Overall, I feel I am valued for my role in society.	3.32 (1.14)	399	3.28 (0.05)	573	0.626

Note: Each item scale ranges from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001



### Multivariate Results - Capital

Table 8 indicates the results of a nested logistic regression, exploring the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless (not wanting, or probably not wanting, to have children in the future) based on sociodemographic factors (Model 1) as well as various measures of social (Model 2), economic (Model 3), cultural (Model 4), and symbolic (Model 5) capital. Tests of the logistic regression assumptions indicate that the model is correctly specified, the variables selected indicate a sufficient fit, and is correctly classified (94.9%). In a test for multicollinearity, each variable's independent effect ranged from a minimum of 57% to 94%, indicating minimal risk of multicollinearity in the model. Model 1 was significant ( $\chi^2 = 181.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and indicates the regression results for sociodemographic factors only. Within this sample, for every year increase in age, the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless increase by .14 ( $p < 0.001$ ), independent of all other variables. The odds of identifying as voluntarily childless increased by approximately 2.2 times among non-heterosexual respondents, controlling for all other variables ( $p < 0.001$ ). Married respondents report significantly lower odds of identifying as voluntarily childless, compared to all other relationship statuses ( $p < 0.001$ ), controlling for all other factors. Additionally, every unit increase in educational attainment (measured in relation to degree attainment, see Table 1 for ordinal categories) decreases the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless, independent of the effect of all other variables ( $p < 0.001$ ). Lastly, when compared to all other religious identifications, the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless were approximately two (2) times greater for Atheists ( $p < 0.001$ ), controlling for all other factors. Gender, race/ethnicity, average number of hours worked

per week, and current attendance/enrollment in school were not significant contributors to the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless.

Model 2, which incorporates measures of social capital with the previous measures, was also significant ( $\chi^2= 221.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In this model, age, sexual orientation, relationship status, educational attainment, and religious preference remained independently statistically significant. Every year increase in age correlates with a .17 increase in the odds of being voluntarily childless ( $p < 0.001$ ), independent of all other variables. The odds of identifying as voluntarily childless remained approximately 2.2 times greater for non-heterosexual respondents ( $p < 0.001$ ), controlling for all other variables. Compared to all other relationship statuses, married respondents report lower odds of identifying as voluntarily childless when controlling for all other factors in Model 2 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Increased educational attainment correlates with decreased odds of identifying as voluntarily childless ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the odds of Atheists identifying as voluntarily childless were approximately 2 times as great ( $p < 0.001$ ), controlling for all other variables in Model 2. Additionally, bi- or multi-racial respondents have greater odds of being voluntarily childless, compared to white respondents ( $p < 0.05$ ), independent of all other factors. Increased time spent with friends correlates with .29 greater odds of identifying as voluntarily childless, net the effect of all other variables in the model ( $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, increased satisfaction with one's leisure time (OR = 1.15,  $p < 0.05$ ) and increased agreement that he or she does not have much in common with friends who have children (OR = 1.49,  $p < 0.001$ ) each indicate greater odds of identifying as voluntarily childless, independent of the effect of other variables in the model. Increased perceived social support, a composite measure of four measures of social support ( $\alpha =$

0.75) was not a significant predictor of identifying as voluntarily childless. The number of friends with children, gender, all other racial/ethnic groups (Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Other), hours worked per week, and school enrollment were not significant predictors in Model 2.

Model 3 seeks to identify the independent effect of measures of economic capital in addition to social capital and sociodemographic variables ( $\chi^2= 239.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Age (OR = 1.18,  $p < 0.001$ ), sexual orientation (OR = 2.11,  $p < 0.01$ ), and religious identification (OR = 1.99,  $p < 0.001$ ) each remained significant independent predictors of greater odds of identifying as voluntarily childless, net the effect of other variables in the model. Similarly, relationship status (OR = .26,  $p < 0.001$ ) and increased educational attainment (OR = .76,  $p < 0.001$ ), continued to correlate with decreased odds of being voluntarily childless independent of all other factors. Increased agreement with the statement “I do not have much in common with friends that have children” also continued to increase the odds of being voluntarily childless by .50 ( $p < 0.001$ ), net the effect of all other factors. Increased time spent with friends also remained independently associated with being voluntarily childless (OR = 1.27,  $p < 0.05$ ). Respondents that have public or some other type of insurance report 2.23 greater odds of identifying as voluntarily childless ( $p < 0.05$ ), compared to those with private, employer based insurance, when controlling for all other variables. Increased satisfaction with spending money also increased the odds of being voluntarily childless, independent of all other factors (OR = 1.23,  $p < 0.01$ ). Experiences of financial troubles, a composite variable consisting of three measures of economic hardship ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ), private/individual insurance, no insurance, and income were not significant economic predictors of being voluntarily childless.

Additionally, satisfaction with leisure time was no longer statistically significant predictors in Model 3.

Model 4 incorporates a third measure of capital, particularly cultural capital. This model was also statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 978.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In this model, Hispanic/Latino respondents have greater odds of being voluntarily childless (OR = 13.71,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to white respondents, independent of all other factors. Bi- or multi-racial respondents were also more likely to identify as voluntarily childless (OR = 7.23,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to white respondents, independent of all other variables. Marital status was the only other significant sociodemographic predictor, exhibiting decreased odds of voluntarily childless identification as voluntarily childless (OR = .31,  $p < 0.01$ ), controlling for all other variables. In Model 4, increased scores in the composite variable of perceived social support also increased the odds of being voluntarily childless by .17 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Having public or other health insurance, compared to private, employer based insurance increased the odds of being voluntarily childless 8.16 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), and increased income correlated with slightly greater odds of being voluntarily childless ( $p < 0.05$ ), independent of all other factors. Every unit increase in support for egalitarian division of housework increases the odds of being voluntarily childless by approximately 2.3 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, increased belief that fathers should be more active in childcare decreased the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless (OR = .40,  $p < 0.01$ ), controlling for all other variables in Model 4. Lastly, every unit increase in the importance of parenthood – which consists of four measures of pronatalist ideologies ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) – significantly predicts a decrease in the odds of being voluntarily childless (OR = .34,  $p < 0.001$ ), independent of all other factors.

Model 5 was the final model that incorporated all measures of capital and sociodemographic variables. There were no specification errors in this model, and approximately 95% of the cases were correctly classified. After creating composite variables for measures with high alpha reliability scores, there were no issues of multicollinearity, with each variable independently predicting variance in the dependent variable. This model was also significant ( $\chi^2 = 981.70$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In this model, Hispanic/Latino respondents (OR = 12.41,  $p < 0.05$ ) and bi- or multi-racial respondents (OR = 6.38,  $p < 0.05$ ) have greater odds of being voluntarily childless compared to white respondents, controlling for all other variables. A relationship status of married decreased the odds of identifying as such (OR = .29,  $p < 0.01$ ), independent the effect of all other variables in the model. Increased time spent with friends decreased the odds of being voluntarily childless in Model 5 (OR = .57,  $p < 0.05$ ), controlling for all other factors. Compared to respondents with employer based private insurance, having public or some other type of insurance increased the odds of being voluntarily childless by 8.5 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), controlling for all other variables. Increased income also remained a significant predictor of being voluntarily childless ( $p < 0.05$ ), independent of all other variables in the model. Increased support for an egalitarian division of household labor increased the odds of being voluntarily childless by 2.2 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), controlling for all other variables, while increased support for fathers being more active in childcare continued to predict decreased odds of being voluntarily childless (OR = .39,  $p < 0.01$ ), independent of all other factors.

Additionally, every unit increase in support of the pronatalist cultural capital ideologies (OR = .34,  $p < 0.001$ ) decreased the odds of identifying as voluntarily childless, controlling

for all other variables. Gender, age, sexual orientation, education attainment, current enrollment/attendance at school, average number of hours worked per week, and religious identification as Atheist were not significant sociodemographic factors in this model. Similarly, time spent with friends was the only measure of social capital that was a significant predictor of identification as voluntarily childless in the final model. Increased financial hardship, increased satisfaction with spending money, having private/individual or no insurance were not significant economic predictors in this model. Increased support for traditional gender ideologies including the separation of spheres, a belief that women's place is in the home, and support for mothers prioritizing their children above all else, were also not significant predictors of voluntary childlessness in Model 5. Lastly, a composite variable of four measures of symbolic capital ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ) did not independently predict the odds of being voluntarily childless in Model 5.

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Table 8: Logistic Regression Results: Odds Ratios for Respondents' Likelihood of Identifying as Voluntarily Childless: Sociodemographic Factors and Measures of Social, Economic, Cultural, and Symbolic Capital

	<b>Respondents who Do Not Want (or probably do not want) Children</b>				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Sociodemographics</b>					
Male	.12 / 1.12 (.24)	.17 / 1.18 (.26)	.17 / 1.18 (.26)	.87 / 2.39 (1.23)	1.02 / 2.77 (1.47)
Black	.94 / 2.57 (2.19)	1.24 / 3.46 (2.94)	1.34 / 3.81 (3.23)	-.68 / .50 (.68)	-.91 / .40 (.54)
Asian	.31 / 1.37 (.83)	.19 / 1.21 (.76)	.22 / 1.25 (.81)	1.59 / 4.93 (6.65)	1.73 / 5.64 (7.78)
Hispanic/Latino	.05 / 1.05 (.43)	-.00 / 1.00	-.17 / .85 (.36)	2.62 / 13.71 (15.71) *	2.52 / 12.41 (14.24) *
Bi- or Multi-Racial	.53 / 1.70 (.50)	.60 / 1.83 (.55) *	.58 / 1.78 (.54)	1.98 / 7.23 (5.68) *	1.85 / 6.38 (5.05) *
Other Race/Ethnicity	-.31 / .73 (.55)	-.34 / .71 (.58)	-.42 / .66 (.54)	.79 / 2.20 (4.96)	.41 / 1.51 (3.33)
Age	.13 / 1.14 (.02) ***	.15 / 1.17 (.03) ***	.16 / 1.18 (.03) ***	.08 / 1.08 (.06)	.08 / 1.08 (.06)
Non-Heterosexual	.77 / 2.17 (.45) ***	.77 / 2.16 (.46) ***	.75 / 2.11 (.46) ***	-.77 / .46 (.24)	-.75 / .47 (.24)
Married <sup>a</sup>	-1.36 / .26 (.04) ***	-1.38 / .25 (.04) ***	-1.35 / .26 (.05) ***	-1.17 / .31 (.15) *	-1.25 / .29 (.14) **
Education Attainment <sup>b</sup>	-.26 / .77 (.05) ***	-.28 / .76 (.05) ***	-.27 / .76 (.06) ***	-.27 / .77 (.15)	-.29 / .75 (.15)
Currently Attending School	.04 / 1.04 (.19)	.06 / 1.06 (.20)	-.00 / 1.00 (.20)	-.31 / .73 (.32)	-.27 / .76 (.33)
Avg. Weekly Hours Worked	-.00 / 1.00 (.01)	-.00 / 1.00 (.01)	.00 / 1.00 (.01)	.00 / 1.00 (.02)	.00 / 1.00 (.02)
Atheist <sup>c</sup>	.74 / 2.09 (.32) ***	.72 / 2.05 (.33) ***	.69 / 1.99 (.32) ***	-.29 / .75 (.30)	-.27 / .76 (.31)

<b>Respondents who Do Not Want (or probably do not want) Children</b>					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Social Capital</b>					
Perceived Social Support		-.05 / .95 (.03)	-.04 / .96 (.03)	.16 / 1.17 (.08) *	.12 / 1.13 (.08)
Time spent with friends		.26 / 1.29 (.15) *	.24 / 1.27 (.16) *	-.49 / .61 (.17)	-.57 / .57 (.16) *
Number of friends with children		-.12 / .89 (.07)	-.14 / .87 (.07)	.18 / 1.20 (.25)	.14 / 1.15 (.24)
I do not have much in common with friends with children		.40 / 1.49 (.11) ***	.40 / 1.50 (.12) ***	.07 / 1.08 (.20)	.06 / 1.07 (.20)
Satisfaction with leisure time		.14 / 1.15 (.08) *	.08 / 1.08 (.08)	.25 / 1.29 (.22)	.24 / 1.27 (.22)
<b>Economic Capital</b>					
Financial troubles in past 12 months			.02 / 1.02 (.05)	.06 / 1.06 (.11)	.06 / 1.06 (.11)
Satisfaction with spending money			.21 / 1.23 (.09) **	-.10 / .90 (.16)	-.08 / .92 (.17)
Insurance <sup>d</sup>					
Private, Individual			.37 / 1.44 (.37)	.13 / 1.14 (.68)	.09 / 1.10 (.66)
Public or Other			.80 / 2.23 (.70) *	2.10 / 8.16 (6.55) **	2.14 / 8.48 (6.98) **
No Insurance			.58 / 1.78 (.67)	.61 / 1.84 (1.36)	.69 / 1.99 (1.49)
Income			-6.61e-07 / 1.00 (2.54e-06)	.00 / 1.00 (6.99e-06) *	.00 / 1.00 (6.97e-06) *



<b>Respondents who Do Not Want (or probably do not want) Children</b>					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Cultural Capital</b>					
Separation of spheres				-.39 / .68 (.19)	-.37 / .69 (.20)
Egalitarian division of housework				.85 / 2.34 (.67) **	.79 / 2.21 (.64) **
A woman's place is basically in the home				-.21 / .81 (.35)	-.22 / .80 (.34)
Fathers should be more active				-.91 / .40 (.12) **	-.94 / .39 (.12) **
Mothers should prioritize their children above all else				.12 / 1.13 (.20)	.12 / 1.13 (.21)
Importance of parenthood				-1.08 / .34 (.04) ***	-1.08 / .34 (.04) ***
<b>Symbolic Capital</b>					
Perceived social value					.11 / 1.12 (.07)
Sample Size (N)	882	882	882	882	882
$\chi^2$	181.56 ***	221.54 ***	239.37 ***	978.92 ***	981.70 ***
df	13	18	24	30	31

Note: Entries are given as logistic regression coefficient / odds ratio with the OR standard error in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> All other relationship statuses combined as reference group; <sup>b</sup> Higher values indicate greater educational attainment; <sup>c</sup> All other religious preferences combined as reference group <sup>d</sup> Private, employer insurance as reference group

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001

### Interaction Effects

In addition to the bivariate and multi-variate analyses above, the following section explores the potential role that gender may play in interaction with various measures of capital on the participants' childbearing preference. The variables included in the preliminary interaction analyses were selected based on their overall significance in the multivariate model above in conjunction with evidence from existing literature that suggest men and women may have different experiences in these arenas in relation to childbearing. The measures considered include marriage, income, time spent with friends, the importance of parenthood, egalitarian ideologies, and the belief that fathers should play a more active role in childrearing. Each interaction was explored independently of one another, while holding all other covariates in the model constant.

The models considering the interactions between gender and marriage, the importance of parenthood, egalitarian ideologies, and the belief that fathers should play a more active role in childrearing were each significant, but the interaction terms did not indicate statistical significance. On the other hand, the model including the interaction between gender and time spent with friends was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 981.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the interaction term was statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), independent of the effect of all other covariates. According to this analysis (see Figure 3), as women spend more time with friends, the probability of identifying as voluntarily childless decreases, while the probability of men identifying as voluntarily childless increases, as time spent with friends increases, with all other covariates held constant at the median.

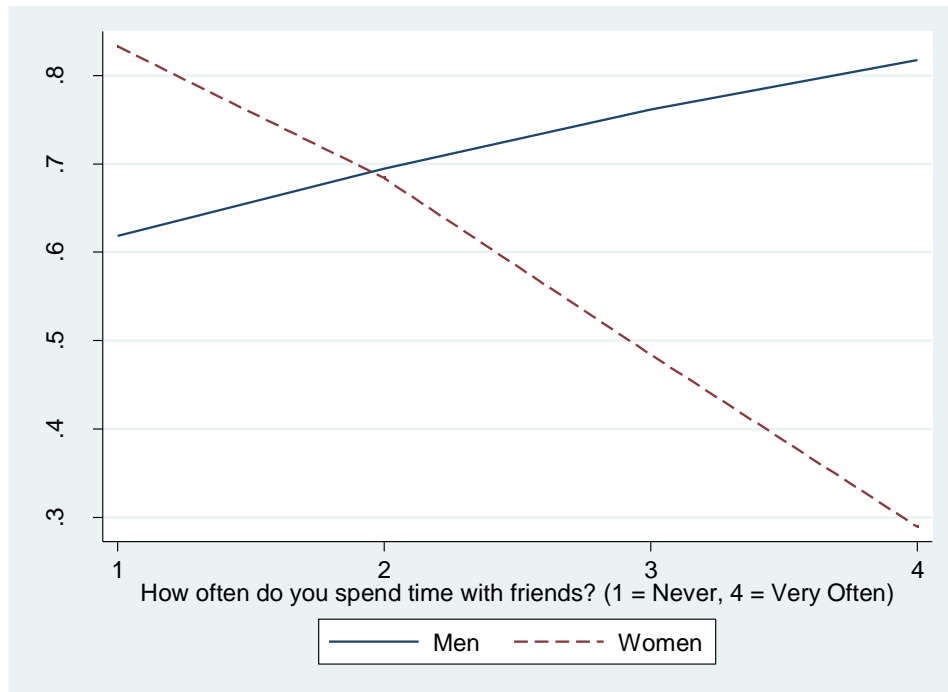


Figure 3: The Interaction between Gender and Time Spent with Friends on the Probability of Identifying as Voluntarily Childless

The income model was also statistically significant ( $\chi^2= 988.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with the interaction between income and gender indicating an independent effect, holding all other covariates constant at the median ( $p < 0.001$ ). In this model, income was also independently significant, with increased income indicating greater odds of identifying as voluntarily childless ( $p < 0.001$ ). As depicted in Figure 4 below, increased income appears to have a greater impact on the probability of identifying as voluntarily childless for men compared to women.

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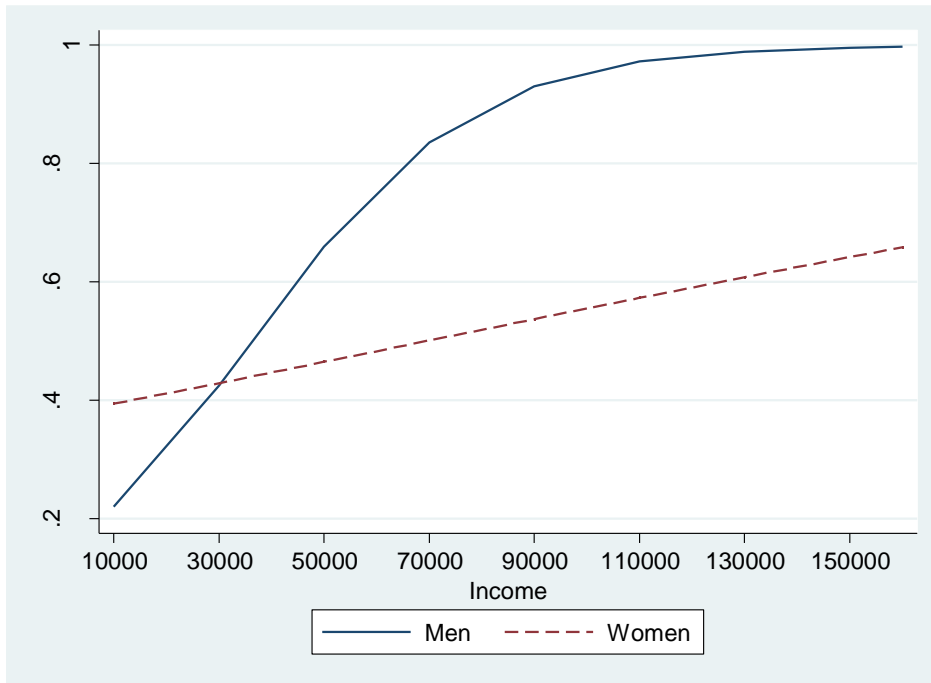


Figure 4: The Interaction between Gender and Income on the Probability of Identifying as Voluntarily Childless

## CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

In order to contribute to a shift in the conversation from an understanding of ‘why’ people choose to remain childfree toward an understanding of how this preference impacts individuals’ experiences in practice, five open-ended questions were asked assessing broad and specific *fields* in which pronatalist ideologies interact with individuals’ childbearing habitus. A between group comparison of the temporarily childless and voluntarily childless participants indicated a number of similarities and differences that highlight the contradictions, hardships, and benefits of actively deciding to delay or forgo having children. Responses for each question were coded using a general inductive approach (Thomas 2006) to identify common emerging themes regarding the social *fields* and the nature of the interactions relevant to childbearing preferences for each question. Responses were read, grouped and re-grouped into categories based on emerging themes using keywords within the responses (i.e. family, divorce, age) based on the nature of the question. Many of the participants’ responses are not mutually exclusive to one particular theme within the question itself as there was overlap in the topics being discussed.

First, participants were asked two separate questions to identify any particular times or places they feel pressured or encouraged to have children as well as the times or places they feel encouraged or pressured NOT to have children. The questions were worded to include both encouragement and pressure so as to not limit responses to either negative or positive experiences in these fields. Table 9 indicates the proportion of responses in each habitus according to the social arenas or interactions that their responses were categorized into. For instance, of the 573 voluntarily childless

respondents, 452 responded to the question regarding pressures or encouragement to have children and 375 respondents answered the question regarding pressures or encouragements NOT to have children. Similarly, of the 399 temporarily childless, 293 answered the first question, and 263 responded to the latter. Only 14% of the voluntarily childless and 19% of the temporarily childless participants indicated that they had not experienced any pressures/encouragements to have children. On the other hand, 45% of the voluntarily childless and 28% of the temporarily childless stated that they had never been pressured or encouraged NOT to have children. In fact, some of the voluntarily childless participants claimed it would “be nice” or that they wished they would get some encouragement not to have children. As one 28-year-old woman stated, “Holy crap NEVER has this happened.” Many of the respondents in this group particularly acknowledged the overt or underlying expectations of a “very pro-birth country” (Woman, age 31). On the other hand, some of the participants categorized as temporarily childless noted that they were aware of, but did not feel affected by, “antinatalist” perspectives in public or interpersonal discourses.

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**Table 9: Categorization of Responses to Open-Ended Questions among Temporarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Participants**

	Temporary (n = 399)		Voluntary (n = 573)	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Pressures/Encouragement to Have Children <sup>a</sup></b>	293	73.4	452	78.9
No pressures/encouragement	57	19.5	65	14.3
Family	163	55.6	271	60.0
Life-Course	55	18.8	27	6.0
Friends & Acquaintances	54	18.4	64	14.2
Workplace or School	32	10.9	83	18.4
Public, Media, and Society	23	8.0	39	8.6
Religion or Culture	13	4.4	26	5.8
Significant Other/Spouse	3	1.0	13	2.9
Other (too general to categorize)	-	-	27	6.0
<b>Pressures/Encouragement NOT to Have Children <sup>b</sup></b>	263	65.9	375	65.4
No pressures/encouragement	73	27.8	169	45.1
Family/Friends	55	20.9	91	24.3
Lifestyle Preferences or Circumstances	39	14.8	22	5.9
Workplace or School	69	26.2	37	10.0
Public Spaces	25	10.0	80	21.3
Global, Societal, Structural	16	6.0	19	5.1
Online Communities	6	2.0	15	4.0
Encouragement to Delay	27	10.3	8	2.0

Percentages indicate the proportion of respondents that have answered the questions  
Percentages do not equal 100% due to overlapping themes within many responses.

<sup>a-b</sup> Percentages represent proportion of total sample size for each category. Percentages beyond this point represent proportion of valid cases within each group

### Contradicting Messages

Both groups frequently indicated family, friends, work or school, public spaces, and other structural and cultural factors pressuring or encouraging them to have children, but also indicated pressures or encouragement within similar fields advising them NOT to have children. For both groups, many of the responses regarding the pressures/encouragement to have children and the pressures/encouragement NOT to have children highlighted the contradictory nature of these messages. In particular, it is interesting to note that many of the pressures or encouragements to have children came from the same groups or fields as the pressures or encouragement NOT to have children. Also of interest here is the similarities and differences between groups, as one's current status of non-parent can lead to certain similar social experiences, regardless of personal preference for the future, while also showing a number of ways these encounters are experienced or perceived differently, based on this preference.

#### *“Join the Club” vs. “Don’t Have Kids”*

Contradicting messages regarding pressures or encouragement to have children, for both the temporarily childless and the childfree, most commonly arose from family members, especially during holidays. For the temporarily childless, many of these responses indicate positive encouragement or support from family members while others indicate feeling pressured by a sense of urgency to have children as well as feelings of inadequacy related to these pressures. For instance, among those trying or planning to have children, many indicated that family members frequently ask them if they are expecting yet or when they are going to have children. Oftentimes, respondents were encouraged (yet also pressured) by their own parents wanting grandchildren or by their



grandparents “wanting great-grandkids before they pass” (Woman, age 25). As one 36-year-old woman noted:

My mother-in-law makes statements about never having grandchildren, how much she loved being a young mother, etc, despite never talking with me about my feelings or intentions regarding children, and it being far too late for me to become a, ‘young mother.’

In addition to the overt desires of family members, responses often noted that their encouragement came from interacting with family members’ children that they love or observing family members’ pregnancies and/or childrearing. For instance,

My Uncle had a daughter a number of years back. Spending time with her raised a fatherly instinct in me that I never knew I had. Would be interested in raising a child to hopefully right the wrongs of my upbringing and encourage them live a happy and fulfilling life... (Man, age 33)

Similarly, the childfree respondents most frequently experienced pressures or encouragement to have children during interactions with family members. Within these responses, however, many voluntarily childless participants highlighted feelings of guilt, agitation, or being devalued, indicating that these encounters are often viewed as pressures, rather than encouragement. As one respondent notes, “...my step-mother gets all sobby about me not experiencing the joys of motherhood” (Woman, age 32). Another expands on the persistence and discomfort that arises within these family get-togethers:

Yes, all the time. Any family get together or every time I talk with someone that has children. They often joke about it at first, then try to explain the benefits, then state that everyone has kids (plus some reasons why I should too). If I am still firm, they will regress to "what if you meet the right person?", "what if your husband wants them?"; after defending my position it ultimately ends with "what if you get pregnant by accident?" or "no birth control is 100%" to which I state my feelings on abortion. The conversation becomes very uncomfortable after that. (Woman, age 25)

Responses noted here often relate to the frequently cited stigmas (Park 2005) and sentiments or BINGOs (WhyNoKids 2011) attached to childfree adults in a pronatalist

society. For instance, many childfree respondents indicated that their family members called them selfish, persisted in telling them they will change their mind, pressured them to pass on the family name, and engaged in other “passive-aggressive remarks” (Man, age 30) or commenting on “when” he or she will have children, attempting to impose this lifestyle upon them rather than asking if it is something that they want or intend to do.

For both groups, pressures and encouragement also came from friends or acquaintances, particularly among those that have children of their own. For the temporarily childless, this encouragement at times came from feelings of isolation from their friends that are parents, and at others arose from experiencing the joys of parenthood through these friends’ experiences – much like the experience of observing close members of the family. As one respondent puts it, “I’m ... the last of my friends to not have a child. But I feel encouraged each time I spend time with them” (Woman, age 32). Temporarily childless participants also noted that friends and family members would make requests for them to “join the [Parent] club” (Woman, age 40) so their children can play and grow up together.

The childfree participants also frequently indicated pressures or encouragement to “join the club” from friends or acquaintances. Many childfree participants report the pressure of feeling isolated from friends with children, such as “[e]very time that I am with my family or my friends that have kids, they pressure me to have them. My sister and friends want me to have kids so we can ‘have kids together.’” (Woman, age 29). Some, but not many, identify how positive interactions with friends or family members’ children make them “question my childfree leanings” (Woman, age 29), such as one respondent

who stated “it’s nice to see how much my friends’ kids look like them. Kinda makes me want that” (Woman, age 39).

On the other hand, many of the voluntarily childless participants also feel encouraged or pressured NOT to have children based on experiences with family members or friends. These participants indicate that the overt discouragement comes as advice from people that are parents, jokingly or otherwise, while some participants framed their responses as feeling supported in their decision to remain childfree, particularly among likeminded people or close friends or family members supporting their choice. For instance, one 40-year-old woman noted that she is encouraged not to have children while “hanging out with friends. The friends with kids tell me don’t have them.” Similarly, another respondent noted that his preference was supported by interacting with “career focused acquaintances who took steps back from their work to raise children [whom] have expressed regret about their decision to have children. To them, the alleged personal fulfillment/rewards of having children did not offer the costs.” (Man, age 25). Additionally, one 29-year-old woman noted that her decision to be childfree is supported by her parents, stating that “[t]hey completely agree that children are too expensive and not a solid investment for the most part.” Another finds support from her long-time friend group which is largely childfree, stating that “we often have large NOPE discussions” and continuing that among her friends with children, “they keep it real with us, saying that overall it’s rewarding to them, but if you don’t want children you definitely don’ need to have them” (Woman, age 32).

Similarly, temporarily childless respondents also noted that friends and family members pressured or encouraged them NOT to have children. While some respondents

noted that they felt pressured from those that were actively childfree, interestingly, these interactions most often came from people that have children of their own. Some temporarily childless respondents also reported overt pressure or encouragement to abstain from having children, such as peers following a story of their child's latest troublemaking "Usually with the phrase, 'don't have kids'" (Man, age 25) or one's "own mother saying that I would be a 'terrible' parent" (Woman, age 31). Others noted that these pressures or encouragements were based on observations of others' experiences. These interpretations often related to hearing "people complain about their kids all the time" (Man, age 29) but also related to more serious pressures based on others' experiences. As one 33-year-old woman describes:

...I have a brother who has some mental health and personality disorders. After seeing his destructive nature cripple my parents emotionally, financially and sometimes physically I reflect fear on having a child like him. I would be afraid of living with the struggles my parents had and also afraid of abandoning my child.

In addition to the more direct interpersonal experiences with friends and family members, pressures/encouragement to have children as well as the pressures/encouragement NOT to have children arise in public settings and broader societal arenas. For instance, temporarily childless participants highlighted various public settings, media representations and societal influences as pressures or encouragement to have children. Some participants feel the pressure based on people's posts on Facebook, in particular. As one respondent notes, "... everyone on Facebook has kids now" (Woman, age 25). Others feel the pressure/encouragement "[b]asically everywhere" (Woman, age 30). As one thirty-year-old woman describes,

Ha ha. ALL THE TIME. Society makes sure almost daily that I should have a child and they question why I don't. It gets questioned on Facebook and even in the supermarket by COMPLETE STRANGERS. It gets even worse if I bring one of my 7 nieces and nephews along. Most people assume they are mine, but the second they find out they aren't, I get asked where mine are/ why I don't have any. I kid you not, I am asked a question about children at least once a week.

Similarly, temporarily childless participants feel influenced by religion or broader cultural forces such as the importance of their faith and its association with childbearing, or the pressures of a particular ethnic culture. For instance, one (Woman, age 33) stated:

My husband's culture (South Asian) is even less sensitive than American culture about this... Demanding to know why it hasn't happened yet, saying that if you wait too long you will be too old to play with the children, that type of thing.

Among voluntarily childless respondents, public spaces, media representations, and broad cultural and structural factors were also arenas for pronatalist pressures/encouragements. Childfree participants indicated feeling pressured or encouraged to have children during interactions with strangers, observing families around them, media representations of families and the lack of media representation of childfree adults, and other broad references to “most social interactions”. For instance, one respondent indicated they feel encouraged to have children “When I see a close, happy family with adult children genuinely enjoying each other's company” (Woman, age 28) while another noted that “...The pressure also sometimes comes from watching movies or shows where couples have their first kid and it's all sunshine and rainbows (the way media often portrays a new child entering the world).” (Woman, age 25).

Similar to the temporarily childless, the childfree indicated cultural or religious pressures or encouragement. However, these participants also often addressed their region of residence – particularly the South or the “Bible Belt” – as a cause of childbearing

pressures. As one woman describes, in "...certain regions/cities in the US (the South, for example) ... people are expected to have children. If you're not married with kids by the time you're 30, they act like there's something wrong with you" (Woman, age 25). Another childfree respondent indicated the pressures she feels as "the youngest an only female to an Evangelical Latina mother..." (Woman, age 25) and one participant even noted that "there's a lot of pressure to have children to pass [my fringe religion] onto" (Non-binary, age 28).

For both groups, public settings, and other global, societal, or structural factors also discourage or pressure them not to have children. For instance, temporarily childless participants indicate observing other people's children in public spaces as a type of discouragement. Some named specific locations like Target, Walmart, or hospitals, while others addressed these locations more broadly, such as, "any nicer restaurant I go to. Really anyplace I visit that has a disruptive child I'm glad that I don't have one of my own." (Woman, age 25). Some of the temporarily childless participants also mentioned large scale factors such as overpopulation, maternity leave, or the state of the world as it appears on the news. For instance, as one participant notes:

Having children, while something that I very much want, is illogical. It's a major financial burden, there is massive overpopulation and I live in a high crime area. Really, any time that I have a discussion about the logic of procreation, I feel pressured to not have kids. (Woman, age 34).

Another woman (no age provided) indicated that she feels discouraged from having children when she considers how the United States work environment makes childbearing "impossible to afford... no paid leave and after three months with no pay I suddenly have to be able to afford new day care experiences and the new cost of adding a child to my

insurance plan!” Additionally, six respondents noted that they only experience discouragement or negative attitudes toward having children in web-based spaces.

The voluntarily childless participants also frequently addressed how the public world or interacting with and/or seeing families and other people’s children encourages a life without children. For instance, one participant stated “When I hear people tell stories about their children, or hear them struggle with ordinary everyday tasks. I think it is a shame when a person struggles with sleep or their own priorities that are not based around children.” (Man, age 28). Another similarly reported “Whenever I spend time with kids I know that it’s not for me. Every story I hear about kids, and parents not being able to do anything because of their kids strengthens my decision” (Woman, age 31). In contrast, fifteen responses specifically cited public, online communities as a support system or encouragement to be childfree.

Additionally, childfree respondents addressed broad global, societal, or structural factors discouraging them from having children. In particular, “news stories describing crime, terrorism, child molesters, murder, horrific accidents, terrible childhood and adult diseases and ailments, abuse, alcoholism, usurious politicians” (Man, age 40) as well as environmental factors (i.e. overpopulation), and the belief that the “US work ethic is extremely hostile to working parents” (Woman, age 29) were provided as examples for these large scale factors.

### *Wait... But Do Not Wait Too Long*

Both groups also addressed factors related to their personal lifestyle preferences or circumstances, as well as pressures arising from their age or life course stage, as contributors to the pressures to have and NOT to have children. A common response

among the temporarily childless participants indicate pressures/encouragements in favor of having children related to their stage of life. These experiences typically consist of internal and external pressures related to their age, life course milestones, or their “biological clock.” Some respondents noted that they started feeling pressure once they entered their thirties, oftentimes because “...All adults are married with children. If you are in your 30's, unmarried and childless, it's like I have matured to true adulthood. Despite being educated and financially independent” (Woman, age 37). Even among the respondents that are married, those that want to have children maintain the sentiment that they are falling behind everyone else they know, such as, “I'm a 32-year-old married woman and all my friends already have kids. [I feel pressured] All the f\*\*king time” (Woman, age 32).

However, temporarily childless respondents also indicate that the pressure or encouragement NOT to have children is more of a pressure or encouragement to *delay* having children, but not to avoid having kids all together. For instance, one twenty-five-year-old woman's mother-in-law “blatantly states ‘you really shouldn't have any kids until you've finished some sort of upper level degree.’” While another thirty-three-year-old woman highlights the pressure she experienced to wait until she and her husband (both with PhDs) were established in their careers, although she reports they are now struggling to conceive.

Similarly, many of those categorized as temporarily childless also view their current stage of life as discouragement from having children. This may relate to the different perspectives within this group where those struggling with fertility may feel a greater sense of urgency than those actively delaying childbearing for other reasons. However,



among the respondents that feel pressured or encouraged not to have children due to lifestyle preferences or circumstances, reasons varied from prioritizing leisure and hobbies to health or financial barriers that would not be manageable with children in the picture. The varying degrees of these pressures are evident in the two following statements:

We do have a lovely life, full of leisurely weekends, hobbies that we pursue on weeknights after work, random weekend trips, lots of personal quiet time, and a clean house full of breakable objects. I know children are going to ruin all of this, but I can't think my way out of wanting them (as much as that would simplify everything, given the infertility). (Woman, age 35)

After putting in effort into certain aspects of my life that a child would make more difficult or ruin. For example, putting money toward new flooring in a home and the child does something to damage it beyond repair. It adds a great deal of financial stress and I'd hate to lose my temper at my child over something so silly and possibly instilling in them that they aren't as important as carpet. Also, I suffer from chronic major depression. I'd feel horrible for my children to see their father in such a pathetic state. (Man, age 27)

On the other hand, a smaller proportion of voluntarily childless participants indicate pressures or encouragement to have children based on life course milestones or their age. Some of these responses among older participants indicate feeling more pressure when they were younger, compared to now, and many reference milestones such as getting married as a time when the pressures began. A few childfree participants also identify internal pressures such as concern about being cared for in their old age, biological clocks, or comparing their lives to the experiences of their peers. For instance, as one participant describes,

Before I was married, not really, but as soon as I got married, people just seemed to think babies were the next step and they weren't shy about saying so. It has mostly been family not friends but especially whenever someone else in the family is pregnant/just had a baby, the pressure is on for me to do so too. "Oh I know you can't wait to hear the putter patter of Little feet!" "X's baby is so cute, when are you

going to start a family?" "You would have the most adorable babies; don't you want that?" (Woman, age 37).

For the most part, the pressures described are external, based on others' expectations for them. Unlike those in the temporarily childless group, the childfree respondents citing the influence of a "biological clock" or a fear of regret for not having children tend to include a statement that these feelings go away pretty quickly or include justifications such as "Hopefully I'll be an awesome aunt and my niece will help out if I'm, like, fully senile" (Woman, age 35) or:

I feel motivated to have kids when I am dissatisfied with some major factor in my life - a bad period at work, and living far away from and friends or family (so I was pretty isolated) have triggered it in the past. The feeling goes away when I make a change in another area of my life - switching jobs, enrolling in a class, etc. (Woman, age 26)

Among the childfree participants stating that they experience pressures or encouragement not to have children, twenty-two responses mentioned various lifestyle preferences or circumstances, either related to hobbies, intimate relationships, social interactions, or other responsibilities and hardships (such as financial strain). For example:

...Thinking about how little time I have already to work on my books, music, and drawings while working a full time job, and how I'm already squeezing every precious minute to bring these projects to some kind of fruition, and how much I love them and they're what really keeps me alive; and knowing that art can leave a far greater and longer legacy than a child (who may or may not do anything for society). (Non-binary, age 28)

Lastly, similar to the temporarily childless participants, approximately eight of the childfree participants indicated feeling encouraged to delay (but not forgo) childbearing, citing present and past examples such as their high school sex education classes or being encouraged by others to wait until they were ready.

### *Work Hard, But Have a Family Too*

For both the temporarily childless and voluntarily childless, workplace and school settings were frequently discussed as arenas contributing to the contradicting messages in favor of and in opposition to having children. Participants in both groups highlighted pressures NOT to have children due to the nature of their work or school responsibilities as well as their perceived inability to balance work and family life. For instance, many temporarily childless respondents acknowledge the predicament that poor family leave policies have on their ability to maintain a career and a family, as evidenced in the three following responses by two women and one man in their mid-twenties:

...whenever I hear a story about people who can't get time off work to help their sick kids I find myself discouraged by the possibility of being a working mom, and so much of my identity is about being a programmer that if I couldn't have both I would pick work over motherhood... (Woman, age 26)

As a graduate student (male), I do get pressure indirectly from my career choices. I just don't have the time to participate in an egalitarian childrearing situation with my [significant other] so it isn't happening yet. (Man, age 27)

Thinking about my future career and how terrible it is to be a working mother in our society makes the idea of having kids distasteful. I DEFINITELY do not want any children until after I have graduated from my PhD program. (Woman, age 25)

Additionally, as one 25-year-old woman who works as a children's mental health therapist notes, "... I see children with severe behavioral difficulties or developmental delays on a daily basis. After an especially hard day it is difficult to imagine having a child if they would be like the children with whom I do therapy." This type of response indicates how the type of work that people engage in can, itself, be a deterrent from childbearing, even among those that want to have children.

Voluntarily childless respondents also noted that the nature of their work or the difficulties balancing work and family life either contribute to or provide support for their preference to remain childfree (10%). One particular response provides a very comprehensive example of these concerns:

I'm a lecturer in academia (physical sciences). My job and its demands are incredibly incompatible with childcare. Getting tenure is unheard of unless you're an amazing person as a woman in a "traditional marriage" or have a stay at home spouse (like so many of the men in my field who do have tenure). // When I was a TA in grad school, my teaching assignment was "farmed out" to another small college in the area to help out a woman faculty member who just had a baby. We didn't chat too much and I can't even recall her name, but I'll always remember that she told me (completely unprompted) that having a tenured position at a small college like hers was a good compromise to achieve both an academic and personal life. I was married at the time and didn't identify as childfree until years later, but I found it interesting at the time. I think she was just offering some friendly advice to another female academic in training. Pre-tenure women faculty are rare and usually super human beings when you find one. Of course, by the time you get tenure, your fertility would be shit. // As a chemist, there are certain substances that would be very bad to be exposed to during pregnancy. I'm honestly not sure if women just put off those experiments in that case or not. It's a bit personal to ask. When you're shooting for tenure, 9 months is an eternity to twiddle your thumbs. Thankfully, none of the labs I teach deal with these types of substances, so I don't have to make special accommodations for any possible student pregnancies. (Woman, age 34)

On the other hand, the workplace can also be a major source of pressure or encouragement in favor of having children. Thirty-two of the responses from temporarily childless participants indicated how casual conversations with classmates or coworkers as well as the nature of their career choice can lead to pressures or encouragement to have children. For instance, one twenty-five-year-old woman who works as a school teacher noted that “[t]eachers and parents alike tend to think that being a good parent and being a good teacher go hand-in-hand... Parents don't take professional advice as

seriously from a teacher who doesn't have kids because "What do they know about parenting?"

Other temporarily childless respondents also highlighted a sense of separation from co-workers with children, as "[parenting is] part of almost everyone's daily conversation in the workplace" (Woman, age 28). Another noted, "As a graduate student, I have been told that having children during graduate school is ideal because you have a lot of time..." (Woman, age 25). Some responses also indicate feelings of isolation or pressure to fit in, although this may be more common among those struggling with fertility issues, as others noted that they view hearing about other people's experiences as (or becoming) parents as encouragement for their preference to have children.

Some voluntarily childless participants also address the pressures/encouragement that arise through office small talk or the nature of their career. One respondent notes, "Co-workers always talk as though it is inevitable I am going to have kids. They are all middle-aged women who have had children." (Woman, age 28). Additionally, a voluntarily childless teacher noted that "People think (or outright assume) that teachers, especially elementary school teachers, should be married with a family" (Woman, age 31). Additional childfree responses lean toward feeling harassed or as though coworkers overstep boundaries into their personal life, such as the sentiment "Co-workers sometimes make insensitive comments about how I have 'no responsibilities' or that I don't have a 'real family' without kids." (Woman, age 30). Additionally, one participant notes feeling inappropriately judged by her husband's coworkers whom "...insist I'm going to go crazy and go off my birth control and have tons of kids without his input. The pressure is annoying and I dislike his coworkers for it" (Woman, age 25). Further, other

childfree respondents relate this pressure to a sense of bias in favor of people that are parents. For instance, one twenty-nine year old woman stated “In my graduate program, there is some sense that students who are married/have children are more "adult" or read as being older and conferred more respect. Not direct pressure, but more of a type of bias.”

In addition to the contradictory messages that men and women encounter based on pressure or encouragement to have (or not to have) children, childbearing preferences may have unique impacts within particular *fields*. The following sections outline the similarities and differences between temporarily childless and voluntarily childless participants in three distinct arenas: intimate relationships, health care, and the workplace. Respondents were asked whether they have ever experienced any disagreement with a partner about whether or not to have children, and if so how this did (or does) impact their relationship. Respondents were also asked if they have ever been denied access to health care coverage, procedures, or contraceptive methods because they do not have any children. Lastly, the third section addresses how not having any children at this time positively and/or negatively impacts their success in the workplace.

### Intimate Relationships

Pronatalist ideologies are deeply connected to intimate relationships, as the playground song “...first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby...” can attest. Public perceptions in the US can also be so rooted in the idea of children, that other arrangements may not even be seen as ‘counting’ as a family (Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, and Steelman 2010). On the other hand, children are known to have an impact on

the quality of marital relationships (Cowan and Cowan 2009; Kimmel 2012; Senior 2014). Therefore, it is important to explore the potential impact of childbearing preferences on intimate relationships in specific detail.

Among the 399 temporarily childless participants, 294 respondents answered the question regarding the potential impact of their childbearing preference on intimate relationships. Within this group 57% stated that they did not experience any disagreement with partners based on their preference. Respondents who elaborated on this response typically indicated that no disagreement has emerged due to mutual agreement within their relationship, whether that agreement was ‘not yet’ or ‘we both know we very much want children.’ In particular, those intentionally delaying having children seem to be in agreement about waiting until their education goals (or similar) are achieved before trying.

Similarly, among the 449 voluntarily childless participants in the sample that answered this question, 53% indicated that their childfreedom has had no impact on their relationship(s). While a substantial proportion of both groups indicated no conflict, differences in the explanations as to why this has not been a problem varied. For instance, the temporarily childless were more likely to consider themselves “on the same page ... since we met” (Woman, age 33) while the childfree participants were more likely to indicate that this was something overtly discussed to select potential partners. These participants stated things like “I would never date someone who wants kids” (Woman, 40), or “it’s always discussed right away” (Woman, age 34), highlighting this preference as a “prescreening dealbreaker” (Man, age 30).

When conflict was mentioned, reports of disagreements or issues with a partner ranged from miscommunications that were easily resolved to significant conflicts,

including the termination of a relationship. The most common theme noted among the temporarily childless group, accounting for approximately 16% of the responses, involved disagreements about “when, not if” they would have children. Women in particular noted timing conflicts arising because they feel they cannot (biologically) wait much longer, while one woman noted that her husband was older than her and therefore he was the one that wants children sooner rather than later. Tensions in identifying the right time to have children also relate to financial security, as indicated by one woman’s testimony that she “... wanted to [start trying] years ago, but since I want to be a stay at home mom, we weren't financially ready. Also, he wasn't mentally ready” (Woman, age 27).

Approximately 12% of the temporarily childless participants discussed conflicts in the past that were resolved through “talking it out” or “getting on the same page.” Many of these responses also noted that communicating about this topic brought them closer together as a couple, while others report that they are still undecided and disagree at times although these conflicts are notably minor. For instance, “My girlfriend [of] 8 years and I often change our minds on the subject, sometimes arguing for the opposite side that we last time argued against. I don't think it impacts our relationship” (Man, age 26).

Similar to the temporarily childless, 10% of the childfree participants discussed past conflict that has been resolved by communicating or getting on the same page. As one twenty-seven year old woman noted, “it took a while to get to a place of complete agreement, but we never had arguments about it, just discussions.” Another thirty-eight year old woman indicated that she and her husband were able to get on the same page upon moving past the pronatalist belief that she “had to bear children in order to fulfill my duty as a woman.” Additionally, one respondent indicated that early on in his relationship,



he assumed his wife-to-be would change her mind in favor of having children but instead changed his own perspective, deciding that “the advantages of this [childfree] lifestyle outweighed any benefits children would provide...” continuing that “we have been happily married for five years” (Man, age 29).

Respondents in both groups also reported how childbearing preferences have led to conflict or disagreement currently playing out in their lives. As one thirty-four year old temporarily childless woman describes, waiting to try “has led to long term, underlying friction between us.” These ongoing tensions in current relationships correspond with varying degrees of pressures associated with the conflict. For instance, thirteen temporarily childless participants indicated an unspoken or hypothetical pressure or conflict in their current relationship. Some partners actively avoid having the conversation, others have not discussed it much yet but worry it will be an issue in the future, and one indicated the impact of the uncertainty about childbearing on the potential longevity of the relationship, as it is “[h]ard to be sure about the future of a relationship when a partner is unsure of when and at what stage in life to have kids” (Man, age 29). Twelve additional responses highlighted a current significant conflict between partners regarding childbearing. Two young women indicate feeling hurt or sad by their current disagreements, and one thirty-nine year old man indicated that he and his partner were “[c]onsidering break up since our only options are adopting a teen foster child or surrogate,” highlighting the impact of fertility barriers on one partner’s preferred method on *how* to have children.

Similarly, the voluntarily childless indicated minor or significant conflicts currently playing out in their lives. For instance, twenty-eight responses refer to an unspoken or

hypothetical conflict in current relationships, such as “I assume that my husband will eventually figure out it’s not just a phase” (Woman, age 26). Nineteen responses relate to significant conflicts emerging from this disagreement, such as: “Yes. It is currently playing out. We might end an 11-year relationship soon because he changed his mind [in favor of having children] ...” (Woman, age 29) and “Yes, she wants to have children eventually. I don't believe our relationship will survive when she feels the need to have kids.” (Man, age 26). Finally, ten responses indicate current or past feelings of pressure to change their minds, as evidenced by the following response:

Yes. My partner and I have known each other for 10+ years and for the first 9 years we were both adamantly "no kids." Last year he changed his mind. We discussed breaking up over this. Ultimately we put off the breaking up and decided we would each re-eval our positions on having kids. (Woman, age 29)

Only five percent of the responses by the temporarily childless indicated the termination or avoidance of a relationship based on disagreements about having children.

As one respondent described:

I have been with women in the past that either did not want to, or not want to in the foreseeable future and I made the decision to leave because it was important for me to be with someone who indeed wanted children. (Man, age 36)

Similarly, a thirty year old woman responded:

Yes. Currently. Yes. Yes. Yes. I am going through a breakup with my boyfriend of almost 2 years because of this. He loves children and always thought he would have them, but at 37 years old he is completely lost in life and isn't ready to bring a child into the world. Which I respect and understand completely. To quote Marissa Tomei in "My Cousin Vinny," - "My clock is tickin' like this" and I decided not to wait for him to have clarity. Who knows if he will actually want kids when he figures it all out? I am not willing to take the chance. (Woman, age 30)

On the other hand, the voluntarily childless most commonly reported that they have either ended or avoided relationships based on this ideological difference (27%). Among

relationships that have ended range from casual relationships to long-term marriages. One young man noted that all of his relationships have ended due to this disagreement, stating “it’s hard finding a partner that shares my views” (Man, age 25). Another respondent noted:

...An ex-boyfriend said he was fine with the fact that we disagreed. (He wanted at least 1, I didn't want any.) But it came up later during a fight. He burst out that he wanted kids out of nowhere when we were arguing. " . . . And I want kids, damnit!" It was a factor in my decision to break up with him. (Woman, age 28)

In short, while both groups indicate the numerous ways that the preference to have or not to have children has (or is currently) impacting intimate relationships, childfree participants appear more likely to end or avoid relationships based on this disagreement. The childfree also indicated that it’s hard to find a partner that shares their views or respects the permanence of this decision, while the temporarily childless were more likely to indicate disagreement on when (or how) to have children, with differences within group emerging based on the timing and “readiness” or conflicts based on fertility barriers.

### Health Care

Health care is another field where pronatalist ideologies are enforced or contested. In particular, men and women have increasingly used technological and medical advancements to control the timing of, or completely forgo, childbearing. Family planning and contraceptive use is relatively ubiquitous in the United States (Fennell 2011), but permanent and long term methods of contraceptives are often contested among providers, particularly among women that have not ‘completed’ their childbearing responsibilities (Denbow 2014). Therefore, it is important to identify potential similarities

and differences in the experiences of men and women that do not have children based on their preference regarding future fecundity.

Interestingly, among the 286 temporarily childless participants responding to the question, “Have you ever been denied access to health care coverage, procedures, or a contraceptive method because you do not have children? If so, what?” approximately 91% stated that they had not experienced this kind of difficulty. Among those saying no, only a small handful elaborated that they had received minor pushback in obtaining access to an IUD, but often noting that the issue was resolved after a brief conversation with their provider. A few others noted that they were more resistant to contraceptives than their doctor would have been, in order to avoid any “risk [of] complication prior to having kids” (Woman, age 31). Others noted that they have not been denied, but are not surprised that it does happen to other people. A few respondents even stated that this denial “sounds pretty messed up in any case...” (Woman, 30), and one even stated, “no, does that happen? That sucks” (Woman, age 25). Other temporarily childless participants responded that the question was not applicable, indicating that this may relate to fertility barriers or active efforts to conceive as preventing them from pursuing contraceptive options.

On the other hand, 430 childfree respondents answered the health care question, of which 73% indicated that they had not experienced any denial of coverage or care. Among those that said no, some expressed that they were fortunate to have quality health care, respectful doctors, or live in an area where access to health care and contraceptives were less of an issue. On the other hand, several childfree participants stated they had “not yet” encountered any of these barriers, and some even expressed sentiments such

as: “I am afraid to talk to my doctor about having my Fallopian tubes removed for fear of being patronized and denied” (Woman, age 27), indicating that they may have not been denied any services but oftentimes because they haven’t asked – either because they weren’t interested or because they were aware of the possible struggles with pursuing permanent methods. Some childfree women noted that they have not had any issues because their male partner was already sterilized in their relationship, without encountering any issues: “... I've used contraceptive pills in the past, nothing else. My husband was able to get a vasectomy with absolutely no trouble, before we were even married” (Woman, age 36).

For the childfree respondents that have encountered health care difficulties, access to sterilization (21%) and long-term birth control such as an IUD (5%) were the most commonly cited issues. As one respondent’s testimony summarizes, “I had to go to three different places to get an IUD, and to this day, nobody will sterilize me, even though I have been begging for it for over 20 years...” (Woman, age 39). Similarly, a twenty-five year old voluntarily childless woman noted that she is unable to get a tubal ligation, which she has requested “every year for the past 7 years.” She continued that her gynecologists have refused the procedure because she might change her mind, and that she has to wait until she is either thirty-five years old or has two children. Some childfree men cited difficulties accessing sterilization, reporting that they were required to provide their wife’s consent before receiving the procedure: “When I was in the US Army the staff at [an] Army Hospital refused to perform a vasectomy unless I had two children and a signed [release] from then my wife. I paid out of pocket to get the procedure” (Man, age 39).

Accessing long-term birth control methods, such as an IUD, also appeared to be problematic for six percent of the temporarily childless. Some respondents stated this occurred when they were younger, particularly when less was known about this device:

When I was younger I was told I could not use an IUD because I had not had children yet and wanted children someday, and there were concerns about my fertility after the IUD. But that has changed with new medical research.” (Woman, age 28)

However, others indicated barriers accessing the IUD because they were perceived as too young and unable to make such a long term decision regarding their childbearing, or that the device was not necessarily a good ‘fit’ for them, in more ways than one...

Initially denied an IUD (in 2005) b/c I was not married and had not had any children. Was told that placement was harder for women who had not given birth, and that I should use a barrier method for birth control since I was not married (presumed promiscuous?) And IUDs don't protect against STDs. (Woman, age 35)

Two temporarily childless respondents also noted difficulty accessing Depo Provera or the “shot” with one participant who plans to adopt a child stating, “Doctors have given me a long lecture about how taking depo will make it harder for me to get pregnant after I stop taking it. That doesn't seem to believe that I don't want to ever physically birth a child” (Woman, age 26).

In addition to discussions of contraceptives, nine temporarily childless respondents indicated that they have had limited access to health care coverage, particularly Medicaid, ACA, or a state sponsored health insurance plan, as they were disqualified to receive coverage because they do not have any children. One respondent even noted that employer insurance coverage is skewed in favor of those with children, stating that “things like orthodontics are covered for dependents, but not for the primary. That is ludicrous” (Woman, age 36). Others noted that their insurance had “caps for infertility treatments.

Most expenses must be pre-authorized and there is a life-time limit of \$20,000” (Woman, age 26), and another indicated that her insurance would not cover the genetic testing she wanted in preparation of having kids, until she was already pregnant. Similarly, thirteen responses from the voluntarily childless suggested that they were unable to access health care or government financial assistance, such as Medicaid, WIC, or welfare, since they do not have any children. As one respondent described, “I wasn’t able to get on Medicaid prior to having insurance/a full time job, but would have qualified if I had a child at the time” (Woman, age 25). This barrier is evident in both groups, as applicants for these assistance programs must be parents of children of a certain age range in order to qualify (Adams 2015).

Interestingly, eight childfree respondents also noted experiences being denied access to unrelated health care procedures or needs based on a perceived prioritization of the potential for childbearing over other pressing health concerns within the health care system. One twenty-five year old woman mentioned that her doctor tried to take her off of hormonal birth control, which she takes “to treat a serious medical condition” to see if she was infertile, even though she had made it clear that her ability to bear children was of no interest to her. Another woman indicated the severe difficulty she encountered, where the unfeasible act of breastfeeding in the future was prioritized over a medical condition she was experiencing:

... It took me over a decade to get approval for my tubal ligation. After my tubal, I had a problem with my nipple that required surgery to fix. They almost did not do the surgery, even after I said I had a tubal AND ablation, because it would have impacted breastfeeding. Their solution was to take antibiotics and pain killers until I was past the point of wanting to breastfeed. It took the threat of a lawsuit to get them to perform the surgery. It was pretty ridiculous. (Woman, age 31)

Lastly, two childfree respondents indicated feeling mistreated or displeased with their doctors. As one twenty-seven year old woman explains, “an older male gynecologist treated me like dirt when he found out I was planning to abort if I had been pregnant by accident.” Another respondent indicated to her doctor that it would put her mind at ease if she could use multiple forms of birth control, but was denied access to simultaneously use the pill and sterilization, with doctors saying it would be “silly to double up... because it doesn’t double my chances of staying childfree” (Woman, age 31).

In sum, voluntarily childless participants were disproportionately denied access to contraceptive methods or sterilization procedures, where potential fertility was even prioritized over other health concerns, for some women. It can be assumed that temporarily childless participants were much less likely to experience issues accessing contraceptives due to the inherent nature of *contraceptives* preventing the main goal of those who intend to become a parent. However, the proportion of temporarily childless participants that did experience issues in accessing birth control, as well as the proportion of childfree participants that were too afraid to ask about their options for fear of being judged or denied, highlights a similarity between groups regarding bodily autonomy and the decision making process of when or if they will become a parent. It is also important to note how these discussions were articulated. While the childfree focused on issues related to preventing themselves for becoming a parent, the temporarily childless were more likely to frame their responses in relation to the barriers they experience while trying to have children or the barriers they experience because they are not yet a parent, such as access to fertility treatments, adoption, or surrogacy, or being unable to qualify for state programs that would be easier to get if they had children.



## Workplace

Work and education goals are often cited as reasons for delaying or forgoing childbearing. Similarly, the workforce is characterized as a 'greedy institution' (Sullivan 2014) often requiring complete dedication (particularly during one's childbearing years) to succeed. On the other hand, the workforce is not immune to pronatalist assumptions. Therefore, the following section outlines the experiences at work or in school as (temporarily or voluntarily) childless adults to identify the positive and negative impact that not having any children has had on their career or education goals.

Among the 290 temporarily childless respondents that provided answers to the open-ended question addressing experiences in the workplace, only 15% stated that being childless has had no impact on their work, positively or negatively. Many respondents, in fact, were able to indicate both positive AND negative impacts that they have experienced. While some of the concerns of temporarily childless adults are unique to their experience of wanting to become a parent, many of the positive and negative impacts of childlessness in the workplace are experienced by childfree participants as well. Among the 440 childfree participants that provided answers for this question, only 19% did not believe their work was impacted positively or negatively because of their status as a nonparent.

For those planning or wanting to have children in the future, the most commonly cited benefit (49%) of being presently childless related to scheduling flexibility, having more time to focus on work, or having the ability to be more dedicated to their position. One twenty-five-year-old woman indicated that having a more flexible schedule without children is helpful since she is just starting her career. Others indicated being able to work

unconventional hours, to work longer hours, or that it is “Easy to come in early/stay late. Easy to move around vacation/days off. Easy to schedule interviews around only [my] schedule” (Man, age 29). Similarly, as one woman describes, “I am at my first job post grad school and have only been in my position for a little over a year so I think not having kids had allowed me to focus and get more experience” (Woman, age 28).

Similarly, almost half of the childfree participants (46%) indicated that their childlessness positively impacted their ability to work more, including “more time to work, fewer distractions...” (Non-binary, age 25), or being able to “fully commit to being the best at my job because I have no immediate and immutable personal responsibilities” (Man, age 28). Voluntarily childless participants also noted that their childfree status has been beneficial to their ability to advance their careers or schooling. As one respondent noted, “the work and hours [of graduate school] are not conducive to having children” (Woman, age 26). Similarly, a thirty-seven-year-old man indicated that “not having children has allowed me to advance my career with casual excessive hours over a number of years,” while another woman perceived her childfreedom as beneficial to her career advancement because, “as a woman, it is more likely that I would have stayed home at points in the last 5-10 years to have children, and my career success would have definitely suffered” (Woman, age 33).

Temporarily childless participants similarly noted the benefit of being able to advance their career or schooling resulting from a lack of childrearing responsibilities. For instance, one respondent stated, “Lack of children has allowed me to pursue a medical degree. If I had children, I would likely have [pursued] a master’s degree instead” (Man,

age 32). Another temporarily childless participant indicated how being childless has been beneficial to her career in a male-dominated field:

My industry (Silicon Valley startup programming) is not used to accommodating pregnant women or mothers, and I definitely feel that having children would have hurt my job prospects. Many tech professionals have told me that maternity leave and children do not mix with the time and productivity demands of startup culture. I am the only female in my engineering team of 16 employees, and we have no maternity policies. Not having children has helped me break into a male-dominated industry.” (Woman, age 30)

Being a non-parent also corresponds with the benefit of financial freedom for both voluntarily childless and temporarily childless participants. Within both groups, financial freedom was considered in relation to an ability to save and spend as they choose, as well as an ability to “get by” on less when needed. For instance, one twenty-eight-year-old temporarily childless man indicated “It’s been much easier to live on a graduate student’s stipend without children” while another temporarily childless participant indicated that working full-time without the added responsibility of children has afforded her the ability to “accrue more money for personal wants/needs” (Woman, age 25). Childfree participants were also likely to cite examples such as being able to take career risks, choosing jobs that make them happy over ones that pay more, and dissatisfaction with the pay of jobs they can find as non-conducive with having children.

Both the temporarily childless and voluntarily childless respondents also identified more broad benefits of being childless in the workplace, particularly in terms of being able to work in a particular career field or simply being able to be employed (or employable) all together. Some women indicated that their career type is not conducive to being pregnant, such as working with “known mutagens and teratogens in a research lab” (Temporarily Childless Woman, age 28) or acknowledging that they would be a “stay at

home mom if we had kids right now” (Temporarily Childless Woman, age 28). Similarly, one voluntarily childless woman also explained, “I work offshore on a research vessel. Pregnancy and childbirth on their own is not possible in that environment and the demands of childrearing in the first year or two after birth would be enough to kill that career” (Woman, age 39).

The childfree also indicated feeling more hireable or “competitive and relevant” (Woman, age 29), and having an overall better work experience than they would anticipate as parents, due to less stress and “dependencies weighing on my ability to work” (Man, age 26). Additionally, a thirty-three-year-old temporarily childless man indicated that if he had children, he would have accepted a less worthwhile job in order to provide for his family, but has since been able to start his own company “and things are looking up for me for the first time in years, so having a child now would not be ideal.”

Next, both groups noted that their current status as a non-parent contributes to their ability to travel or relocate for work, which they find easier to do without uprooting or finding care for children. One twenty-five-year-old temporarily childless man indicates that not basing his employment around maintaining residence within a particular school district is a benefit, and another temporarily childless respondent elaborated that she is able to “...travel for research. I spend several months a year in the Amazon basin in extremely rugged conditions and would be discouraged both from bringing a child there and from leaving a child at home.” (Woman, age 29). Similarly, as one thirty-eight-year-old childfree woman indicated, “...It's giving me the freedom to make bold career moves, take 6 months to a year off work to go travel abroad or to just work part time due to my overhead being quite manageable.” another voluntarily childless respondent elaborated:

In 1 year I went from a low paying employee to an executive because of my dedication, hard work, and sheer luck. Kept my schedule open and now I travel the world, opening new restaurants, speaking on stage, and can work from anywhere in the world. (Man, age 25)

The last theme that emerged among the participants regarding the positive benefits of childlessness was an appreciation for – or greater access to – leisure time outside of their working hours, which would otherwise be spent taking care of children. This includes feeling less stressed, more rested, and so forth. Some participants indicated that “not having children to worry about helps keep the stress at [a manageable range] and has allowed me to mentally focus on work more thoroughly” (Temporarily Childless Woman, age 36), while others simply appreciated being able to have fun, party, and spend time with friends.

On the other hand, both groups also noted multiple negative aspects of not having children at this time. Interestingly however, for both the temporarily childless and voluntarily childless, the total number of responses addressing all of the negative impacts of childlessness at work is a smaller proportion of the responses than the single most frequently cited category of perceived benefits of non-parenthood. First, participants in each group indicated that childlessness impacts their credibility or relatability in the workplace. Oftentimes this relates to their inability to relate to peers or coworkers, such as one temporarily childless participant’s report that “... I... hear a number of comments about how I ‘don’t understand’ because I don’t have kids or how I have ‘no idea’ what it’s like to be a parent” (Woman, age 26). However other responses also addressed how being childless impacts credibility related to the nature of their position or career field:

“I’ve been told as a childcare worker, that because I do not have children of my own that I ‘do not understand’ certain aspects of my work, despite having years of experience with the job” (Temporarily Childless Man, age 26).

Childfree participants also addressed these difficulties relating to coworkers, noting that they are “not so great at ‘water cooler’ chats” (Non-binary, age 25) or that they feel “rather excluded from some socializing, because people are always talking about their kids or organizing outside of work events that cater to kids and families” (Woman, age 39). Additionally, these respondents also experience difficulties proving their credibility in their line of work, particularly when working in child care related professions. As one twenty-nine-year-old woman explains, “I work with children and adolescents so parents struggle to understand why I love my work but don't have children. They have never been outright rude but I think some hesitance exists there.”

Additionally, temporarily childless participants indicated having disproportionately greater time obligations or expectations within the workplace as a result of not having children. These participants feel more pressured to work longer hours, get stuck working on major holidays, or as one twenty-seven-year-old man explains, “I have less excuses to take off of work, AKA I get to pick up the slack of those with children.” Similarly, coworkers that are parents are also perceived as “able to leave early or take flexible time off, and have informal first priority for setting their shift schedules” (Woman, age 25) among the childfree participants. In response to these disproportionate demands, one twenty-five-year-old childfree man expressed, “my free time is not less important than theirs because I don’t have kids” (Man, age 25), while another indicated frustration with not being able to access paternity leave.

Participants in both groups also indicated that they were denied promotions, benefits, or positions which they attribute to their childlessness. For instance, among the temporarily childless, one twenty-eight-year-old man believed that coworkers with families get promoted faster, and one twenty-five-year-old woman noted that “just being of childbearing age makes me borderline unhireable.” Additionally, a small proportion of temporarily childless participants felt as though they are perceived as younger than they are, simply because they do not have children, “despite a lack of real age differences in several cases” (Woman, age 33).

Childfree participants also felt as though co-workers perceive them as younger or less mature than they are as co-workers “have a hard time believing someone in their mid-thirties would not have children” (Man, age 34). Childfree participants also addressed the belief that childlessness is a liability in the workplace, particularly as it relates to being more vulnerable for layoffs, being denied promotions, and so forth. As one twenty-nine-year-old man indicated, “in a previous job, childfree individuals and those with grown children were selected for layoffs first.” Much like the temporarily childless women, childfree women also appear to feel a burden of a perceived risk of becoming pregnant in the workplace as a liability to their hireability or ability to advance. Additionally, a thirty-five-year-old woman explained, “...I feel that employers generally regard women in my age group as a liability, believing that they will either take time off for existing children or want to take maternity leave at some point in the future...”

Lastly, some responses were unique to a small proportion of temporarily childless participants, including the impact that the stress and anxiety of not being a parent, or their personal preference to be a parent, has on their perceptions or experiences in the

workplace. These responses view children as a motivating factor to either leave work if they're currently unhappy in their career, to work harder to support a family, or to force the 'detachment' from work in off hours due to having a family at home. One respondent also noted that her work suffers from the anxiety she feels about not being pregnant yet.

Some participants that want or plan to have children also framed their responses of the drawbacks of childlessness in relation to the perceived benefits to being a parent that they believe would increase their overall well-being or their perceived ability or preference to make accommodations or adjustments when the time comes. Some respondents noted that their career fields are accommodating to parents, or that not having children has resulted in less satisfying material pursuits for happiness. As one twenty-nine-year-old woman indicated, "[being childless] has made me depressed on some days. It has made me jump from job to job looking for higher income." Another noted that she intends to be a stay at home mom/wife when the time comes, "so the positive effect [of being childless] is minimal to me" (Woman, age 27). Additionally, for one participant who plans to be a provider, the prospect of becoming a parent has changed his perspective on work altogether.

I think once we decided to have kids, my timescales changed. I wasn't thinking of the next year or two, but twenty. Since we started trying, I've been significantly less irritable and stressed. I think it was all based on unreasonable pressure I placed upon myself to achieve and rise quickly. Things have slowed down and I have relaxed considerably. (Man, age 31)

In short, participants' responses in the open-ended questions indicate a number of ways one's current status of non-parent can lead to certain similar social experiences, regardless of their personal preference for the future, while also showing a number of



ways these encounters are experienced or perceived differently, based on this preference. For instance, generally speaking, both groups indicated that they had experienced pressures to have children from their family and friends. Both groups also indicated shared positive and negative consequences at work based on their status as a non-parent.

However, while these experiences and pressures are similar given the participants' shared status as non-parents, the groups typically articulated or rationalized their responses consistent with the distinct habitus differences discussed in chapter five. For instance, temporarily childless participants were more likely to report feeling pressured to have kids before they were ready or able to – either due to financial, lifestyle, or fertility based circumstances – while the voluntarily childless respondents were more likely to feel pressured to “change their minds.” Additionally, while temporarily childless respondents may see themselves as excluded from friends or co-workers that are parents, but were more likely to see themselves as fitting in 'some day,' while the voluntarily childless participants articulated this as a more permanent experience that they need to cope with or modify their social arenas to avoid.

Additionally, despite both groups experiencing contradicting pressures or encouragement, the participants' responses tended to revert back to their initial preference regardless of the opposing pressures to have or not to have children. This is evidenced by the participants whose responses indicated a sense of ambivalence about their decision, while ultimately reverting back to a perspective of either "I can't think my way out of wanting them, as much as that would simplify everything" or "every story I hear... strengthens my decision." These substantial differences are also evident in the

intimate relationships and health care examples where voluntarily childless were more likely to experience unresolvable conflict in relationships resulting from ideological differences regarding childbearing, as well as difficulties accessing medical care of choice based on pronatalist influences in the healthcare industry which are inconsistent with their personal preferences.

## CHAPTER 7: SUMMARIES/DISCUSSION

### The “Childfree” Habitus

The first research question of the current study sought out to identify whether there was a distinct shared “childfree” habitus among voluntarily childless adults based on demographics, childbearing motivations, and personality traits. An additional aim of this research question was to identify the extent that characteristics of voluntarily childless adults match existing profiles in current literature. The current study is relatively unique in that I offer a comparison of two groups of childless adults based on their preferences for childbearing in the future. While some of the respondents in the temporarily childless group may also be considered involuntarily childless as they are currently or planning to undergo fertility treatments and/or adoption in order to become a parent (Letherby 2002), others within this group are making a rational choice to delay parenthood to pursue other goals or responsibilities (Livingston 2015b; Newport and Wilke 2013). Many comparisons today identify patterns among the voluntarily childless as they relate to people who are already parents (e.g. Callan 1983; Somers 1993; Umberson et al. 2010), however research remains relatively limited in identifying the relevance of the voluntary – involuntary distinction (McQuillan et al. 2012) in terms of experiences and characteristics. Thus the first aim of this study is to identify potential nuances between the groups of currently childless adults.

Generally speaking, existing profiles of those delaying or forgoing childbearing note that this trend is more common among middle and upper class men and women, as structural barriers and ideological preferences tend to lead working class or poor into parenthood early in life (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Edin and Nelson 2013). Thus, it was not

surprising that the average income for both groups meet or exceed the median household income in the US (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2015). The temporarily and voluntarily childless were also similar in terms of average hours worked per week, the proportion currently enrolled in school, and their average age (29 and 30, respectively). Existing profiles of voluntarily childless adults tend to argue that older women are more likely to state that they intend to remain childless (Houseknecht 1979; Kelly 2009; Rovi 1994), however the similarities among this group may relate more to the limited age range of participants, as those younger than 25 and older than 40 were excluded from the sample and variations may exist outside of the current range of interest.

While existing literature suggests that voluntarily childless have higher incomes and education attainment when compared to parents (Livingston 2015a; Park 2005; Rovi 1994), in the current sample the average income was approximately \$10,000 higher among the temporarily childless, compared to the childfree. Similarly, a greater proportion of the temporarily childless respondents received advanced degrees, compared to the voluntarily childless. However this may be more likely to correspond with delaying childbearing to achieve education goals, as adults with lower educational attainment are more likely to become parents before the age of 25 (Livingston 2015b), thus excluding them from participation in the current study. Consistent with existing research, however, is the importance of marriage (Hayford 2013). Respondents indicating that they want to have children in the future were almost twice as likely to be married compared to those that do not want children. Similarly, voluntarily childless respondents were more than twice as likely to be single (never married) compared to those intending to have children, indicating the potential for preferences to change based on future partnerships (Mosher

and Bachrach 1982). However, the childfree respondents were also more likely than their counterparts to be in unmarried, cohabitating relationships and non-cohabitating long term relationships. Overall, there remained more diversity among the relationship status in this group, which may be impacting childbearing preferences or involve some other mediating variable that contributes to both the changing demographics of marital status as well as changing trends in childbearing preferences.

Similarly, voluntarily childless adults were more likely than the temporarily childless to identify as a non-binary gender as well as a non-binary or non-heterosexual orientation, indicating the importance of exploring the interplay between gender/sexuality and childbearing preferences in the future. The majority of participants in both groups in the current sample were white, remaining consistent with existing profiles of voluntarily childless adults (Abma and Martinez 2006; Rovi 1994), while also indicating little variation among non-parents based on childbearing preferences. This also results in the sample providing limited ability to address the prevalence and experiences of childlessness among people of color (Kelly 2009), although existing research suggests that people of color may be less likely to postpone or forgo childbearing and may have more opportunities and intentions to have children early in life (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004; Dye 2010), excluding many from the current sample. Additionally, it is important to note that the current sample is not nationally representative of the US population, particularly in terms of religious preferences. Atheists were vastly overrepresented in the current sample among both groups, but particularly the voluntarily childless. While Atheists account for approximately 4-5% of the national population (Central Intelligence Agency n.d.), Atheists accounted for approximately 50% of the voluntarily childless in the current

sample. There is likely to be an interplay between other demographics including age, education attainment, and income, as well as preferences to delay or forego childbearing contributing to the disproportionate representation of non-religious or Atheist participants in the current sample. For instance, Pew Research Center (2015b) recently identified broad patterns of changing religious preferences, including a younger median age of non-religious or Atheist adults, a disproportionate representation of white adults identifying as Atheist, Agnostic, or unaffiliated, high levels of education and greater income, and smaller family sizes including fewer children. Additionally, this disproportionate representation may be a result of a web based sample selection (Pew Research Center 2015a) or the specific forums selected for recruitment. While there is limited research identifying the religious preferences of Reddit users, there may be an interaction between the active effort of delaying or forgoing childbearing among non-parents and reduced rates of religiosity (Hayford and Morgan 2008; McQuillan et al. 2008; Mosher and Bachrach 1982). Similarly, existing research is limited in the exploration of religious identification and the average age of becoming a parent, thus it is possible that more devout or religious leaning individuals may already have children (Frejka and Westoff 2008), thus excluding them from the current sample. The link between religiosity and childbearing preferences among non-parents should be explored in greater detail among a more representative sample in future research.

The similarities among the non-parents in the current sample as well as several characteristics in both groups matching existing profiles of voluntarily childless adults leads to additional questions about whether there is a distinct shared habitus among childfree or voluntarily childless adults. Previous studies frequently discuss reasons or

motivations for childlessness as an explanation for this preference or identity. The current study does not directly address the vast range of explanations available, including broad societal valuation of children over time (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004; Mintz 2009) or the intergenerational transmission of childbearing values (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004; Christoffersen and Lausten 2009; Umberson 1992). Nor does it directly measure whether one's childfreedom is a result of early articulation (Houseknecht 1987), postponement for careers (Ireland 1993) or ambivalence about finding a partner (Mosher and Bachrach 1982). However, the emphasis on the motivations for childfreedom in the current study, based on Scott's (2009) Childless By Choice project provide an introduction into the differences between temporarily and voluntarily childless. Bivariate analyses comparing the two groups in relation to various childlessness and pronatalist motivations identified significant differences in each of the measures provided, with the voluntarily childless respondents indicating greater agreement with motivations such as "I do not want to take on the responsibility of raising a child" and "the costs outweigh the benefits of having a child, financially and otherwise." On the other hand, the adults that indicate wanting to have children in the future report greater agreement with statements such as "I believe I have a maternal/paternal instinct" and "I want to pass my genes/family name to the next generation."

While the results of the bivariate analyses indicate that there are significantly distinct differences between groups consistent with childbearing motivations regarding the costs and benefits of childrearing, this story appears to be more complex when considering parental intendedness and viewing childbearing as an active choice. For instance, temporarily childless respondents reported moderate agreement with the

statements “I have more to accomplish/experience in life that would be difficult to do if I were a parent” and “I want to focus my time and energy on my own interests, needs, or goals.” Similarly, the most common open ended response about additional motivations for (not) having children cited things like finishing schooling, becoming more financially stable, traveling with a partner, and so on, indicating that this group is much more likely to be “planners” (Dye 2010; Rovi 1994) rather than have a “whatever happens, happens” mentality, consistent with research suggesting the interplay between economic and social advantages and parental intendedness (Edin and Kefalas 2005; McQuillan et al. 2011; Shreffler et al. 2015). This leads to further questions regarding the interplay between structural and cultural factors (including the culture of independence – valued greatly by both groups) or social class factors that may make these groups distinct from the general population, in relation to childbearing motivations and preferences.

The open ended responses provided by both groups also support existing research in terms of understanding why some people delay or forgo childbearing. For instance, many of the respondents in the sample of adults that want to have children noted challenges with fertility (Cain 2001; Letherby 2002), finding a suitable partner or waiting on marriage (Hayford 2013; Mosher and Bachrach 1982), or social pressures including partner’s or family preferences (Cain 2001; McQuillan et al. 2011). On the other hand, the voluntarily childless group cited motivations consistent with existing research supporting the childfree life, including overpopulation (Cain 2001; Scott 2009), leisure and quality of relationship with other adults (Gillespie 2003; McQuillan et al. 2008; Scott 2009), and a rational consideration of the pros and cons of parenting (Morgan and King 2001; Scott 2009) which the costs, for them, outweigh the rewards. Also important of note are the



responses related to natural maternal/paternal instinct or a love for children compared to a simple disinterest in children or childbearing between groups in the current study. These responses highlight an important aspect of the childbearing habitus as many respondents that want children cite reasons related to personal fulfillment, the joy of parenting (Senior 2014), or a need that feels difficult to explain. On the other hand, the voluntarily childless respondents often cited a general disinterest in having children, or a firm, unexplained perspective. This finding supports arguments that childfree lifestyles should be viewed as just another choice (Xu 2013) rather than an outcome of some specific factors, as for many of these people having children is something that just has “literally no appeal” (Woman, age 27).

Additionally, the current study also responded to Scott’s (2009) call to explore a personality component of the motivations to remain childless. Bivariate analyses identified significant differences between each of the personality traits selected for this analysis. However, while this indicates a number of ways in which the childfree may have a distinct habitus from those with more pronatalist leanings, several of the statistical differences were not substantial differences, highlighting ways in which the sample of postponers may be similar to our existing profiles of the voluntarily childless. For instance, Scott (2009: 73) noted that several of her participants noted being introverted, needing time to themselves, and being a “planner,” supporting the idea that “certain personality types are predisposed to choose a life without children...” However, the findings of the current study have thus far indicated that this sample of temporarily childless adults includes more “planners” in terms of their childbearing intendedness. As such, the temporarily childless respondents in the current study actually reported greater agreement with the statement

“I consider myself a ‘planner’” than those that are voluntarily childless. However, the temporarily childless were slightly more likely to consider themselves outgoing, and slightly less likely to need time alone to “recharge,” indicating slightly less introvertedness than the childfree respondents.

Additionally, researchers are increasingly acknowledging a concern of guilt or regret for choosing a childfree lifestyle. As Scott (2009: 70) noted, “we risk regret every time we make a decision or fail to act.” Thus the current study included measures of future regret for both becoming a parent and forgoing parenthood. While the risk of regret is commonly addressed in discourses about childlessness, regret among those choosing to be childfree appears to be limited to date (Cain 2001; Scott 2009). Similarly, within this sample, childfree respondents were more likely to fear a regret of becoming a parent, indicating that they are more concerned with the costs of childbearing that cannot be “undone” once a person becomes a parent. On the other hand, the respondents that want to have children (but may be struggling with fertility or concerned about being stable enough to have children during their reproductive years), were much more likely to express concerns of regret should they not have any children.

In short, bivariate analyses of childbearing motivations and personality traits indicate that there are significant differences in the deeply rooted habitus of respondents based on their childbearing preferences. However, while several differences did emerge, this study also highlights several similarities between groups, indicating that while childbearing preferences may differ, experiences of childlessness may be of more interest to highlight differences between these two groups. It is likely that the parallels that have emerged to this point highlight the similarities among 25-40 year olds that are making

active choices to plan or postpone childbearing and those that are making active choices to forgo childbearing in relation to the active decision making process and class based advantages. Thus it is important to consider similarities and differences in access to capital as well as the differences and similarities in how the social world is experienced in relation to this preference/identity.

### Childbearing Preferences and Capital

#### *Bivariate Analyses*

The purpose of the second research question was to identify how access to different forms of capital, including social, cultural, economic, and symbolic, interacts with childbearing preferences. While it is beyond the scope of the current analysis to measure the complex interplay and/or cause/effect relationship between capital and childbearing habitus, the bivariate and multivariate analyses conducted serve as a starting point to identify distinct patterns between groups. First, the bivariate analyses comparing temporary and voluntary childless groups in relation to measures of economic capital indicate significant differences in economic difficulties and access to health care. Voluntarily childless respondents reported greater economic hardship in the last 12 months and were less likely to have private employer-based health coverage, and twice as likely to have no health insurance coverage. However, with the exception of major differences between coverage, there were few substantial differences between groups as both groups, on average, disagreed with statements of economic hardship. Similarly, as previously stated, the temporarily childless respondents reported an average income approximately \$10,000 higher than the childfree respondents, although the average

income of both groups remain considered middle class (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2015).

Delaying and forgoing childbearing are often linked to economic advantage, compared to those that become parents earlier in life, with explanations ranging from prioritizing professional or economic pursuits (Xu 2013) to the demands of more prestigious professions being incompatible with childrearing (Keizer, Dykstra, and Jansen 2008). However, few studies have explored the economic differences among childless adults based on childbearing preferences. Mosher and Bachrach (1982: 539) identified several socioeconomic similarities among voluntarily and temporarily childless adults, yet ultimately identified that the voluntarily childless “consistently had the highest levels of educational attainment, earnings, and occupational status of all the groups examined.” On the other hand, Christoffersen and Lausten (2009) found support for the link between poverty and lifetime childlessness as well as the link between socioeconomic advantages and delayed first time childbearing. Shreffler et al. (2015) also identified a link between greater economic advantage and greater intendedness of pregnancies.

Thus while both groups in the current sample may be more economically advantaged on average compared to parents of a similar age, the findings of the current analysis support the argument that the relationship between economic capital and childbearing preferences is more complex. Economic factors alone do not provide a coherent enough distinction among childless adults based on the preference to have children in the future, despite the statistical significance of these findings. Instead, much like Bourdieu’s call for a deeper understanding of capital beyond economic measures (Bourdieu 1990), the decision to remain childless among individuals is not likely to be a

strictly economic evaluation of the costs of raising a child (McQuillan, Grier, Scheffler, and Tichenor 2008). Future research using these measures may identify in greater detail how these factors play a role in the childbearing preferences as there appears to be some overlap and inconsistencies in our understanding of the economic situations of childless adults. For instance, are some adults that are motivated against childbearing doing so because they are in a fragile economic position? Does the lack of health care coverage impact their perceived ability to care for a child? How does type of health care coverage impact the means used to try not to have children?

The second group of bivariate analyses target measures of social capital, further expanding the understanding of capital beyond the economic realm. When it comes to childbearing, social support networks are likely to be an important factor in a would-be parent's ability to balance the demands of childrearing and other responsibilities. Similarly, leisure time and relationships with other adults are often cited as corresponding with the decision (not) to have children – ranging from the prioritization of hobbies and leisure (Gillespie 2003) to the desire to give their own parents grandchildren or feel less excluded from friends with children (Gillespie 2003; McQuillan, Greil, Shreffler, and Bedrous 2014). Findings indicate statistically greater levels of social support among those that want or intend to have children in the future. These respondents were more likely to agree that their family provides emotional help and support, and that they have people they can count on as support for major life decisions or during difficult times, compared to the childfree respondents. The temporarily childless were also less likely to agree that there is no one they can share their most private worries and fears with or that they have

little in common with their friends that have children. Voluntarily childless respondents also report greater satisfaction with the amount of leisure time they have.

However, while the results of the bivariate social capital analyses support the argument that adherence to pronatalist ideologies corresponds with social support, or the claims that childfree adults value and prioritize leisure and hobbies, many of these significant differences were not substantially distinct. For instance, although temporarily childless adults in the current sample adults report greater agreement that there are people they can count on during difficult times and/or major life decisions, both groups agreed with these statements on average. There was also no significant difference between groups regarding how often they spend time with friends or how many of their friends have children. Additionally, while satisfaction with leisure time is an important measure as it relates to common perspectives about voluntary childlessness, there was little substantial difference between groups, both of which indicated a moderate or neutral position on average. Similarly, future research should explore in more detail why these adults are or are not satisfied with their leisure time, as well as what leisure means to them, and how a child contributes to or impedes on this satisfaction. A measure of satisfaction with leisure time raises more questions in relation to childbearing preferences, particularly as it relates to the voluntarily childless and the postponers/planners sampled here. For instance, does the degree of satisfaction with leisure time relate to income? Type of employment and/or multiple responsibilities? Are those that want children but are unhappy with the amount of leisure time delaying childbearing in order to get on a schedule more suitable for the time requirements of childrearing? Do childfree respondents report greater satisfaction with leisure time because they are more

established in their routine, identifying that childbearing is not a future goal? Each of these questions and more are of interest to future studies exploring the relationship between social capital and childbearing preferences.

The third bivariate analyses in the present study included two types of cultural capital, gender ideologies and pronatalism. Consistent with existing literature, voluntarily childless respondents were more likely to agree with more egalitarian statements, while the temporarily childless were more likely to report higher average scores associated with traditional ideologies. However, once again there were limited substantial differences between groups as both groups favored more egalitarian view points overall. The most substantial difference between groups was in response to the statement “a mother should prioritize her children above all else” with the temporarily childless reporting close to moderate agreement with this statement while the voluntarily childless were more likely to disagree. This finding supports the culture of “intensive mothering” (Hays 1994) among those that want to have children in the future, but raises additional questions about why this relationship exists. Have the external cultural pressures influenced those with a pro-childbearing habitus that to be a good mother a woman must prioritize their children above all else? Has disagreement with this ideology, but a perceived lack of alternate options, influenced the decision to remain childless among the childfree?

The second group of questions measuring pronatalist ideologies further contributes to the different cultural perspectives between groups. This section included four questions about the importance of parenthood from the National Survey of Fertility Barriers. There were substantially significant differences between groups for each of these statements indicating support for the distinct differences between groups

surrounding pronatalist ideologies. It is increasingly clear that while there are statistical differences between groups regarding differential access to forms of capital, the greatest, and seemingly most obvious, difference between the temporarily childless and the voluntarily childless relates to the degree of support for pronatalism.

This is also evident given there were no significant differences between groups regarding any of the measures of symbolic capital. The measures of symbolic capital used in the present study intended to address claims that pronatalist leanings relate to the belief that children are a chief source of identity and success (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Livingston and Parker 2011; Senior 2014). This analysis included measures of perceived social value in order to identify whether those intending to become parents were less likely to believe they contribute to society as a non-parent. However, while identity making through childbearing is particularly common among working class and poor parents and parents-to-be (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Livingston and Parker 2011; Sassler and Miller 2014), it is possible that the lack of significant differences in the current sample relate to class based differences among parents-to-be, particularly as many of the temporarily childless adults in the current sample are considered postponers or planners. As many of the open ended motivational responses indicate, childbearing may be deeply connected to personal fulfillment and desire, the respondents in the current sample did not experience a shortage of life purpose or successes outside of their desire to become a parent. Income, educational attainment, marital status, and other social identities may contribute to the perspective of one respondent discussed above that having children is a separate enjoyable path in life, but not the only way to feel fulfilled or valued in society.



### *Multivariate Model*

A multivariate nested logistic regression was conducted to identify the impact of each measure independently when all forms of capital were considered. Findings indicate several variations in significant factors contributing to a preference to remain childfree. The significant findings in the first model were supported by existing literature as increased age, non-heterosexual identities, and Atheism each corresponded with greater likelihood of being voluntarily childless (Abma and Martinez 2006; Somers 1993), and being married decreased the odds of this identity (Hayford 2013). However, conflicting with existing literature that childfree adults have higher educational attainment (Abma and Martinez 2006; Somers 1993), this factor was negatively associated with childfreedom. However, of these demographic factors, marital status was the only remaining significant contributor in the final model. On the other hand, Hispanic/Latino and bi- or multi-racial respondents were significantly more likely to identify as voluntarily childless in models four and five. While existing literature notes that little is known about the true prevalence of voluntary childlessness among non-white men and women and that racial and ethnic gaps are narrowing, this finding conflicts with the argument that Hispanics are much less likely to be childless at the end of their reproductive years (Livingston 2015a). However the significance of race/ethnicity in the current model should be taken lightly at this time as the current sample is overwhelmingly white, making comparisons between racial/ethnic categories significantly imbalanced. Despite this, the increased likelihood of Hispanics and bi- and multi-racial respondents identifying as childfree in these models provides justification for future research to explore the differences between a preference

to remain childfree and the potential cultural and social pressures and barriers that may make adhering to this preference more difficult in practice.

In the second model of the nested regression, greater agreement with the statement “I do not have much in common with friends that have children” was the strongest independent social capital based predictor of preferring to remain childfree. It is more likely that this correlation would result from a childfree identity rather than contributing to this preference, indicating once again that the current model only intends to provide preliminary speculations regarding the relationship between childbearing preferences and types of capital. Also of interest in this model were the impact of increased satisfaction with leisure time and decreased time spent with friends corresponding with a childfree identity. However, in the final model, less time spent with friends was the only remaining measure of social capital to independently predict voluntary childlessness. Future research should continue to explore the importance of relationships with other adults as contributing to the desire to remain childless, as well as whether less time spent with friends is a result of having fewer friends that are not occupied with children of their own, or if workplace demands contribute to both the lack of time spent being social as well as a preference to forgo childbearing.

When economic factors were introduced into the nested model, increased satisfaction with spending money and having public or other non-employer based health care coverage also increased the odds of being voluntarily childless. As discussed above, the type of health coverage is important for future research to explore in more detail as this may shed light on perceptions of limited care resources available to make childbearing more desirable. However, many of the respondents reporting some other

form of health insurance often cited that they were still covered under their parent's plan or a university based coverage, indicating that this preference may be influenced by the lengthening road to adulthood which may leave certain respondents in a period of semi-autonomy in which they perceive themselves as unable to consider the possibility of raising a child of their own in the future (Arnett 2000; Sassler and Miller 2014; Skolnick and Skolnick 2009; Xu 2013). This variable remained significant in the final model, while satisfaction with spending money did not.

In models four and five, measures of cultural capital associated with gender ideologies and pronatalism once again appeared to be the greatest predictors of childbearing habitus, while measures of symbolic capital or social value were not significant. These findings support research suggesting that voluntarily childless adults are more egalitarian and less traditional in gender relations as well as pronatalist assumptions. However, despite the strong association between measures of pronatalism and childbearing habitus, the current model cannot offer an answer to the question of whether the increased importance of parenthood causes more pronatalist fertility intentions or whether decreased intentions results in a reassessment of the cultural attitudes regarding importance of parenthood (McQuillan et al. 2008).

In short, the bivariate and multivariate analyses described above contribute to existing literature on voluntary (and temporary) childlessness as it explores common relationships between childbearing preference and various explanatory factors while reframing this discussion in relation to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital. This discussion of the relationship between childbearing habitus and capital is useful to provide preliminary support for the need for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay

between structural, interpersonal, and individual factors relating to childbearing preferences. The subtle and substantial differences identified raised additional questions about the ways in which childbearing preferences can both be an outcome as well as a contributing factor to access to different types of capital. The unanswered questions and suggestions for future research also provide a glimpse at the need to explore this relationship in even greater detail to identify potential mediating variables or the ways in which becoming childfree is an ongoing process that may be modified or confirmed based on the capital that arises from or influences this decision.

The current study provided one example of the interaction between multiple measures, exploring how gender may result in “difference in differences” (Mitchell and Chen 2005). The significant difference in the increased time spent with friends having opposite effects on the probability of identifying as voluntarily childless for men and women highlights the importance to consider gendered socialization. This raises questions regarding whether men are socialized by friends to be more independent while women are being socialized to become mothers as well as questions related to the perceived impact that children may have on leisure time. Similarly, the significant difference between income on men and women’s probability of being childfree should be explored in greater detail. Possible explanations may relate to differences in prioritization of finances for childrearing and leisure or the demands of higher paying jobs being incompatible with childrearing, with workplaces disproportionately placing burdens on men to prioritize work above all else. In sum, habitus and capital appear to interact with each other in numerous ways in various social arenas and are simultaneously shaped by

and continuously shaping the “rules of the game” in each of these fields. The next section further explores examples of these interactions.

### Childbearing Preferences in Social Fields

In an effort to shift the academic conversation from ‘why’ individuals remain childless toward an understanding of how childbearing preferences impact members’ lives in practice, the present study utilized a Bourdieuan perspective to consider the interplay of non-parents experiences in various fields, based on their childbearing habitus, or preference to have (or not to have) children in the future. Responses to the five open-ended questions described above highlight a number of ways in which one’s current status as a non-parent can result in a number of similar experiences when interacting in various social arenas, as well as a number of differences in how these encounters are experienced or perceived, based on differences in the intended permanence of this status. For instance, even when experiences are similar (i.e. feeling excluded from co-workers or friends that are parents), the perceptions of this experience may vary as the temporarily childless may see themselves as fitting in ‘someday’ while the voluntarily childless may be more frustrated by the encounter as this distinction is permanent. Additionally, it can be argued that one’s childbearing preference or identity simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the various fields in which these individuals interact. While a more complex model measuring this interplay in more detail is beyond the scope of the current project, these preliminary findings intend to first address how these interactions may be different between the temporarily and voluntarily childless in order to contribute to a more detailed understanding.

One of the major findings from the open-ended exploration into interactions in various *fields* is the identification of the contradictory messages that both groups receive, often from similar groups. For instance, many of the participants indicated that their family was a major source of pressure or encouragement to have children. However, many respondents also cited that their families were a major source of pressure not to have children – or to delay having children to pursue other goals. Similarly, many of the respondents noted that their close friends and acquaintances consistently urge them to have children (with the exception of likeminded companions among the voluntarily childfree). Family and friends often express to these non-parents that they want their children to be able to play together or grow up together, and that they should ‘join the [parent] club.’ On the other hand, many of the participants in the present study also noted discouragement to have children coming from friends and family members that are parents themselves. Some respondents noted that friends with children overtly say things like “don’t have kids” or “don’t do it yourself,” particularly when describing a hardship that their children have caused for them.

One notable difference that emerged between the temporarily childless and the childfree participants was the perception of these similar contradictory pressures. For instance, both groups indicated being pressured to have children by people close to them as well as strangers and structural and societal forces. However, the temporarily childless typically felt this pressure in terms of the *timing* of having children. Since they knew they wanted to have children in the future, they felt more pressure to do it either sooner than they were ready, or sooner than they were able (particularly among those struggling to

conceive or those that are not financially stable). On the other hand, those identifying as voluntarily childless received these messages as pressure to “change their minds.”

Additionally, the participants in the current sample received contradictory messages about *when* to have children. Many of the participants were encouraged to wait to have kids until they achieved stability in their career or completed their education, or until they experienced life as a young adult, yet the prolonging of school and the time it takes to become secure in one’s career, for instance, oftentimes placed these participants in a position where those that wanted to have children were finding it difficult to conceive, or they began feeling pressure from parents or grandparents that wanted to have a (great) grandchild. Many of these participants also reported they were the last of their friends that do not have children, although this experience was often limited to the temporarily childless, as childfree participants were more likely to surround themselves with likeminded individuals.

Contradicting messages often emerged in the workplace as well. Many of the participants expressed that their childlessness has afforded them the ability to dedicate more of themselves to their careers, including working longer hours, committing to more shifts, and so forth. On the other hand, participants also frequently indicated that their status as a non-parent demands greater investment and “picking up the slack” of parents, particularly by working longer hours and more frequent shifts. Another benefit of being childless or childfree in the workplace related to their ability to work in certain career fields or advance their schooling resulting from having fewer dependencies at home. On the other hand, participants were also more likely to feel as though parents were prioritized for promotions and being childless caused a greater susceptibility to be selected for

layoffs. Similarly, some women noted a particular risk that they experienced by simply being of childbearing age, regardless of their intention to have children or not. Women were particularly aware of the competing ideologies of the workplace and motherhood (Budig et al. 2012; Hays 1996) that disproportionately impact mothers. For some of the temporarily childless participants, this was a significant contributor to their preference to delay having children, while those that were childfree identified it as a contributor to their preference to forgo childbearing all together. Future research using this dataset and others should continue to explore these contradicting messages to identify to what extent the same individuals are getting mixed messages from the same people or groups and how these contradicting messages are perceived among individuals actively making the decision to have or not to have children in the future.

Additionally, while the responses in the current sample support the belief that the workplace is often considered a “greedy institution” (Sullivan 2014), there is also evidence that the fields of work and school have not escaped pronatalist ideologies. In fact, in many cases it seems as though the participants’ contradictory experiences in the workplace can assist in identifying the interplay between various ideologies, as well as how individuals’ habitus can shape and be shaped by various fields. In this case it appears that, *structurally*, childlessness serves the workplace as a ‘greedy institution’ in that non-parents can be viewed as committed, ideal workers, contributing to the constant demands of the workforce. However, *interpersonally*, childfree and childless members are viewed as deviant to pronatalist ideologies that workers carry in to this field, thus making it difficult for childless members to interact, relate, and prove their credibility among their colleagues, clients, and superiors. Pronatalist pressures were also evident in intimate



relationships and health care settings. Childfree participants indicated greater rates of terminating or avoiding relationships due to different opinions about childbearing. They were also disproportionately likely to be denied access to contraceptive methods, as the assumption that they would change their mind or should want to have children permeates the structures that serve as gatekeepers to these contraceptives.

These discussions indicate a number of ways in which childbearing identities can be both distinct yet overlapping. In the current study, participants were categorized into either the voluntarily childless or the temporarily childless category based on their responses to overt questions regarding their preference for having children in the future. From these groups, analyses were conducted to identify significant differences in commonly cited explanations for childbearing preferences, potential personality distinctions, access to capital, and experiences in various fields. However, what is missing from this analysis is the underlying identities related to childfreedom or childlessness that may provide a more nuanced understanding of this sample.

For instance, while there was a statistically significant difference between groups regarding the personality measure of whether participants consider themselves childfree, approximately 32% of those categorized as temporarily childless agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Similarly, differences within the temporarily childless group emerged related to childbearing ambivalence or the preferred means of becoming a parent, as well as distinctions between the "planners" actively delaying childbearing and those currently trying to conceive or facing with fertility barriers. The number of similarities between the two groups outlined throughout this project, and the limited substantial differences in several of the measures of capital and personality differences, also provide

room for a more nuanced discussion of applying these labels or identities among the participants in this sample. Future analyses using this data set would greatly benefit from additional means of categorization of participants to identify if different results or patterns emerge.

### Policy Implications

Childbearing patterns have consequences for policy at global, national, state, and local levels. In general, pronatalism is present in “virtually every society” (Callan 1983: 179), yet support for parents vary among these nations. International variations in policies to encourage or limit the number of children citizens have are arguably based on a careful balance of that nation’s ‘replacement rate’ (Kimmel 2012). Unlike some of the more pronatalist nations that have taken action to make childbearing more accessible (Austere 2014), the United States is often criticized for its limited efforts and support for parents. These critiques range from disproportionate access to adoption, surrogacy, and fertility treatments (Cain 2001; Hagestad and Call 2007; Johnson-Hanks, Bachrach, Morgan, and Kohler 2011) to the limited and disproportionate access to quality and affordable child care systems (Clawson and Gerstel 2002; Kimmel 2012). Limited support for families in the United States may be an important structural factor contributing to increased rates of voluntary (or semi-voluntary) childlessness as the inability to balance work and family life may lead to forced compromises and choices in which childbearing is left behind (Scott 2009). For instance, findings from the current study support claims in existing literature that women in particular experience wage loss penalties (Budig and England 2001) in the workplace. The respondents in this sample, regardless of their intention to have or forgo childbearing were also aware of the significant lack of resources available for parents –

particularly paid parental leave and access to child care systems or the ability to sustain a family on a single income should one parent decide to stay home to raise the children.

However, despite the fact that some non-parents may be more inclined to adhere to pronatalist expectations if national systems were in place to ease some of the complex burdens placed on parents, findings from the current study and existing literature also argue that some people just do not want to have children. With this in mind, it is important that policy efforts empower parents or would-be parents without engaging in a type of “new pronatalism” (Bulcroft and Teachman 2004) that continues to devalue childlessness as an alternative lifestyle. Opponents of mandatory motherhood (Benard and Correll 2010; Kelly 2009; Kricheli-Katz 2012) express reasons ranging from personal autonomy at the individual or interpersonal level to the global threat of overpopulation (Cain 2001). Understanding voluntary childlessness as simply another choice rather than a deviant lifestyle allows for a more diverse range of opportunities for citizens to contribute to the society in diverse ways. For instance, one respondent in the current study identified the following factors contributing to her preference to remain childfree:

I am a pediatrician specializing in medical genetics, primarily taking care of children with birth defects and genetic disorders affecting growth and development. My husband is a palliative and hospice physician who spends 25% of his time caring for children with special healthcare needs and chronic conditions, often at the end of their life. We both adore children, but our days can be emotionally demanding. We both feel we can be of great good to society by helping children born with physical differences or those who are born typically-developing but then suffer traumatic injuries or illnesses. I also spend a great deal of time volunteering with the adult special-needs population. If we had a child of our own, we wouldn't be able to give back in this way at the level we desire. I also feel that to bring a child into the world, one should be prepared to raise ANY child, and with a 3-5% background rate of birth defects, I don't want to risk quitting my job caring for hundreds of children to raise one of my own. Neither of us have had a strong desire for children, and we are completely content in our relationship, careers,

finances, friendships, and community. We have discussed the potential for "regret," but in my husband's career he sees many adults at the end of their lives who are not in good standing with their children or who are alone. Having a child for the sake of ensuring that someone else will take care of us in our elder years seems selfish. (Woman, age 32)

With this in mind, it is important that policy initiatives avoid favoring pronatalism to the degree that the choice of when or if childbearing will happen for an individual or couple. As such, it is important to increase access to reproductive technologies. Many of the participants in the current study identifying as childfree indicated that they have, at some point, been denied access to their contraceptive method of choice, particularly IUDs and sterilization. While the concern for sterilizing someone prior to having children may be a valid one to initiate a discussion of the risk of regret or a sterilized person changing their mind as they age, it is important not to sacrifice an individual's bodily autonomy for the sake of pronatalist expectations that men and women should want to have children, and should follow through with this preference. Further discussion is needed, within the field of health care for instance, regarding the ethical responsibility placed on health care providers to adhere to the wishes of their patients in comparison to broader cultural expectations (Denbow 2014).

Limited access to contraceptive methods of choice also have significant impacts on the discussion of abortion. While this topic extends beyond the reach of the current analysis, it is important to note that some participants volunteered information about their desire to abort a child that they do not want, if an accident were to happen. Access to quality contraceptive methods are estimated to prevent more than 200,000 potential abortions per year (Planned Parenthood 2014). This may be disproportionately higher among the adamantly childfree, whom are more likely to be unwilling to accept a

“whatever happens, happens” mentality regarding accidental pregnancies. However, future research regarding childfree perspectives and the active processes engaged in to remain childfree should include more questions about attitudes toward abortion and what participants would do if they (or their partner) got pregnant.

Somewhat similar to the topic of contraceptives (temporarily) preventing pregnancies opens the discussion of the policy implications that childbearing preferences has on egg freezing. While there is still a lot to be uncovered about the ethical implications or reliability of egg freezing, the fact that some major institutions are creating arenas where women can delay childbearing to pursue professional goals without risking it getting “too late” to conceive opens up a conversation about the medical advancements that are available to prevent individuals from feeling as though they have to choose one identity over the other (Fox 2014). Many of the responses of the temporarily (or involuntarily) childless participants in the sample indicate a greater need to pursue this conversation in order to identify the appeal of “deferring childbearing... for the women with ambitions beyond motherhood” (Mead 2014, para. 4).

The childfree lifestyle is often depicted as a concern of white, educated, high earning professional women. However, this class based distinction may relate to structural and cultural disadvantages disproportionately experienced by working class and poor populations, establishing childbearing patterns as arguably divided by class lines. For instance, despite legal changes and variations in individual preference, access to contraceptives has not been equally available to all groups. According to the National Institute for Reproductive Health (n.d.), approximately 50% of pregnancies are unintended, with more than half of women in their reproductive years reporting a need for

contraception to prevent unplanned pregnancies in 2006. Barriers including the inability to afford contraceptives as well as refusals by pharmacies, employers, or religions play a substantial role in preventing many women's access to birth control methods (National Institute for Reproductive Health n.d.). Additionally, young women and teens, particularly those that are low income or immigrants are excluded from many public programs that provide access to contraceptives. This may impact rates of childbearing or voluntary childlessness as the intention to remain childless may be difficult to adhere to among those with fewer opportunities to prevent pregnancies.

#### Limitations/Future Research

While this research contributes a preliminary exploration into experiences of childlessness through a Bourdieuan lens, the study presented here is not without its limitations. First, as stated in chapter five, the current sample is not representative of the national population. Oversampling techniques were used to increase the variance among voluntarily childless adults to provide a larger comparative sample than representative studies provide. However, web based sampling techniques using Reddit forums served the purpose of offering a convenient resource with no cost to the researcher to recruit participants, making the current study difficult to generalize to a broader population. However, as stated in chapter four, the purpose of these convenience and purposive sampling methods and analyses were to identify exploratory themes emerging on relation to the shift in conversation toward a Bourdieuan theoretical model.

Similarly, this study is limited in that the comparison group consists mostly of planners. This comparison group is useful when measuring childbearing preferences as a rational choice and cost/benefit analyses but further work should be done to identify

differences among planners and ambivalent or “whatever happens, happens” childless adults. Similarly, respondents experiencing infecundity were not excluded from this analysis, as the purpose was to broadly identify parenting preferences regardless of biological capability. Future research would benefit from dividing these groups based on biological capability to identify distinct patterns that may emerge among those that this current research considers “temporarily” childless, as some of these adults may ultimately be labeled involuntarily childless (Cain 2001; Mosher and Bachrach 1982). While the purpose of the current study was to assess experiences based on *preference* to have children, rather than intention or likelihood that this desire will be achieved, it is important to note that experiences in the social world among the involuntarily childless are likely to be distinct in many ways from those that are intentionally postponing or intentionally trying to have children. Future examinations of this dataset would benefit from a deeper exploration into the differences of the group currently homogenously categorized.

Additionally, since the measures of the importance of parenthood were especially significant in the current model, future research should follow the suggestions of McQuillan et al. (2014), to further explore the process through which parenthood comes to be valued and how this might vary among those facing fertility barriers. While fertility was relatively overlooked in the current sample to emphasize personal preference regardless of biological capability, differences in parenting preferences and the importance of parenthood among those facing biological barriers may provide an indication of the relationship between access to forms of capital and the childrearing decisions made. For instance, those with greater access to economic capital are more likely to have access to fertility treatments and may view adoption as an option, while

others may find it easier to come to terms with a voluntarily childless identity due to the lack of biological capabilities (Cain 2001). The interaction between the preference to have children and fertility barriers may also contribute to varying levels of life satisfaction or social value within a pronatalist society (McQuillan et al. 2011).

Additionally, the qualitative analyses in the current sample are limited as there is no intercoder reliability (Babbie 2013), thus there is a risk for bias in the coding process. However, since the current study only intended to identify emerging themes in an exploratory fashion, this limitation provides room for future research to explore the current dataset using more advanced qualitative coding approaches. For instance, future research should identify how the narratives differ between groups based on their childbearing preference, biological ability to reproduce, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth to identify additional themes in the interplay between *habitus*, capital, and *fields*. Future research should also continue utilizing qualitative methodologies and their corresponding data collection methods to consider the theoretical framework presented here in greater detail.

The current study is also limited in the exploration of experiences of marginalized groups. For instance, while the current sample was not exclusive to heterosexual adults, non-binary and non-heterosexuals only accounted for a small proportion of respondents making further analyses of the unique challenges faced among these groups more difficult. Future research would benefit from continuing to explore variations in the childbearing intentions of LGBT+ populations, particularly as it relates to the changing nature of gay marriage, same sex adoption, surrogacy, and different stigmas experienced based on whether or not the individual (or couple) wants to have children (Cain 2001;



Harris 2005; Mezey 2010). Additionally, the current sample is limited to relatively well off, mostly white respondents, limiting the ability to identify differences among childbearing preferences and identities among non-parents of different class positions and racial and ethnic groups. The lack of diversity in samples of childless adults is common in existing literature (Kelly 2009) and should be explored in greater detail to fill in the many gaps that remain regarding the intersection between race, class, and meanings of parenthood (Clark 2012).

This research may have also benefitted from more questions directly measuring the personal rewards of having children, such as happiness, pride, and fulfillment, as most motivational questions leaned more toward motivations of childfree living (Scott 2009). For instance, there was no measure addressing attitudes related to children as one's chief source of identity (Edin and Kefalas 2005) or the belief that people can't really be happy unless they have children (Livingston and Parker 2011). However, this research intentionally favored measures related to voluntary childlessness and some pronatalist measures were excluded for the purpose of not alienating childfree respondents from completing the study. However, future research should continue to explore comparisons between voluntarily childless adults and temporarily childless adults related to various motivations, personality traits, and lived experiences in relation to this preference.

Similarly, future research would benefit from more in depth questions about respondents' family of origin to identify how this relates to personal childbearing preferences as well as the experiences in social fields, particularly as it relates to social capital. For instance, a large proportion of respondents in both groups cited family gatherings or family members as exerting pressure or encouragement to have children.

Many of the voluntarily childless also stated that their own childhood experiences or “bad parents” deterred them from wanting to have children. Qualitative and quantitative measures of family of origin could aid in identifying additional patterns related to social capital in the family.

Future research should also explore contraceptive use in more detail, particularly in relation to childbearing preferences, access to health care, and contraceptives. In the current sample, approximately five percent of those identifying as voluntarily childless or childfree reported using no method of birth control in the past twelve months. Similarly approximately eight percent of the respondents in the same group report having no health care coverage. It is of significant importance to this area of research to identify pregnancy prevention techniques as well as the plans in place should an accidental pregnancy occur. First, this research may shed light on the differences between those ambivalent about childlessness compared to those more committed to this identity. Secondly, given the current political climate in the United States imposing restrictions on access to abortions (Guttmacher Institute 2016; Planned Parenthood Action Fund 2016) it is important to gain a more complete understanding of the relationship between parenting intentions, sexual activity, and access to preventative measures, as well as potential patterns in answers to the question “what if?”

**APPENDIX A:  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Alyssa Mullins

Date: November 20, 2015

Dear Researcher:

On 11/20/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Life Without Children: An Exploratory Comparison of the Experiences and Motivations of Childless Adults  
Investigator: Alyssa Mullins  
IRB Number: SBE-15-11730  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: n/a

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kanille Chay" followed by a horizontal line.

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX B:  
SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

## Screener Questions

### EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Life Without Children: An Exploratory Comparison of the Experiences and Motivations of Childless Adults

Principal Investigator: Alyssa Mullins, M.A.

Faculty Supervisor: Fernando Rivera, PhD.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- The purpose of this research is to identify patterns in the preferences and every day experiences of men and women that do not currently have children.
- You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, including multiple choice and descriptive questions.
- The survey is expected to take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

**Participants must be between 25 and 40 years of age to take part in this research study, and should not have any children or be pregnant or expecting a child at the time of completion of the survey.**

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints contact Alyssa Mullins, MA, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, University of Central Florida, (407) 823-3744 by email at [alyssamullins@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:alyssamullins@knights.ucf.edu) OR Fernando Rivera, PhD., Faculty Supervisor, Department of Sociology, University of Central Florida, (407) 823-3744 by email at [fernando.rivera@ucf.edu](mailto:fernando.rivera@ucf.edu).

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

Do you reside in the United States?

Yes

No

Are you currently between the ages of 25 and 40 years old?

Yes

No

Do you have any children? This includes biological children, children on the way (i.e. you or your partner are pregnant), step children that you consider to be like your own, or adopted children.

Yes

No

### Personality/Motivations

Please rate the following statements, on a scale of Very like me to Very unlike me, to indicate the degree to which you identify with that statement **on a typical day**.

	Very like me	Like me	Neither like me nor unlike me	Unlike me	Very unlike me
I'd rather do almost anything than spend an evening by myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider myself a "planner"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My actions are frequently influenced by my emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often feel that I need to be alone to "recharge"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consider myself "outgoing"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements **on a**

**typical day:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure/Don't Know
I get the emotional help and support I need from my family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have people I can count on to support me in major life decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have people I can count on to help me during difficult times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that there is no one I can share my most private worries and fears with.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with the amount of leisure time I have	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My daily activities contribute something worthwhile to my community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have something valuable to give to the world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with the amount of spending money I have after my bills are paid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have nothing important to contribute to society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I feel I am valued for my role in society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How often do you spend time with friends?

Very often

Occasionally

Seldom

Never



Approximately how many of your friends have children?

- All of them
- Most of them
- Some of them
- A few of them
- None

Are you covered by private health insurance, by public health insurance such as Medicaid, some other kind of health care plan, or by no health insurance?

- Private Insurance, Individual Plan
- Private Insurance, Employer Plan
- Public Program (i.e. Medicaid, ACA)
- None
- Something else

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure/Don't Know
It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry I may regret it in the future if I DO NOT have any children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that the woman's place is basically in the home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fathers should play a					

more active role in raising children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A mother should prioritize her children above all else	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having children is important to my feeling complete as a woman/man	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have always thought I'd become a parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think my life would be or is more fulfilling with children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important for me to have children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following statements, on a scale of Never to Very Often to indicate your experiences during the last 12 months.

	Never	Not Very Often	Fairly Often	Often	Very Often
I had trouble paying the bills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not have enough money to buy food, clothes, or other things my household needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not have enough money to pay for medical care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Preferences

**Now I am going to ask you some questions about your preference regarding having children...**

Women: As far as you know, is it physically possible for you to have a child?

Men: As far as you know, is it physically possible for you to father a child?

Yes

No

As of now, (if it were possible) do you want to have any children in the future?

Yes

No

I don't know

(If it were possible) do you think you would probably want or probably not want to have any children at some time in the future?

Probably Want

Probably do not want

Completely undecided

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: **I consider myself "childfree"**

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Unsure/I don't know

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: **I worry I may regret becoming a parent.**

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Unsure/I don't know

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:**I**

### consider pets to be family members

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unsure/I don't know

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: **I do not have much in common with my friends that have children**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unsure/I don't know

Please rate the following statements, on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, to indicate the degree to which you identify with that statement **on a typical day**.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure/I don't know
I love my life as it is, and having a child won't enhance it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have more to accomplish/experience in life that would be difficult to do if I were a parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend to have a child when I am more financially stable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The costs outweigh the benefits of having a child, financially and otherwise.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think I would make a good parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My lifestyle/career is incompatible with	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

raising children.

I enjoy being around children.

Please rate the following statements, on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, to indicate the degree to which you identify with that statement **on a typical day**.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure/I don't know
I do not want to take on the responsibility of raising a child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am concerned about bringing a child into the world we live in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to focus my time and energy on my own interests, needs or goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I have a maternal/paternal instinct	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to pass my genes/family name to the next generation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I value freedom and independence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is my job to help continue the human race by having children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer to let nature, the Universe, or God decide if it's time for me to have a child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In the space below, please add any other motivating factors that you believe influence whether or not you will have children in the future:

If you are sexually active, please select the method(s) that you and your partner(s) have used most frequently as birth control in the past 12 months (Check all that apply).

I am sterilized or naturally unable to reproduce

My partner is sterilized or naturally unable to reproduce

Condoms

Birth control pills

Hormonal patch, ring (i.e. NuvaRing), or injection (i.e. Depo Provera)

IUD or Implant

Withdrawal or rhythm method

Other

Not currently using any birth control

## Open Experiences

**The following section will ask you to describe some of your experiences as an adult that currently does not have any children.**

Remember, your responses are voluntary, although your continued participation is greatly appreciated and important to this research.

Are there certain times or places that you feel pressured or encouraged to have children? If so, can you give a few examples?

Are there certain times or places that you feel pressured or encouraged NOT to have children? If so, can you give a few examples?

Have you ever experienced any disagreement with a partner about whether or not to have children? If so, how did/does this impact your relationship(s)?

Have you ever been denied access to health care coverage, procedures, or a contraceptive method because you do not have children? If so, what?

In what ways has not having children at this time impacted your success in the workplace, both positively and negatively?

## Demographics

What is your gender?

Woman

Man

Other

How old are you?

How many pets do you have?

Zero

One

Two

Three or more

Would you consider yourself...

Heterosexual/Straight

Gay/Lesbian

Bisexual

Asexual

Unsure/Don't Know/Something Else

What is your current relationship status?

Single, never married

Unmarried, living with a partner

Separated or Divorced

Married

In a long term/committed relationship

Dating one or more partners

What is your racial/ethnic background? (Check all that apply)

Black or African American

Asian

White (Caucasian)

American Indian or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Hispanic or Latino

Bi- or Multi-racial

Other



What is your approximate total annual income?

Less than \$20,000

20 to under \$40,000

40 to under \$60,000

60 to under \$80,000

80 to under \$100,000

100 to under \$120,000

120 to under \$140,000

140 to under \$160,000

\$160,000 or more

Are you currently enrolled in/attending school?

Yes

No

What is the highest level of education you have completed to date?

8th grade or less

Some high school, no degree

High school degree or GED

Some college, including community college (no degree)

Associate's (Two Year) degree

Bachelor's (Four year) degree

Master's degree (MA, MS, MBA)

Doctorate Degree (PH.D; MD; DDS, etc.)

Would you say you are:

Christian

Catholic

Jewish

Latter Day Saints or Mormon

Muslim

Buddhist or Hindu

Agnostic

Atheist

Spiritual but not religious

Other

On average, how many hours do you work and/or attend school each week?

Which of the following best describes your current field of work?

How many siblings do you have?

Zero

One

Two

Three or more

What state do you live in?

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## LIST OF REFERENCES

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