

Abstract

The American family averages approximately two children. What about individuals who actively oppose the traditional definition of family by choosing to remain permanently childless or produce a singleton? This study explores the emergence of socially non-normative family size intentions, namely voluntary childless, singleton, and large family size (defined as four or more offspring), as they compare to the normative average expected family size (defined as two or three offspring). Prevalence rates of and demographic, individual, and family-of-origin factors influencing these fertility intentions are assessed using the NLSY97 and Intergenerational Panel Study of Parents and Children (IPSPC).

Fertility intentions & behaviors: What is known?

- ✓ **Intentions predict behaviors** (e.g., Azjen & Fishbein; Miller & Pasta)
- ✓ **Non-status quo EFS intentions** ('nonconformists') reflect active decisions
- ✓ **Past & current trend skew toward smaller family sizes.** Multiple *mechanisms* explain the shift in what is considered normative & non-normative.
 - Once normative, **large family size** intentions and completion are increasingly non-normative and rare.
 - * Expectation change: quantity → quality.
 - * Flow of Wealth: children as assets → liabilities
 - * Economic change: farm & production → industrialization & consumerism.
 - **Voluntary childlessness** intentions and outcomes are increasing in prevalence although not in social acceptance (stigmatization remains strong – Motherhood Mandate).
 - * Change: collective → individualism
 - * Female work force participation: opportunity costs associated with motherhood
 - **Singleton** preferences and actual parity continue to constitute a small proportion of the US population.
 - * Cultural emphasis: provide a child with a sibling
 - * Gender composition: desire one male & one female child.
 - * Prontalist replacement pressures

Why should we care about fertility intentions opposing the status quo?

- ✓ **Anti-natalist individual intentions and behaviors challenge** Pronatalist societal preferences
 - Individual preferences supercede societal pressures
 - * At the collective level, society is concerned with below replacement fertility → Pronatalist pressures
 - * At the individual level, people are concerned with the opportunity costs parenthood confers and not with how reduced fertility trends affect society → smaller families
 - **Desired family size** described as the most significant factor influencing total fertility rates (Bongaarts, Morgan)
- ✓ **Threat of Below-Replacement Fertility**
 - Once fertility levels decline, these levels never increase to approach previous levels
 - Consequences of Below-Replacement Fertility
 - * Disproportionately older population – old-age care, labor force implications, social security, etc.
- ✓ **Question of Unmet Need – people may be satisfied!**
 - **Claim:** People experience distress at the end of their reproductive life because they had fewer children than intended earlier in life (Morgan).
 - An 'unmet' need has not been empirically validated;
 - * It is an assumption. Major methodological and conceptual flaws call for a developmental approach to understanding fertility intentions and behaviors over time.

Impetus, Purpose, Overview, & Operationalization

- ✓ **Impetus:**
 - With an ever-increasing proportion of adults in this country choosing a life without rearing children or rearing only one child, two major questions concerning the decision to have few or no children include: (a) when and how did these adults come to this decision; and, (b) how and to what extent do voluntarily childless individuals and persons expecting atypically small or large families differ from people who expect an average size family?
- ✓ **Research Question:**
 - How do relational and individual characteristics as well as familial and contextual factors differentially predict EFS fertility intentions among youth?
- ✓ **Purpose:**
 - Two studies evaluating normative & non-normative **emergent EFS**
- ✓ **Study 1 Overview:**
 - Using the *Intergenerational Panel Study of Parents and Children (IPSPC)*, the first study examines adolescents' reports of EFS and compares adolescents across normative and nonnormative EFS categories to assess whether
 1. Adolescents with non-normative EFS intentions differ from adolescents with normative EFS intentions in terms of individual preferences, educational and marital goals, and marital and parental family formation values; and,
 2. Adolescents who report expecting to have no children (the greatest family norm violation) typologically resemble willingly childless adults.
- ✓ **Study 2 Overview:**
 - Using the *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - 1997 (NLSY97)*, the second study examines
 1. Whether intentions for permanent voluntary childlessness and parenthood exist in adolescence;
 2. Whether marital intentions exist in adolescence; and,
 3. The relationship between EFS (normative and nonnormative) & marital intentions among adolescents
- ✓ **Operationalization of EFS**
 - Normative/ Status quo
 - * Average – 2 or 3 children
 - Nonnormative
 - * Voluntary permanent childlessness – 0 children
 - * Small/ Singleton – 1 child
 - * Large – 4 or more children

Hypotheses & Mechanisms

Construct	Hypothesis	Mechanism
Education	Educational attainment intentions will increase as a function of decreasing EFS. • Edu. level intended: large < average/ small < perm childless	• Opportunity costs associated with parenthood and larger family size.
Marital Intentions	1. Intentions to marry (RE: certainty or proclivity) will increase as a function increasing EFS. • Likelihood of marrying: perm childless < small < average < large 2. Intended age at marriage will decrease as a function of increasing EFS. • Intended age at marriage: large < average < small < perm childless	• Attitude correspondence across domains (opportunity costs/ life course competition associated with parenthood & marriage). • Marriage and parenthood – both are traditional institutions & status quo. • Marriage is considered the optimal union for bearing/ rearing children. Many people marry when they are ready to have children.
Sex Role Attitudes (SRA)	Youth reported SRAs will increase in traditionalism as function of increasing EFS. • Traditionalism: perm childless < small < average < large	• Attitudes toward roles and role preferences correspond. Parenthood is a traditional role.
Family of Origin Experiences	Youth intending non-normatively small EFS (0 or 1) will report poorer relationships with parents & more negative parented experiences (styles). • P-A relations: perm childless < small < average/ large	• Deidentification with parenthood role

Methods

	Study 1 - IPSPC	Study 2 – NLSY97
Participants	• Caucasian, middle-class youth born in 1961, in Detroit • Sample reduced to never-married zero-parity youth in 1980 (N=860) • Average age = 18	• Nationally representative sample of youth ages 12 to 16 in 1996 • Subsample of 1643 never-married, zero-parity youth ages 16 to 22 in 2001 • Average age = 19.0 in 2001
Procedures	• Youth interviews conducted at ages 18, 23, and 31 • Analyses for this study were limited to age 18 data – 1980	• Annual interviews began in 1997; CAPI and ACASI • Youth were randomized to one of four experimental groups; only one group received fertility intention questions. • Analyses limited to Round 5 (2001) when fertility intention questions were asked
Measures	• EES: "How many children do you expect to have altogether when your family is completed?" • EDU: "What is the highest amount or kind of schooling you think you will ever complete?" • Marriage: "Do you think you will get married?" (yes, probably, maybe/depends, no) • Sex Role Attitudes: youth were assessed on the degree of their traditional attitudes (12 items; 5 point; higher = more egalitarian) • Parent-Adolescent Relations: youth reported the degree of intimacy with mothers and fathers (7 items; 4-point; higher=poorer)	• EES: "Altogether, how many (more) children do you expect to have?" • EDU: "Now think ahead to when you turn 30 years old. What is the percent chance that you will have a four-year college degree by the time you turn 30?" (Asked in 1997 of youth ages 15 or older) • Marriage: "Now think about five years from now, you will be [respondents calculated age in 5 years] years old. What is the % chance that you will be married?" • N/A • Parent-Adolescent Relations: "When you think about how your [mother (figure)/father (figure)] acts toward you, in general, would you say she is very supportive, somewhat supportive, or not very supportive?"; "Overall, what is your relationship like with [him/her]? On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is no conflict and 10 is a lot of conflict, how would you rate your relationship with [him/her]?" • Parenting Style: uninvolved, permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian (2000)
Analysis Plan	• Nonparametric Statistics – due to unbalanced design & normality assumption violation. –Kruskal-Wallis (~ ANOVA); Mann-Whitney Wilcoxon (~T-test) –Confidence Interval Box Plots (CIBP) –Discriminant Function Analysis	

Notable Quotable

"It is thought not to be unrealistic to ask youthful respondents about their family size plans and to accept their answers as an indication of how they felt at the time" (Kenkel, 1985, 510).
"Even today, those who wish to remain childless are often seen as maladjusted, immature, unfulfilled, immoral or selfish, and their freedom is sometimes a source of jealous annoyance to others. Childless women are criticized more than childless men" (Stewart & Robinson, 867, 1989)

Conceptual Model

