

Couples Who Choose to Remain Childless

By Linda Silka and Sara Kiesler

There has been an unprecedented decline in childbearing in the United States over the last decade and a half, from a total period fertility rate of 3.6 children per woman in 1961 to fewer than 1.8 children in 1975.¹ This decrease has been attributed to a number of factors, such as later marriage, fewer marriages, more divorces, higher levels of female employment and education,² and, most remarkably, an *apparent* increase in intentional childlessness. In 1975, 32 percent of ever-married women under age 30 were childless, up from 27 percent in 1970 and just 20 percent in 1960.³ Even if 20-30 percent of these women are childless only because they have fecundity impairments,⁴ there remain three million ever-married women under age 30 who have intentionally not yet had children. Data from surveys of attitudes about childlessness and of fertility expectations among young wives suggest that the overwhelming majority of fecund married women will eventually have children. Thus, the childless family was seen as "ideal" by only one percent of Americans in a 1973 Gallup Poll.⁵ And only 4.6 percent of wives under age 30 indicated in 1975 that they expected to have no children ever.⁶

However, there are signs that lifetime childlessness may be on the rise. The appearance and growth of organizations such as the National Organization for Non-Parents suggest that some proportion of currently childless adults intend to remain so permanently. This propor-

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Couples who intend never to have children plan their families and make decisions about childbearing more carefully and deliberately than other couples. They are more likely to use and plan to continue using the most effective birth control techniques. They appear to be more successful and happy in their careers, and are more likely to talk about their decision with others. Whether or not there is a significant increase among young couples in the choice never to have children may well depend on the status of the upper level job market in the next few years—especially in the availability of rewarding careers for young women.

tion may be significant. In 1975, one-quarter of childless wives aged 25-29 expected to remain childless over their entire lifetimes.⁷ Fifteen percent of a sample of students surveyed at private universities planned no children.⁸ Sixteen percent of a sample of high school adolescents wanted no children.⁹ Those who are now postponing childbearing may well join the ranks of the permanently childless as they grow older, while reasons not to have children become more salient.¹⁰ Given the large number of young people who are currently childless, even a 5-10 percent rate of voluntary childlessness would have important effects on the total number who remain childless.

At present, we do not know whether current childlessness represents uncertainty, postponed childbearing or commitment to a lifetime without children.

Previous studies on childlessness provide few answers. One reason is the absence of base lines for comparison. We know little about young people who want no children, as compared with those who say they are postponing childbearing and those who are undecided. Data collected during the 1960s and earlier are limited by the fact that childless-

ness was rare and deviant. Further, comparisons were not made that would separate the effects of experience from the effects of early choices.

The study reported in this article was designed to provide more information about early intentional childlessness. We located young childless couples who intended never to have children, couples who did intend children but were postponing them, and couples who were unsure about their intentions. We asked these couples questions that might show how the groups differed in their family planning practices, personality, attitudes, background and life style. The hypotheses that guided our selection of questions and tests were drawn from the research literature, as well as from our informal survey of popular myths about childlessness.

Method

Lawrence, Kansas, the site of this study, is a university city of about 50,000. It is surrounded by farms, but is just an hour's drive to Kansas City. In 1975, approximately 100 couples living in the vicinity responded by telephone to a series of classified advertisements solicit-



ing couples under 30 who presently had no children. They answered a brief set of questions used to identify groups of approximately equal size with different childbearing intentions. The first 61 couples who fit into those groups were selected and scheduled for the home survey. In 21 cases, both the husbands and wives were agreed on the intention never to have children; another 21 couples did intend children at some later time; and 19 couples, classified as unsure, had not arrived at a joint decision about whether or not to have children. Of those not selected for the study, most planned to have children.

Each respondent completed a 15-page questionnaire and was interviewed. Interviews were conducted with one spouse while the other completed the questionnaire in private. The questionnaire included items measuring the respondent's background, attitudes about childbearing, personality, personal values and life style. Two published tests were also administered: the Personal Attributes Questionnaire,¹¹ which was used to measure sex role stereotyping, and the Interpersonal Check List,¹² which provided an estimate of self-esteem and 16 categories of typical in-

terpersonal behavior. The interview was designed mainly to elicit information on the development and current state of intentions to bear or not to bear children. Analyses were performed to compare groups with different intentions, and to compare men and women within these groups.

Background

As would be expected from the sampling procedures used, differences in social background did not account for the differing intentions of these childless respondents. There was no statistically significant difference between the three groups in age (average 24 for men, 22.5 for women), race or years married (average two years^{*}). In each group, the couples had an average of 2.5 siblings, came from similar middle-class backgrounds, and had similar levels of education (average, 2.5 years of college). In each group, 17 percent had been raised as Catholics, and nearly all the remainder had been brought up as Protestants; two respondents who intended children, and one respondent who was unsure, were Jewish. Although our intention was not to select for representativeness, the sam-

ple did not differ in religion, income, social class or urban status from one with similar age restrictions that might have been drawn at random from the same area. Area fertility rates and birth expectations are nearly identical to those of the U.S. population as a whole.

Decisions About Childlessness

Because our sample included couples who were unsure of their reproductive intentions, as well as couples who had already made a decision, we were provided with an unusual opportunity to examine the relationship of introspection, communication and consideration of consequences to family size decisions and plans. Each respondent orally answered a battery of 27 open-ended and forced-choice questions on this topic; each also responded to written questions about birth control and reasons for having and not having children.

Our predictions were based, in part, on the reasoning of Kurt Back and Paula Hass,¹³ who noted that lack of motivation for a small family, inadequate knowledge of contraception and desires for culturally ideal family sizes reduce the likelihood of planning and discussion of childbearing. None of the couples in this study wanted more than three children, and all knew about the various methods of contraception; but it seemed reasonable to expect that those who intended no children would be more likely than others to have considered and discussed their reproductive decision, as well as to have been the targets of social pressure, because they were departing from the accepted norm. We also expected these couples to be most likely to use the most effective birth control measures, and most likely to reject methods that involved a high risk of pregnancy. The group least likely to have considered and discussed childbearing, we hypothesized, would be couples who were undecided about their childbearing intentions, since their unsure state implied lack of motivation to plan.

Table 1 shows that, as predicted, the intentionally childless had thought longest about whether or not to have children

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^{*}Those who intended to remain childless had been married an average of 2.5 years, those who intended children, 1.6 years, and those who were unsure, 2.2 years.

Table 1. Responses of childless couples to questions about the processes that led to their childbearing decisions, by couples' reproductive intentions, Kansas, 1975

Measure and spouse	Reproductive intentions		
	Do not intend (N=21)	Intend (N=21)	Unsure (N=19)
Mean no. of years thinking about whether or not to have children			
Wife	5.0	3.9	4.2
Husband	5.0	3.8	4.7
Mean no. of years discussing whether or not to have children			
Wife	3.4	1.8	2.7
Husband	2.8	2.0	2.3
Mean times per month discussed having children			
Wife	1.8	2.3	1.9
Husband	2.3	2.4	1.7
Average no. of other people* who ever said or hinted anything about your having children			
Wife	2.4	1.7	1.1
Husband	1.9	1.3	1.9

*Each person other than spouse = 1.

and had begun discussing their decision earliest. However, they had not discussed it more frequently than couples who intended children—at least in recent months. The table also shows that couples who intended no children had been the target of more advice from others. Further questioning (not shown) revealed that this 'advice' was most often given by their parents in the form of hints that they should have children, or pointed news about other pregnancies; a total of 75 percent of couples who intended to remain childless were so advised. Nevertheless, as Table 2 shows, these couples were highly committed to their decision. They were happy about it, did not feel they needed children to be "fulfilled," saw little chance of changing their minds, and listed more reasons for their decision, as compared with reasons against it, than those who had made the decision to have children. A majority could think of no circumstances under which they would want to have children.

Do the intentionally childless give different reasons for their decision not to have children than most other people give for not having children? We compared responses among the three intention groups in our study to questions about reasons for wanting or not wanting children, and also compared these responses to data provided by wives in two previous studies—by Linda J. Beckman¹⁴ and Kenneth W. Terhune¹⁵—where roughly comparable questions

had been asked. As may be seen in Table 3, those in our study who wanted no children, or were unsure, were far more likely to check each suggested reason for having no children than those who intended children. But they did not give any reasons that at least some of those who wanted children did not also cite. Furthermore, the ranking of proportions within intention groups showed similar patterns. Where differences existed between our study and the Beckman and Terhune studies (e.g., in greater concern for the husband-wife relationship), they could be attributed to the youth and early stage of marriage typical of couples in our sample. The data on reasons for having children were parallel, and therefore are not tabulated here. In sum, there was no evidence that the intentionally childless thought in qualitatively different ways about having and not having children than others.

About 60 percent of the couples who wanted children did not indicate they had a planned schedule for having children, suggesting that many had "planned not to plan." Table 4 shows how planning was related to couples' attitudes toward various methods of birth control. Those couples who intended children were more likely to use, or plan to use, less effective contraceptive techniques and to reject highly effective techniques than were other couples.

The data on the couples who indicated they were unsure about having children are puzzling and interesting. They had evidently discussed having children (Table 1) and had expressed a degree of unhappiness about their failure to come to a mutual decision (Table 2), but had still been unable to decide. Our data show that in many cases, the problem was inability to reach agreement rather than a mutual state of uncertainty. Only three sets of partners among the 19 unsure couples were equally unsure; among nine couples, the partners were inclined in opposite directions; while among seven couples, one spouse had a definite inclination (usually against having children) and the other was unsure (not shown in tables). How would the disagreement be resolved? There is a possibility that external circumstances affecting income, the wife's career and the marital relationship might have strong effects. From the couples' point of view, it would be income and the wife's career (see Table 2). However, the data presented in Table 4 suggest that these unsure

Table 2. Responses of childless couples to questions about certainty of their childbearing decisions, by couples' reproductive intentions, Kansas, 1975

Measure and spouse	Reproductive intentions		
	Do not intend	Intend	Unsure
Percent definitely decided			
Wife	91	95	21
Husband	100	100	26
Percent postponing children ≥5 years			
Wife	na	38	na
Husband	na	33	na
Happy with decision? (10=highest)			
Wife	9.2	9.2	8.4
Husband	9.0	8.9	8.2
Could be fulfilled without children? (10=highest)			
Wife	8.9	5.2	8.2
Husband	8.7	7.1	7.4
Average no. of reasons checked for having children minus no. of reasons checked for not having children			
Wife	-8.0	6.5	-2.6
Husband	-7.2	5.4	-0.7
Average probability of changing mind			
Wife	.18	.12	.46
Husband	.17	.16	.38
Percent* who would change mind in case of:			
Increase in income			
Wife	—	29	47
Husband	—	—	53
Decrease in income			
Wife	—	43	47
Husband	—	53	63
Inability to continue career plans			
Wife	24	—	42
Husband	—	—	26
Increase in birthrate			
Wife	—	24	26
Husband	—	—	—
Improvement in U.S. society			
Wife	—	—	42
Husband	—	—	37
Deterioration of U.S. society			
Wife	—	29	37
Husband	—	—	37
Bad health (volunteered)			
Husband	—	57	—
Wife wanted children (volunteered)			
Husband	48	—	—

*Percentages listed only if 20 percent or more responded in affirmative.

Notes: na = not applicable. Analyses of variance on all items are significant across groups at .05 or better; sex differences are significant for questions 3-5.

couples were not going to let chance decide for them. Like the couples who had already decided to remain childless, they tended to reject the less effective methods of contraception. A higher proportion of unsure wives than of those who had decided on their reproductive intentions, however, did not express an opin-

ion about the less effective methods; and a higher proportion indicated they had obtained or would obtain abortions—suggesting that they felt more strongly about keeping their options open.

Sex Differences

Analyses of the data pertinent to reproductive decision-making revealed consistent sex differences across groups. Although wives were no more likely than their husbands to have considered having children, the decision about whether or not to have children seemed to be somewhat more important to them. In most cases, the decision was made jointly, but when it was not, the wife was more likely to have made the decision, whatever the reproductive intentions of the couple at time of interview (not shown). Wives were also more satisfied with their decision and cited more reasons for it (see Table 2). It is perhaps significant that nearly one-half of the husbands who did not intend to have children volunteered that they would change their minds if their wives decided to have children, but none of the wives said that they would do so (see Table 2). There were also significant sex differences in perceptions of circumstances that would affect the decision to have children (Table 2). Wives were less likely to say that ups or downs in family income would affect their decision, but more likely than their husbands to say that inability to continue with career plans or an increase in the national birth-rate would influence them (see Table 2).

Personality Differences

For at least the past 40 years, the intentionally childless in America have been stereotyped as selfish, immature, materi-

*As recently as 1974, a favorable portrayal of the intentionally childless featured in the *Kansas City Star* was followed by one letter to the editor expressing sympathy for those who, "through fear or selfishness," do not have children, and by another that described them as "unsuccessful at the game of life," "immature" and without "love of one another and mankind." A systematic study in the same geographical area by one of the authors, which used experimental variations of information about women to measure attitudes toward them, also showed negative stereotyping. The intentionally childless were perceived by 864 women, aged 18-80, to be less happy, less likable and less well adjusted than those who had children or who might have been only postponing children. (See: S. B. Kiesler, "Social Norms and Family Size," final report to the Center for Population Research, University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1976.)

Table 3. Percent of married women in three studies citing salient reasons for not having children, California, 1973, New York, 1972-1973, and Kansas, 1975

Reason	Beckman: "Negative factors associated with being a mother"*	Terhune: "Likes for no children"†	Silka/Kiesler: "Reasons for having no children"‡		
			Do not intend	Intend	Unsure
More time with spouse	12	§	100	48	74
Opportunities and freedom	42	49	90	43	89
Wife's job or career	24	24	81	43	74
Avoid responsibility	23	11	71	14	47
Leisure, travel	21	17	62	38	58
Worry; social problems	24	§	52	24	37
Economic concerns	20	31	48	33	53
Manage work load	17	11	43	9	68
Dislike for children; not sure good parent	11	§	29	5	16

*See reference 14. Beckman's sample consisted of 123 married women. Forty-seven had no children; 18 of these wanted none or were unsure. Respondents were aged 28-39 (average age, 33) and were living in California.

†See reference 15. One-fourth of Terhune's sample of 300 married women had no children; virtually all wanted children. Respondents, aged 15-44, were living in New York.

‡Group differences are significant at the .001 level, primarily because those who intend children give fewer reasons to have no children.

§Not reported, but cited as low.

alistic, unhappy and misanthropic.* Whether or not they actually have these traits, however, is not known. Few studies have reported correlations of personality traits with actual or intended fertility. One study did find that women who tended to be introverted, submissive and less well adjusted had fewer children,¹⁶ but the publication date was 1955, at the height of the 'baby boom,' when those who intentionally had no children or only one child were generally consid-

ered to be extreme social deviants. Researchers are now finding some relationships between socially desirable traits—such as low alienation, rationality and independence—and having fewer children,⁷ but the relationship to intentional childlessness is unclear.

Because there now exists a wide gap between popular or assumed personality attributes of the intentionally childless and the data base for them, it was our intention to explore the issue with greater

Table 4. Percent distribution of childless couples who accept or reject* contraception, by method, and couples' reproductive intentions, Kansas, 1975

Method and spouse	Reproductive intentions and contraceptive attitudes								
	Do not intend			Intend			Unsure		
	Accept	Reject	No answer	Accept	Reject	No answer	Accept	Reject	No answer
Abortion									
Wife	57	29	14	38	52	10	74	16	10
Husband	71	10	19	29	43	28	74	5	21
Sterilization (vasectomy, tubal ligation)†									
Wife	86	2	12	62	26	12	57	18	25
Husband	71	14	15	45	43	12	61	34	5
Pill and IUD									
Wife	71	19	10	57	35	8	84	5	11
Husband	76	14	10	73	19	8	71	18	11
Diaphragm, condom†									
Wife	28	50	22	43	36	21	34	29	37
Husband	43	38	19	45	26	29	50	29	21
Rhythm, spermicide†									
Wife	14	64	22	26	50	24	11	55	34
Husband	19	60	21	38	40	22	32	53	15

*"Accept" means the respondent has used or would use; "reject" means the respondent asserted he or she has never used and would never use a method.

†Average proportion.

breadth than is ordinarily the case. The results of over 200 test items and questions are presented in summary form below.

On the basis of responses to the Interpersonal Check List used in this study, it appears that:

- Couples intending no children were neither more nor less happy than those intending children or unsure. They were equally satisfied with their lives and with each other, had had equally happy childhoods, were no more likely to come from broken homes, and did not differ in self-esteem. Comparisons of husband-wife differences showed that the three intention groups were similar in the degree to which partners agreed on values, attitudes and interests (not shown in tables).
- Couples intending no children did not appear to be more or less selfish or immature than others. They were equally interested in mankind and in their communities and enjoyed community activities to the same extent. Nor were they more materialistic. All measures, whether self-rated personality descriptions or measures of interests and values, were consistent in this respect (not shown).
- Couples intending no children shared with those who were unsure less interest in interaction with people, a preference for being alone, and, to some degree, behavior in accordance with these atti-

tudes. Notably, they tended to live further from their parents and to be engaged in more solitary occupations. This pattern is shown in Table 5.

- Wives intending no children were more likely than other wives to describe themselves as independent. But wives in the unsure group who were "leaning" toward childlessness were very much like the intentionally childless wives. On the Interpersonal Check List, women who intended or who showed a preference for no children were more likely to describe themselves as "able to doubt others" (86 percent and 77 percent, respectively, as compared to 57 percent of those intending children); "self-reliant and assertive" (57 percent and 66 percent, compared to 38 percent); "skeptical" (43 percent and 44 percent, compared to 29 percent); and less "easily influenced" (19 percent and 15 percent, compared to 33 percent). In this respect, they were more like the men, who showed a high level of independence, whatever their reproductive intentions.

- Wives intending or preferring no children also placed a greater value on personal freedom than did others. But neither wives nor husbands in these groups were more desirous than others of a "stimulating life," "change in their lives," travel or exploration of their own "potential."

Attitudes About Women and Marriage

The women's liberation movement as we know it today effectively began in 1963 with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and with the establishment of the National Organization for Women soon thereafter. The downward trend in births began before that, but a number of researchers have associated that trend and the liberation movement. Presumably, women who are more 'liberated' will be less interested in the traditional mothering role and more likely to have no children. To test this hypothesis, our respondents completed the Personality Attributes Questionnaire, which measures feminist attitudes and traditional stereotyping of women, and answered questions relating to perceived equity, role assignments, decision-making and distribution of domestic chores in their marriages.

We found no evidence that attitudes about women, sex roles and marriage, or actual marital relationships and behavior, systematically varied among groups

with different childbearing intentions. Men were significantly less likely to embrace feminist goals, had more traditional views about women, were less positive about sharing domestic chores and were more uncomfortable with the idea of having a successful or well-educated spouse than were their wives. But among groups of couples, there were no comparable or other differences. Indeed, couples with differing childbearing intentions were similar along the more general dimensions of traditionalism, conservatism and religiosity. They attended church with the same frequency (on the whole, very little), described their political leanings similarly, and had similar interests in political or social causes, traditional middle-class sports or hobbies, and such currently fashionable activities as transcendental meditation. (Data not shown in tables.)

These findings are consistent with the results of three other studies directly testing the same hypothesis. Alice H. Eagly and Pamela Anderson, in a survey conducted in 1971 with college students, found no relationship between total desired family size and nontraditional attitudes, approval of women's liberation or approval of sex role equivalence.¹⁸ They did find, however, a relationship of those same attitudes with general approval of birth control (r =about .30). Similarly, Linda Beckman found that modernity, religiosity and attitudes toward women's liberation were no different among childless couples than among those with one child (religiosity was higher among couples with three children).¹⁹ In her study, these variables were differentiated between women engaged in professional and nonprofessional jobs. Karen O. Mason and her colleagues found that on some measures of attitude, childless women were even more traditional than women with children.²⁰

A study by Susan Bram nevertheless did find notable differences in attitudes and life style among groups of couples who did not intend children, who were postponing childbearing and who already had children.²¹ Those who did not intend children had and desired somewhat more equalitarian marriages and shared more activities. In other behavior, however, these couples were not very different from those who were delaying childbearing. Bram's findings on the two groups in most other respects parallel those of the present study. That is, her findings on background, family

Table 5. Indicators of gregariousness of childless couples,* Kansas, 1975

Measure and spouse	Reproductive intentions		
	Do not intend	Intend	Unsure
Average of 10 attitude scales: interaction with spouse, relatives, parents; entertaining friends; family activities; visiting friends; good relationship with spouse, parents; not being alone; not living alone (10 = highest score)			
Wife	6.8	7.3	6.7
Husband	6.3	6.9	6.4
Average no. of miles living from parents			
Wife	684	555	1,641
Husband	871	318	590
Percent in occupation requiring interaction with < 10 persons per day			
Wife	24	19	21
Husband	29	19	42

*For attitude scales, multivariate analysis of variance shows differences at .02 or better between those who intend children as compared to the two other groups. Sex differences are also statistically significant (wives more gregarious). For miles from home, those who intend children live closer than do the other two groups (.05). The sex difference is significant (.05) even though in one group the trend for wives to live further away is reversed.

planning and decisions about childlessness, social pressure and attitudes about children, as well as employment (see below), were similar to ours. But the couples in her sample had been married, on average, two more years than had ours. Perhaps differences among couples widened relatively fast as they become more committed to a particular life style. The Bram study suggests a need for longitudinal data.

Career Commitments and Aspirations

Smaller family size is often associated with female employment, especially professional and other careers requiring high levels of education. Demographers have noted over the last several years that increasing employment of married women, with and without children, has accompanied the decrease in family size.²² The very fact of employment may discourage women from having children or more children. By age 30, most working women are highly committed to their jobs.²³ If a wife does not want to stop working, young children may be difficult to manage.

Our data suggest that neither level of education nor amount of employment was related to intentions to bear children. Groups with differing childbearing intentions were similar in the proportions of husbands and wives who had been educated at each grade level, who were currently attending classes or who worked, and in hours of employment per week. In addition, there were no group differences in education or employment aspirations, intentions for further education or training, desire for a successful career, desire for a fulfilling job and intentions to work. Nor were there differences among groups in the proportions with mothers who had worked or in how much their mothers had worked.

On the other hand, as may be seen in Table 6, there was a small but potentially important difference in *quality of employment* that set those who intended no children apart from others. Husbands who did not intend children were slightly less likely than others to have had a father in a highly prestigious occupation, but were considerably more likely to have a highly prestigious job themselves. Moreover, they anticipated a higher income than did the other husbands. Similarly, wives who did not intend children had jobs that were higher than usual in prestige; they were more

Table 6. Differences among childless husbands and wives in job-related characteristics and in career expectations,* Kansas, 1975

Characteristic	Do not intend	Intend	Unsure
Husbands			
Age	24.1	23.5	24.7
Father's job status (1-10 scale)†	6.4	7.7	6.7
Own job status (1-10 scale)†	6.0	4.6	4.3
% professional	38.0	29.0	21.0
Expected family income in 10 years	\$28,000	\$25,300	\$27,300
Wives			
Age	23.8	22.4	22.5
Own job status (1-10 scale)†	5.5	4.6	4.6
% professional	33.0	10.0	21.0
% in 'male' jobs	19.0	10.0	11.0
Rated acceptability of predominantly female jobs for self (1-10 scale)†	5.4	6.4	6.2

*Age is not significantly different among groups. Job status was rated using the Hollingshead system. The professional category includes scientists, lawyers, nurses, teachers, social workers and post-M.A. graduate students employed in teaching or research.

† $p \leq .05$ among groups (F test).

likely to be professionals and to hold traditionally male jobs.

As one can see in Table 6, the numerical differences are not remarkable, but the overall employment pattern is nevertheless provocative. Considering that motivations to work, proportion employed, education and desire for success were virtually identical among groups, it looks as though intentions not to have children are not related to employment aspirations but instead to employment success. As a group, those who had made the decision not to have children were experiencing greater rewards from employment, and they expected greater rewards in the future. Perhaps having done better sooner, this group of childless couples was provided grounds for expecting that a life without children would be a good one. Beckman's survey of professional and nonprofessional women (about 10 years older than the women in our sample) supports this proposition.²⁴ She found that while professional women who wanted children wanted more of them than nonprofessionals, a greater proportion of the professional women wanted no children at all or were still undecided.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings from our study suggest that couples who intend never to have children plan their families and make decisions about childbearing more carefully and deliberately than do other couples. In most other respects, couples in our study who intended no children did not appear to be very different from couples who were unsure about their intentions, or even from couples who intended children but were postponing having them. Couples who intended no children had considered their decision longer, had discussed it earlier, had rationalized their decision more and had more firmly committed themselves than other couples. In carrying out their decision to have no children, these couples had used and planned to continue using the most effective birth control techniques (particularly the pill and sterilization) and had rejected the less effective techniques. They had talked to others about their plans, even though they were apparently subjected to social pressure against childlessness. These findings cannot be attributed to differences among the couples in such background factors as age, education or social class, nor to variations among groups in the relative impact of the male-female differences.

Why did couples who intended never to have children make that decision? We have seen that couples who were unsure (that is, husband and wife had not reached a mutual decision) were very similar to couples who intended no children in personality, life style and attitudes, including attitudes about childlessness.

The degree to which couples were experiencing successful employment or career development appeared to be one situational variable that had influence on the decision to have no children. (Bram also found this factor to be related to intentional childlessness.²⁵) Perhaps peer group support was another source of external influence. Unfortunately, we did not ask. But we did find that intentionally childless couples had talked with more people about their decision than those who intended children, averaging 5.5 as compared to 4.4, respectively. Couples who were unsure had discussed having children with only 2.8 other persons, perhaps simply reflecting their uncertainty. A third influence may reside in the nature of the marital relationship. It

is not hard to imagine that a shaky marriage reduces the desire for discussing and making a decision about having children. We have no questionnaire evidence that unsure couples on the average were unhappier with each other than were couples who had agreed about future childbearing. However, by the time this article was written, three of the unsure couples, but none of the other couples, were divorcing.

It is possible that a decision to have no children caused couples to experience employment success, peer support and marital stability rather than the reverse. Certainly, having made a decision did have some effects on the couples in our study (on attitudes about children, for example). But the couples in our study also reported their own opinion that the status of their careers or other external factors could influence their reproductive decisions. Thus, we speculate that from the larger pool of people whose personalities and attitudes predisposed them against having children there was selected (by choice or chance) a group of individuals who married other individuals with similar desires, who experienced early success in their careers and who, perhaps, also had social support for and confidence in their marriages. Perhaps these happy experiences led to the decision never to have children.

There may be some relationship between feminist, nontraditional or antinatal attitudes and family size decisions, but our data and earlier studies suggest that there is no direct connection between those attitudes and intentions for childlessness early in marriage. Rather, an indirect self-selection process and a process of rationalizing one's decisions and behavior might produce the relationship later. If those who are more 'liberated' or 'modern' are also more frequently involved in a professional career and are more accepting of birth control, they will probably have smaller families and bear children later. Moreover, if

having no children (or one child) makes nontraditional values salient (and decreases exposure to traditional reference groups), then a negative relationship between 'modernity' and family size might result. Since family size intentions also increase with actual family size, intentions would also almost necessarily bear a negative relationship to modern attitudes.

We suggest, then, that attitudes are as likely to be affected by family size decisions and planning as the reverse is true. It is not usual to investigate postdecision processes in studies of family planning. But they do have potential importance—particularly for understanding how the decision to have a certain number of children or to use a particular method of birth control has impact on attitudes that reinforce the decision in question.

There is no evidence that all or even most people make a deliberate decision to have children, or to plan the particular number and spacing of children that they want. Our own data suggest that some couples who intend to have children never make a decision at all, in the sense of considering and then choosing among alternatives. As a group, our respondents did not discuss or consider their intentions very much. Several of them said they had "always" intended children. As for planning, most had no schedule for having children. Furthermore, their attitudes about birth control techniques suggest that chance might be allowed to plan for some of them. These findings imply that our own and others' research on family 'decision-making' among married couples may have overemphasized the search for deliberation and choice to the neglect of other factors that induce or commit people to take action or to avoid taking action.

Although only 4.6 percent of U.S. wives under 30 indicated in 1975 that they expected to have no children ever, this proportion represents an increase of nearly three times from the 1.7 percent who said in 1964 that they expected to have no children.²⁶ What is more, these tabulations were calculated without including the 18.5 percent of wives who did not answer the birth expectation question.²⁷ If the persons in our own "unsure" category are in part representative of those who, in population surveys, are dropped from the analysis, then our data suggest that such surveys underestimate the number of persons who would have no children, given favorable cir-

cumstances. Our data show a strong similarity in motivation and personality between those couples who intended no children and those who had not yet made a decision. Further, more of the unsure indicated a preference for having no children than indicated a preference for having them, and the group as a whole checked more reasons why they should not have children than reasons why they should. The few differences in motivation or personality that did exist (e.g., in number of reasons for not having children) can be reasonably interpreted as resulting from justification rather than causing the unsure status.

The circumstances that may induce unsure couples never to have children perhaps include continuing disagreement about the issue with the spouse on the one hand, or resolution of the conflict and success in a career on the other. In each group in our study career and income considerations were perceived as the most important factors that might cause a change in intentions or desires. Furthermore, an examination of the seven couples who intended children, but planned to postpone them for five years or more, shows the same trend. These couples indicated a greater probability than the others who intended children that they would change their minds and remain childless.* Couples postponing for five years or more also had justified their decision to have children to a lesser degree.† Their jobs were slightly better than those of the couples who planned to have children in less than five years, and the circumstances they listed that might cause them not to have children were a change in income and the chance for the wife to have a career.

We suggest, then, that the state of the upper level job market will in the next few years have a significant impact on the fertility of the couples in our sample. We further suggest that, since wives are more likely to make the final decision, *their* job status possibilities will be crucial. This conclusion fits well with Judith Blake's argument, made some seven years ago, that one cannot expect women to "regard make-work and dead-end jobs as a substitute for 'mothering'"²⁸ and that basic changes that offer a life's work outside the home are necessary if family size is to decrease.

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*The probabilities of deciding to remain childless for those postponing for five years or more were .28 for wives and .20 for husbands; while for those who intended children sooner, the probabilities were .04 for wives and .14 for husbands.

†Among those postponing five years or more, the difference between the number of reasons for having and not having children was 5.0 for wives and 3.3 for husbands. For those not postponing, the difference was 7.3 for wives and 6.5 for husbands (see Table 2, question 5).

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