



Voluntary childlessness : a comparison of attitudes of married parents and married childless couples in Bozeman, Montana  
by Phyllis Kay Kovach

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE in Home Economics  
Montana State University  
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**Abstract:**

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Both C+ and C- respondents thought reasons relating to personal freedom and the population situation were important. There was disparity between them concerning: financial cost, prior experience, unwillingness to make commitments, social status climbing, uncertainty about parental abilities, physical aspects of having children, and marital satisfaction.

Religion was the only demographic variable that showed a difference between responding groups. Most C+ respondents were Christians whereas none of the C-respondents were so designated.

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Date May 22, 1974

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OF MARRIED PARENTS AND MARRIED CHILDLESS  
COUPLES IN BOZEMAN, MONTANA

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PHYLLIS KAY KOVACH

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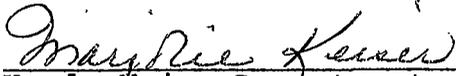
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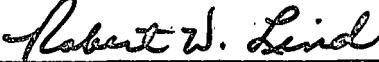
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## ABSTRACT

It was the intent of this research to: (1) determine from voluntarily childless couples (C-) their reasons for being childless; (2) determine from those who are or intend to be parents (C+) the reasons they impute to C- couples; and (3) examine certain demographic variables and their relationship to C+ and C- status.

Of the seventy-eight couples responding to the questionnaire, four were C-. This was the number which could be expected for the youthful age of the sample. It did limit statistical reliability.

Both C+ and C- respondents thought reasons relating to personal freedom and the population situation were important. There was disparity between them concerning: financial cost, prior experience, unwillingness to make commitments, social status climbing, uncertainty about parental abilities, physical aspects of having children, and marital satisfaction.

Religion was the only demographic variable that showed a difference between responding groups. Most C+ respondents were Christians whereas none of the C- respondents were so designated.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Today the decision made by millions of couples about the number of children they will have is determining the future size of our country's population. When children helped work the land to assist in supporting the family, every child was an economic asset. Uncontrolled procreation was essential to insure survival of the human race. This is no longer the situation. Such problems as air and water pollution, unemployment, diminishing natural resources, and crime are presently linked to population growth. Social scientists are emphasizing the crucial need for producing fewer children. The President's Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (the Commission) has suggested that the population would stabilize within 20 years if:

- (1) the proportion of women becoming mothers declined from 88 to 80 percent;
- (2) the proportion of parents with three or more children declined from 50 to 41 percent; and
- (3) the proportion of parents with one or two children rose from 50 to 59 percent (Rockefeller, 1972, p. 111).

It was the Commission's first suggestion which was the concern of this research.

An eight percent decrease in the number of women becoming mothers could be accomplished in two ways. First, with a reduction in the number of women marrying--assuming that most single women do not have children--and/or second, with an increase in the number of childless couples. Since in 1970, 95 percent of all women 18 and over were or had been married, it is most likely that a decline in the proportion of women becoming mothers will be effected among married women (Landis & Landis, 1973).

Historically childless couples have been pitied because of their misfortune of being barren. Provisions for their becoming parents have been the object of much dedication and research--from adoption agencies to scientists developing fertility pills. It was assumed that anyone childless was so involuntarily and in most cases this was a correct assumption. However, today, there is need for more couples to remain childless voluntarily. Very slowly there is beginning to be movement by some in this direction. Establishment of the National Organization for Non-Parents, an institution publicly supporting voluntary childlessness, is evidence of such movement. Improved contraceptive effectiveness and the legalization of abortion provide for greater control over fertility, but not until it has social

approval can childlessness increase to a level significant enough to help defuse the population bomb.

Research and education involving reasons for and attitudes toward childlessness must be undertaken so that realistic attitudes toward childlessness may be established. Much has been done to help understand why couples choose to have children (Kirkpatrick, 1955 & 1963; Solomon, Clare, & Westoff, 1956; Farson, Hauser, Stroup & Wiener, 1969), but little has been done in studying why couples choose to not have children. Such work can help dispel any myths concerning voluntary childlessness and thus make room for better understanding and perhaps greater acceptance of childlessness.

#### Purpose

Determining the reasons for the attitudes toward voluntary childlessness was the concern of this study. More specifically, the three purposes of the study were: (1) to determine from voluntarily childless couples (C-) their reasons for being childless; (2) to determine from those who are or intend to be parents (C+) the reasons or motivations they impute to those couples who are voluntarily childless; and (3) to examine certain demographic variables (age, religion, education, occupation, income, number of

years married, type of contraception used) and determine their relationship to C+ and C- status.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### The Population Explosion

The question of whether the world is rapidly moving toward too many people is still a moot point in the minds of many. The belief or disbelief in the danger of burgeoning population is the crux of the matter for how soon our population will stabilize. An increase in childlessness is one of the means The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (the Commission) suggests for attaining population stabilization. But before people can accept childlessness as a means, they must first accept the need for the means.

#### Birthrate

Birthrate is the number of children born during a year per 1,000 population. The birthrate figures of the twentieth century in the United States have jumped about in an erratic pattern. In 1900 the birthrate stood at 32. After the outbreak of World War I there was a decline to 26.2 in 1919. This was followed by a slight postwar rise and then a downward drift in the twenties. The great Depression made its impact and by 1933 the birthrate was at a low point of 18.4. After 1940 the birthrate rose slowly,

but in 1945 when many potential fathers were out of the country fighting in World War II, it dipped to 20.4. During the postwar years the rate climbed and by 1947 it had reached 26.6 (Kirkpatrick, 1955). This "baby boom" level maintained itself at about 25 until the early 1960's when it began to gradually decline again. Then in 1970 it rose to 18.2. However in 1972, instead of continuing upward it fell to 17.3 and continued to fall. By the end of 1973 the birthrate was at the lowest level in United States history--15.1 (Rockefeller, 1972). This decline in birthrate contributes to the idea that we can breathe easy now as far as population growth is concerned. But this is a false and deadly assumption. "Our past rapid growth has given us so many young couples that, to bring population growth to an immediate halt, the birthrate would have to drop by almost 50 percent. . . (Rockefeller, 1972, p. 19)." The children born in the baby boom years are now finishing school, seeking jobs, developing careers, getting married, and having children. The number of children they have is a crucial determining factor for life in the future. In 1975 there will be six million more people in the prime child-bearing ages of 20-29 than there were in 1970. Unless the population is stabilized now the figure will jump another

five million. At the current 1.1 percent rate of population growth, two and one-quarter million people are added to the United States population each year. This means the population will double in 70 years unless a stabilized population is established now.

#### Population and the Future

It is estimated that at our present growth rate, 75 percent of the U. S. population will be crowded into 11 percent of the land area by the year 2000. Already over-crowding as a result of overpopulation is being blamed for such contemporary problems as air pollution, water pollution, traffic congestion, unemployment, crime, drug addiction, increased intergroup conflict, and the decay of the American system of government (Farson, 1969). Indeed almost every facet of human life is affected by overpopulation--and none for the better. Lorraine (1970) notes that,

. . . it has been estimated that every year each American citizen produces three-fourths of a ton of solid refuse, and even more alarming is the knowledge that this figure is growing at a rate of four percent per annum (p. 155).

Thirty-nine million people are expected to enter the labor force during the decade of the 1970's. This is seven million more than entered the labor force in the 1960's.

With continued population growth it can be expected that unemployment will continue to be a significant national problem. With regard to crime, the Commission reports that, ". . . the population change alone accounted for about one-half of the reported increase in the number of arrests for serious crimes over the past decade (Rockefeller, 1972, p. 19)."

Because of our past we associate population growth with economic progress for that has been the case up to now.

Historically we have always equated population growth with national prosperity and progress. More children meant more help on the farm, more support in old age, a greater market for businessmen and a bigger labor force. During the 1930's Depression, when the birthrate took an abrupt fall, there was frightened talk of race suicide and of a final end to all prosperity (Mauney, 1972, p. 50).

Now it is a mistake to believe population decline will mean economic decline. As stated by the Commission, ". . . we find no convincing economic arguments for continued national population growth. On the contrary, most of the plusses are on the side of slower growth (Rockefeller, 1972, p. 41)."

The prospect for the quality of life in the future is summarized when the Commission states,

The point is that continued population growth limits our options. In the case of larger population, with less land per person and more people to accommodate, there are fewer alternatives, less room for diversity, less room for error. To cope with continued growth, technology must advance; life styles must change. Slower population growth offers us the difference between choice and necessity, between prudence and living dangerously (Rockefeller, 1972, p. 52).

### Parenthood Myths

In the past the population needed to increase. Mortality rates were high and the agricultural society depended on children to help out. Religious overtones affected people's views toward parenthood. Intercourse when the conception of offspring was prevented was seen as being wicked, and therefore parenthood legitimized sex. Also, sex meant babies as reliable contraception measures were unavailable. However today the need is seen for population stabilization. Just as our culture depended on increased reproduction for survival in the past, today survival depends on limiting that reproduction. Sexual liberation has advanced the predominant attitude that sex is more than a procreative act. Effective contraception provides a means of preventing conception and thus separates sex and reproduction also. Yet there remains with us the prevailing attitude that parenthood is the duty and destiny

of every couple. Dr. John A. Lorraine (1970) summarizes this pervasive pro-parenthood attitude when he says,

. . . virtually all governments expound pro-natalist policies while the great majority of propaganda to which we are exposed by the mass-media of communication has similar flavor. Bachelors and spinsters are derided, the childless couple is criticized and even only children are frowned upon. . . . Another attitude which is highly persistent is one of respect and even admiration for the matriarch with her large number of children, and even in the world of 1970 articles appear in our newspapers and programs are shown on our television screen lauding such reproductive activity (p. 190).

Women's Liberation and groups such as the National Organization for Non-Parents (NON) are working mightily to dispel the myths perpetuating pro-natalism. It is their conviction that until the myths are dispelled, freedom of choice regarding parenthood is encumbered.

Of necessity, the parenthood myths promote population growth. Demythologizing parenthood can help control population by eliminating any compulsory effect the myths have had on couples. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the growth of the myths and how they are maintained, for until they are disposed of, childlessness is suppressed by social stigma.

Attitudes Sustaining the Myths

Because women are biologically endowed to have children it has been assumed that they are also biologically endowed with the desire to have children (Silverman & Silverman, 1971). Strenuous efforts are now being made to disprove the maternal instinct myth. Dr. William Goode, past president of the American Sociological Association says,

There are no instincts. There are reflexes, like eye-blinking, and drives, like sex. There is no innate drive for children. Otherwise, the enormous cultural pressures that there are to produce wouldn't exist (Rollin, 1970, p. 15).

The myth is instinct--the reality is socialization. Women are socialized to the role of motherhood since childhood when presented with baby dolls so that they can play "mommy" (Limmer, 1972).

Business and the media contribute to parenthood myths as their livelihood is at least partially dependent on the survival of these myths. "What is beyond debate is that the cumulative message of the media is that motherhood is beautiful and a woman without children is an unhappy woman indeed (Radl, 1972, p. 6)." American business creates a market for its products through advertising. If it advertises the parenthood myths and Americans buy them, then business can be assured that people will buy the

products which will make the myths come true for them. The media further support the myth because it survives on the advertising (Radl, 1972).

A myth currently being dismissed is the alleged association between divorce and childlessness. The prevalent belief in the 1930's and 1940's was that having children was a form of insurance against family disintegration. Children supposedly were what made couples happy and the fact that 71 percent of the childless marriages ended in divorce seemed to confirm this (Monahan, 1955). However, once other possibilities concerning divorce and childlessness were considered the assumed cause and effect relationship of childlessness and divorce came under more careful scrutiny.

It is popularly assumed that children and marital happiness go together and are causally related. This notion is part of our folklore, and at first glance it seems to be given support by the fact that over half of all divorces involve childless couples, suggesting that children hold a marriage together. But these statistics are deceptive, since most divorces occur in the early years of marriage before many couples would normally start their childbearing and, furthermore, the association of divorce with childlessness does not prove that these are causally related . . . . (Christensen, 1968, p. 284).

Pressures to bear children are experienced by couples in other respects, too. Parents want grandchildren.

Peers starting their families tend to focus their interests on childrearing. So as not to be left out the childless couple assumes the new role of parenthood too. Parenthood still is seen as one of the most obvious proofs of maleness and femaleness. Also, it is thought to give purpose to life and to be an insurance against loneliness in old age (Peck, 1972).

Behavioral scientists are expressing the need for such attitudes to change. In a recent study a panel of five authorities--a sociologist, two psychiatrists, a marriage counselor, and an anthropologist rated various attitudes on a continuum. If they thought the attitude was totally desirable it was scored with a one. A totally undesirable attitude was scored with an 11, and intermittent desirability was scored accordingly. The following is a list of some of the attitudes rated and the panel's average score:

1. People would probably think I had some physical problem if I remained childless--7.8
2. If I did not have children I would be lonely in my old age--7.6
3. Women who do not have children are going against nature--8.2

4. The desire for a couple's parents for grand-children should not play a part in their decision to have children--1.8

5. If I did not have a child I would feel as though I were a social outcast--9.0

6. Sexual relations are sinful if children are not desired--9.0

7. If I did not have children I would be selfish--8.6

8. I would not be truly feminine if I never had children--8.0

9. Women should become mothers because this is their traditional role in society--7.6

10. A woman's capability to bear children does not also mean that she has the capacity to raise them--2.6

11. Becoming a mother is the best way for a young married woman to develop into a mature responsible adult--7.2

12. Husbands and wives can have a great deal in common even if they do not have children--3.0

13. Childbearing is not a God-given obligation that all women must assume--2.8

14. There are many valuable contributions that women can make to the world instead of children--3.2

15. Personally, I do not think there is anything wrong with a woman who does not desire children--3.0

16. Having a baby is generally not a good way to cure a troubled marriage--3.0

17. I can understand how certain women would derive more self-satisfaction from a career than from motherhood--2.2

The same questionnaire was also given to 28 mothers and 19 non-mothers. Those women who had attended college showed a great tendency to agree with the panel, while those never attending college showed only slight agreement. With regard to education, it was concluded that the more educated a woman was the less likely she was to view motherhood as the proper role for all women and the more likely she was to see that there are alternatives to motherhood. Women who had large families showed less agreement with the panel than did women with small families. Working mothers showed greater agreement than those not employed outside the home. Childlessness influenced agreement too. Those women who definitely did not want children were in 100 percent accord with the panel. The variable of age was also considered.

The average age of the childless women answering the form was 23 and all of them, including those who eventually planned to have children, tended to show a high degree of agreement with the experts.

This might be a result of the increasing awareness among young women today that institutions of society--business, higher education, and the profession--open to them are expanding and that motherhood is no longer the only role that offers them status, prestige, recognition, and a feeling of accomplishment and usefulness (Silverman & Silverman, 1971, p. 202).

#### Women's Changing Role

The expression that a woman's place is in the home with the children is one myth which recently has been vehemently attacked. Research is verifying the new ideology that a woman can be more than a wife and mother. Using the California Test of Personality to test groups of married mothers and women never married, Luther Baker concluded,

As measured by this test, there is no support for the assumption that adequate personal and social adjustment is possible to women only if they marry and bear children . . . .Furthermore, just as a man is able to make a creative contribution to some significant society and . . . achieve a high sense of personal worth without ever impregnating a woman, so a woman can accomplish a similar sense of personal fulfillment without ever having been impregnated by a man (Baker cited by Silverman & Silverman, 1972, p. 177).

Whether the new ideology will be represented by the behavior of today's young women is still to be seen. Up to now wives have become mothers in six out of seven marriages (Sirjamaki, 1970). According to research done on the Montana State University campus, attitudes about raising a family are changing.

There has been a drastic change in the way students consider raising a family to be essential or important to them. In five years (1968-1973) there was a drop from 75 percent to 50 percent of the freshmen women who considered raising a family to be essential or important (A. Suvak, personal communication, February 27, 1974).

The important factor for population stabilization is whether these women's future behavior will be congruent with their present attitudes. Effective contraception provides the means for the behavior to represent the attitudes.

#### Contraception

Effective contraception allows today's generation the option of not having children. Voluntary sterilization is considered the most certain way to avoid unwanted pregnancies (Manisoff, 1969). Female sterilization for contraception has not been prevalent in the U. S. and it is only recently that male sterilization by means of vasectomy has become popular (Fried, 1972).

Oral contraception, considered to be nearly 100 percent effective when taken according to instruction, became available for prescription sale in 1961. By 1965 it was the most frequently used contraception and in 1971 nearly one-fourth of the 40 million women of childbearing age were using it (Westoff & Westoff, 1971). In comparison, the most frequently used contraceptive method in 1935 was withdrawal and in 1955 it was the condom (Himes, 1963). A rating based on clinical experience and statistical studies classes sterilization and oral contraception in Group 1, most effective; the condom in Group 2, highly effective; and withdrawal in Group 4, less effective (Calderone, 1965). Modern couples have available and are using methods of greater effectiveness than couples of yesteryear. Consequently, they have greater biological control over voluntary childlessness.

#### Fertility Trends and Differences

The traditional negative correlation between family size and education, income, occupation, and place of residence for different socioeconomic classes is disappearing. The differences are still present but not to the extreme that they existed for cohorts 20-30 years ago.

. . .there are indications that the family size desired by the higher-income, better-educated, and urban groups has increased, while that desired by the lower-income, less educated and rural groups has declined. It is not yet certain that such changes in attitudes are permanent, but there is substantial evidence that they have occurred (Freedman, 1969, p. 273).

It cannot be assumed that trends in childlessness necessarily correlate with general fertility trends as to be childless is something quite different than to have only one or two children. Therefore the relationship between childlessness and socioeconomic factors needs to be examined separately.

### Childlessness

#### Age

The age of the wife has a profound effect on the fertility of a couple. Studies show that among those who marry early, there are fewer childless wives and they bear more children on the average than do women marrying late in life (Nimkoff, 1947; Grabill & Glick, 1959; Winch, 1963). This phenomenon can most prominently be linked with women's decreased reproductive capability in later life due to menopause. Therefore, the trend undoubtedly will continue through the 1970's. There is some indication though that more young women are expecting to remain childless than in

the past. In 1972 more than twice as many wives 18 to 24 years of age (prime childbearing time) expected to remain childless than wives of that age in 1967--3.6 percent compared to 1.3 percent. Four percent of the wives 25 to 29 years in 1972 expected to remain childless as compared to 2.2 percent of the wives that age in 1967 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1973).

#### Residence

The 1972 Census illustrates less childlessness for women in nonmetropolitan than metropolitan areas as well as less in farm than nonfarm areas for all age groups (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1973). The same situation was also depicted in earlier studies (Nimkoff, 1947; Grabill & Glick, 1959).

#### Income and Occupation

Previously the childless couple was most likely to be of the upper and middle income (Winch, 1952 & 1963). The Census of June 1972 shows that between the ages of 25 and 44 more wives with family incomes of \$10,000 or more are childless than wives of the same age group but with family incomes of less than \$10,000. However, fewer wives with family incomes above \$10,000 are childless than

those with incomes below \$10,000 in the age group of 15 to 24 years (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1973). This could be related to the probable combination that few wives have completed their families by 24 or have achieved an income that high yet. It might also mean that the younger ones see a relationship between children and poverty and refrain from parenthood because they do not think they can financially afford it.

Because there is a close relationship between income and occupation, it makes sense that the fertility trend corresponding to income would be repeated for occupation. Fertility is higher among laborers than professionals. And, accordingly, childlessness has been greater among white collar workers than among blue collar workers. The lowest rates of childlessness have been found among nonfarm laborers, farm laborers, and farmers in the past (Grabill & Glick, 1957; Brinkerhoff, Hundly, & Kunz, 1973). Looking at the wife's occupation, S. L. Rao (1974) found young housewives to have the least percent childless and white collar workers to have the highest. However, these observations were made of women less than 30 years old and therefore could be just an indication of differences in occupations for postponing motherhood. Of wives 30 to 49,

those of blue collar occupations had the highest percentage childless, followed by white collar workers, service workers, and housewives respectively. Service workers had the highest percentage childless for women 50 and over followed by white collar workers, housewives, and blue collar workers. When considering childlessness and women's occupations Rao cautions that causality must be considered: Childlessness reduces family responsibilities and therefore allows women greater opportunity to pursue careers.

#### Religion

Of the two major religions in the United States, Catholics universally have higher fertility than Protestants. It is logical then that Catholic families are childless less often than Protestant families. In his work, Rao (1974) found a substantially higher proportion of childless Protestants than childless Catholics.

#### Education

"The American college graduate tends to marry later and procreate later, and to have fewer children per family or to form childless families (Rockefeller, 1972, p. 93). This statement is substantiated for previous years also (Gamble, 1947; Grabill & Glick, 1959; Kirkpatrick, 1955 &

1963). However there is question whether this trend will continue. Rao (1974) remarks that if the data for the women 30 to 49 in the group he studied is a significant indicator of future levels of childlessness, ". . .the educational differentials beyond the eighth grade in permanent childlessness have disappeared (p. 154)."

#### Total Number Childless

Throughout history there has been an erratic distribution of childlessness in the United States. But generally the number of women remaining childless has gradually decreased since the great Depression.

After the Civil War, 8.3 percent of married white women had never borne children. A half century later, following World War I, the percentage childless rose to 14.3 percent. By 1930 and the Depression years it had reached nearly 20 percent--the highest incidence of childlessness recorded. By 1937 it fell again, to 17.7 percent and in the mid-1940's was 17.0 percent (Winch, 1963). The 1950's showed a marked decline in childlessness--from 19.0 percent in 1950 to 11 percent in 1959 (Kirkpatrick, 1963). Throughout the 1960's and into the 1970's the percent of childless wives has remained at about 12 percent (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1969; Rockefeller, 1972).

### Voluntary Childlessness and Involuntary Childlessness

The extent of the voluntary or involuntary aspects of childlessness is difficult to determine and consequently appraisals vary. In the late 1930's estimates suggested that from two-thirds to three-fourths of all childlessness was involuntary (Kiser, 1939). The 1950's presented a somewhat altered estimation. Winch (1952) found that ". . .involuntary sterility probably accounts for no more than one-half, or possibly two-thirds, of the childless marriages (p. 184)." Recently a study suggested that, ". . .about half of the childless completed families are of the fertile type and about half are of the sterile type (Li, Rao, & Waller, 1973, p. 138)."

### Reasons for Fertility Decline

Very little has been learned about why couples choose to remain childless, however several authorities offer suggestions as to why fertility in general is declining. These suggestions may have some influence on voluntary childlessness.

In most countries of the Western world, war seems to produce a generalized pattern characterized by an increase of fertility with the coming of war, a mid-war decline, and a post war 'baby boom.' In general an economic depression and internal disturbance tend to decrease fertility (Kirkpatrick, 1963, p. 517).

In the 1940's commentators emphasized material wealth and social status as factors contributing to lower fertility.

Many men graduating from college today enter the business world with the feeling that their primary mission is to earn prestige and power against competition. Because children may interfere with the attainment of such goals, they tend to be relegated to, at least, a second place in the value hierarchy (Gamble, 1947, p. 360).

Winch (1952) commented on the inhibitory effect the fear of pregnancy had on fertility.

There is a set of attitudes centering upon the physiological consequences of pregnancy. Of these, fear of death in childbirth is perhaps the most widespread. . . .more over, there is an emotional basis for the development of negative attitudes toward pregnancy. A woman may feel that such loss in her physical attractiveness as might be the consequence of bearing children would make her relationship with her husband less secure (p. 202).

Winch (1952) also mentioned inhospitable urban living conditions as deterrents to large families. Gamble (1947) likewise delved into urbanization's effect on fertility:

The trend toward urbanization has brought smaller homes with financial, education, and recreational centers outside them. As a result, children have become an increasing economic burden and thus less desirable because they contribute less to the family economy, their education costs more, and their parents' freedom for entertainment is limited (p. 361).

The cost of raising children is frequently mentioned as a stimulus keeping family size down. In 1944 it cost \$7,763 to raise one child to the age of 18 for a family with an income of \$2500. If the income was \$10,000, the cost jumped to \$16,337. When the loss of the wife's earning potential was considered, the cost was even more drastic (Winch, 1952). By 1969 the estimate for raising the first child, including the cost of a college education and the earnings foregone by the mother not working, was \$59,627 (Rockefeller, 1972).

Another factor considered relevant to decline in family size is age at marriage. In 1959 the median age for men at their first marriage was 22.5 and 20.2 for women. In 1970 it was 23.2 for men and 20.8 for women (Rockefeller, 1972). The age of the woman is especially important because the older she is at marriage the less childbearing time she has left.

#### Reasons for Childlessness

Paul Popenoe's study at University College, University of Southern California in 1936 is one of the few, and probably the most extensive, studies done regarding the motivation of childless marriages. Dr. Popenoe's

detailed enumeration of presumed reasons for voluntary childlessness, in the order of frequency is as follows:

- (1) self-centered--this was not equated with selfishness but rather with a feeling that children would interfere with the couple's way of living (travel, pursuit of active social career, involvement in community and politics, etc.);
- (2) wife's career; (3) economic pressure; (4) health;
- (5) dislike of children; (6) genetics--histories of inherited mental or physical illness; and (7) marital discord. The attitude of the time toward childlessness can be detected in Dr. Popenoe's summary.

The present method indicates that the great bulk of the voluntarily childless marriages are motivated by individualism, competitive consumption economically, and an infantile, self-indulgent, frequently neurotic attitude toward life . . . (1936, p. 472).

It should be noted that Dr. Popenoe did not ask the childless couples their reasons, but had observers report on the childless marriages which they knew intimately. Whether the results would have been the same had the couples given their reasons first hand may only be surmised.

According to Ellen Peck (1972), today the two usual reasons for voluntary childlessness are: (1) awareness of ecology and the problem of population explosion, and (2) the desire for wider personal experiences.

In looking at the new concept of "childfree" rather than "childless" marriages, Anna and Arnold Silverman (1971) say,

These are the so called 'make love, not babies' marriages in which both husband and wife feel that childbearing would interfere with their careers, education, or other goals. This attitude can be traced to two sources. The first is that higher education is making more and more young men and women aware of the many alternatives available for personal fulfillment outside of traditional family life. For many of these couples the suburban home, the two cars, and the 2.3 children are a moribund dream of another generation; a static and sterile way of life that restricts individual development and expression by promoting security over freedom. The second source is the flowering of Women's Liberation that not only makes women aware of their options but provides them with the psychological strength to take them (p. 148).

## Chapter 3

### PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was threefold. The first purpose was to determine from C- couples their reasons for being childless. The second purpose was to determine from C+ couples the reasons or motivations they impute to C- couples. The final purpose was to examine certain demographic variables (age, religion, education, occupation, income, number of years married, and type of contraception used) and determine their relationship to C+ and C- status.

#### Population Description and Sampling Procedure

In order to obtain a wide variety of sociological backgrounds for examination, four groups were sampled-- community parent, university parent, community non-parent, and university non-parent.

The community parent population was all presently married Bozeman community couples with children ages zero to 21 as of October, 1973. This group was selected from the 1973 County Superintendent of Schools' census which records children to age 21.

The university parent population was all presently married couples with one or both partners attending Montana State University as of September, 1973 and having children

ages zero to 21. They were selected from the 1973-74 Nursing Services Center's list of university students with children.

The community non-parent population for the research included all those names in the June, 1973 Bozeman telephone directory not listed in the superintendent's census as having children ages zero to 21, and listed in the 1973 Polk's Bozeman City Directory as being presently married and not a student. This portion of the population was a limitation to the research as it could not be ascertained whether these couples had children over 21 years of age.

The population of university non-parents included those presently married couples with one or both partners attending MSU and living in the Peter Koch or Nelson Story residence towers, which units are reserved for couples without children.

Fifty couples from each of the four categories were selected by means of systematic sampling from the County Superintendent of Schools' census, the census prepared by the Nursing Services Center, the Bozeman telephone directory, and the housing list of Peter Koch and Nelson Story residents. The total number eligible in each list was determined and then every  $n^{\text{th}}$  couple

needed to obtain fifty couples ( $n = \frac{T}{50}$ , where T is the total number eligible in each individual list) was selected.

The possibility that couples had moved, separated, or died since their names were recorded on the various lists was an unavoidable limitation to the sampling technique.

#### Instrument

All the couples selected were asked individually to complete the researcher designed questionnaire. A mailed questionnaire rather than personal interviews was used in order to obtain more responses. It was also believed that the anonymity of a questionnaire would encourage more forthright responses.

The instrument included questions regarding socio-economic and parental status, and questions regarding reasons couples might have for voluntarily remaining childless. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and detailing instructions for completing and returning it was included in every envelope. A sample cover letter and questionnaire are in Appendices A and B.

Validity

Members of the Home Economics faculty, graduate students and five couples not in the sample reviewed the questionnaire for pertinence, comprehension, and interpretation. Their suggestions were implemented and when the researcher was satisfied that the instrument would obtain the desired information, it was mailed.

Method of Collecting Data

Each couple received by mail a cover letter, two questionnaires (so that the husband and wife could reply as individuals rather than as a couple), and an enclosed addressed and stamped envelope. Participants were coded according to the room number of the return address so that a follow-up reminder letter and questionnaires could be sent to those participants not responding within ten days after the initial correspondence was mailed. No follow-up letters were sent as the total number of questionnaires returned seemed satisfactory. However after the data was analyzed it was noted that follow-up letters to community couples should have been mailed in an effort to increase the number of returns from that part of the sample.

Data Analysis

The data were coded for electronic data processing and transferred to the Montana State University computer center for statistical analysis.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

#### Sample

The returns analyzed included 78 couples from the 200 sampled--or 39 percent. Six additional responses were disregarded as they were returns of just one partner of the couple.

Four of the couples responding were of the C- category and 74 couples were C+. The four C- women (5.13% of the women in the final sample) was less than the national average of 12 percent quoted by the Commission. As Li, Rao, and Waller (1953) estimated that half of all childlessness is voluntary, it might be assumed that of the Commission's stated 12 percent childless, six percent are so voluntarily and six percent are so involuntarily. The 5.13 percent childless from the sample of this research were so voluntarily.

#### Characteristics of Sample

##### Age

The group analyzed was a youthful one with 69 percent of the respondents being less than 30 years old. Most likely this was due to the fact that one-half of the

questionnaires were mailed to university students. Student questionnaires accounted for 61.5 percent of the returned questionnaires from couples whereas only 38.5 percent were from the community. This might be explained by the students' greater interest in this type of research or their greater willingness to cooperate because of the student status of the researcher. Table 1 shows the distribution of age groups for C+ and C- couples.

Table 1  
Age of C+ and C-\* Respondents

Age	C+ N	C- N
15-19	7	0
20-24	47	4
25-29	47	3
30-34	11	1
35-39	4	0
40-44	7	0
45-49	7	0
50-54	7	0
55-59	5	0
over 59	6	0

\*C+ represents people who are or intend to be parents  
C- represents people choosing to remain childless

Eighty-two percent of the women in the final sample fell between the ages of 15 and 39 (normal child-bearing time). The 1972 United States census recorded that 4.1 percent of the wives between 14 and 39 years expected to be childless (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1973). Consequently, four C- women (5.13%) in the final sample was what could be expected for the age group represented.

Though the number of childless couples was within normal limits for such a young sample, it was the small size of the C- group (eight people) that made statistical analysis of questionable value. Consequently, in most cases, emphasis was placed on descriptive statistics rather than statistical inferences in the examination of the data.

#### Marital Status

All of the C- couples had been married for 0-5 years and over half of the C+ couples were in this recently married range also. This was probably due to the large percentage of young people in the sample who, because of their age, had really not had the opportunity to be married longer.

Religion

An interesting phenomenon occurred in the religion category. As depicted in Table 2, all of the C- couples were represented in the Other, Non-Christian and None classifications.

Table 2  
Religion of C+ and C-\* Respondents

Religion	C+ N	C- N
Jewish	1	0
Catholic	21	0
Protestant	88	0
Mormon	3	0
Other, Christian	17	0
Other, Non-Christian	0	2
None	17	6
No Response	1	0

\*C+ represents people who are or intend to be parents  
C- represents people choosing to remain childless

Eighty-three percent of the C+ couples designated themselves as of Christian beliefs. It might be that C- couples deliberately shy away from Christian religions because of

any emphasis placed on reproduction and family by these groups. Or perhaps the overall philosophies of C- people do not coincide with the teachings of the religion. Further research is needed regarding this.

### Education

The educational level of those returning the questionnaire was high. This was probably accounted for by the fact that one-half of the sample were university students. All of the C- couples had had some college education and half of them were college graduates. Eighty percent of the C+ couples had either had some college education or were college graduates, or post graduates. Education then was not a distinguishing factor between C+ and C- couples. However, the level of education for C- couples was in keeping with the high level of education for childless people as noted in the literature (Rockefeller, 1972).

### Income

There was no clearly evident separation between C+ and C- couples with regard to income. As is shown in Table 3 about one-half of C+ couples indicated an income of

\$10,000 or less and about half indicated one of more than \$10,000.

Table 3  
Combined Family Income of C+ and C-\* Respondents

Income	C+ N	C- N
\$ 0-\$ 3,000	18	3
\$ 3,001-\$ 5,000	27	0
\$ 5,001-\$10,000	42	3
\$10,001-\$15,000	30	2
\$15,001-\$20,000	15	0
\$20,001-\$25,000	7	0
\$25,001-\$30,000	5	0
over \$30,000	4	0

\*C+ represents people who are or intend to be parents  
C- represents people choosing to remain childless

Three of the C- couples (six people) had an income less than \$10,000 and one was within the \$10,001-\$15,000 range. One couple was not in consensus about their income as one partner marked the \$0-\$3,000 category and the other marked the \$5,001-\$10,000 category. A possible reason for this

discrepancy was that the wife mistakenly marked what her earnings were alone instead of the combined income. The economic pattern displayed by this sample seems to follow the emerging pattern of greater childlessness being less confined to high income. It should be kept in mind however that young people usually have not yet established high incomes.

#### Occupation

The occupation marked by most C+ couples was professional, technical, manager, administrator, and related workers, followed by student and then housewife (See Table 4). Voluntarily childless people most frequently marked sales worker. When housewife and student were considered as white collar workers along with professional, sales, and clerical workers, 89 percent of C+ couples were included and 100 percent of C- couples. Therefore, occupation for this sample was not a characterizing factor.

Table 4

## Occupation of C+ and C-\* Respondents

Occupation	C+ N	C- N
housewife	24	1
student	41	2
professional, technical, manager, administrator, & related workers	50	2
sales worker	2	3
clerical & related workers	14	0
craftsmen, foremen & related workers	3	0
operatives, including transport	0	0
service worker	8	0
laborers, except farm	1	0
agricultural	5	0

\*C+ represents people who are or intend to be parents  
C- represents people choosing to remain childless

Contraceptives Used

If more than one contraceptive method was being used, that which was the more effective was scored.

Table 5

## Contraceptives Used by C+ and C-\* Respondents

Contraception	C+ N	C- N
None	31	0
Sterilization	24	2
Pill	69	2
IUD	12	2
Diaphragm with contraceptive jelly or cream	4	2
Cervical cap	0	0
Condom	6	0
Foams, jellies, or creams alone	0	0
Rhythm	2	0

\*C+ represents people who are or intend to be parents  
 C- represents people choosing to remain childless

As shown in Table 5, the pill was the method most often used by the C+ group, followed by no method and by sterilization. Those in the "None" category evidently were attempting to have the family they had indicated they wanted, were already pregnant, or were post menopausal and had no need for contraception. Those using an effective

means of contraception evidently were attempting to postpone new additions to their family, had completed their family, or were not yet ready to begin their family. The C- couples were evenly divided among four categories--sterilization, the pill, the IUD, and the diaphragm with contraceptive jelly or cream. The latter couple was also using the condom. Therefore all C- couples were using highly effective means to achieve their ends.

In general, the respondents were young, Protestant, well educated, white collar workers of middle income currently using some form of effective contraception.

#### Reasons for Childlessness

The way C- and C+ people responded to the reasons for childlessness was examined to determine whether disparity existed between the groups. The C- people were indicating the importance the various reasons had for them choosing to be childless and the C+ people were indicating the importance of the reasons they imputed to C- couples.

A  $\bar{z}$  ratio for a difference between means was used to determine for which reasons there was a difference between mean responses of C+ and C- people. The results of the test are indicated in Table of Appendix C. On nine of the 22 reasons on the questionnaire, there was a

difference significant at the .05 level between the means. In all but one of the nine reasons the difference was a result of the C- people saying the reason was of less importance to them than the C+ people imputed. Three of these reasons centered around a physical theme--fear of pregnancy, genetic fear, and unwillingness to lose attractiveness. The C+ people might have designated greater importance to these reasons than did the C- people because these are concrete concerns which they themselves had probably experienced. They are less likely to have experienced the more philosophic reasons of C- people. The others had no apparent relationship to one another but individually were concerned with finance, prior experience, commitment, social status, and parental abilities. Like the physically oriented reasons, finance and prior experience are tangible reasons which possibly were easier for the C+ individuals to relate to. Personal identification with a reason may have been influential in increasing the level of importance ascribed to it by the C+ individual. The reasons of commitment, social status, and parental abilities have negative connotations in our society and possibly could have been more difficult for C- couples to admit to because of their own self concept. Or it may have

been the result of a negative attitude C+ people have about C- people.

Disparity in the opposite direction was noted for the reason concerned with the desire to have more time, money, and energy to share with one's spouse. The C- respondents assigned a higher level of importance to this reason than the C+ respondents imputed. As is shown in Table 6, the emphasis on the marital relationship was a concern of two other reasons also.

Table 6  
Reasons for Childlessness

Reasons		3	2	1	0	$\bar{x}$	$\bar{z}$
		N	N	N	N		
more to share with spouse	C+*	21	66	61	0	1.73	-2.397
	C-	4	3	1	0	2.38	
higher marital satisfaction	C+	24	61	63	0	1.74	-1.093
	C-	4	1	3	0	2.13	
rival demands	C+	12	53	82	1	1.51	1.668
	C-	0	2	5	1	1.13	

\*C+ represents people who are or intend to be parents  
C- represents people choosing to remain childless

A fairly high mean score (2.13) was assigned by C-respondents to the reason specifically concerned with the belief that marital satisfaction would be higher without children. It was indicated, then, that the marital relationship was very meaningful to C- couples and they felt children might interfere with the relationship. However their response to the question concerning the rival effect children might have in their relationship was a comparatively low mean score--1.13. Perhaps they thought this reason had connotations of immaturity involved with it.

The C+ couples gave lower mean scores to the reasons concerned with having more to share with one's spouse and with higher marital satisfaction than did C- couples. However, they thought that the question dealing with the rival demands children might create was more important than C- couples did. This might have been an indication of C+ couples denying that children have had or will have any negative effect on the marital relationship. It possibly was indicative of their projecting immaturity on C- couples also.

A total score was determined for each individual by summing the scores given to each of the 22 reasons. A high total score designated high anxiety toward parenthood

(or imputed high anxiety) and a low total score was related to low anxiety. The highest total any C- person received was 49 (of 66 possible) and the lowest was 22 (of 22 possible). The mean for C- people was 37.38. The highest total any C+ person received was 59 and the lowest was 22. The mean for C+ people was 40.18. The ratio for difference between means showed no significant difference between them.

Table 7 shows the abbreviated reasons in rank order of importance for C+ and C- people based on means.

The Spearman Rho rank difference test was used to compare the ranked list of the C+ couples with that of the C- couples. The results showed no significance at the .05 level. This indicated that the lists were in substantial disagreement.











































