

Life Course and Structural Factors in Childlessness: The Waiting Game and Constrained Choices in the Second Demographic Transition

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Introduction: Structural Contexts and the Waiting Game

The levels of childlessness have been in the range of 10 to 20 percent of women at ages 45 and over. The rates reached their lowest levels in the generations born in the 1920s and early 1930s that gave birth to the baby boom. In effect, an important part of the baby boom was associated with higher proportions marrying and having children. The cohorts born in the early 1960s, the end of the baby boom, are the latest cohorts on which the level of childlessness can be estimated as women would have reached the end of their childbearing age. These cohorts born in the early 1960s are showing proportions without children that are in the range of 20 percent.

Childlessness has increased with the delays in life course transitions and the changing normative context of the second demographic transition. For the generations that gave birth to the baby boom, there was strong pressure to have children, and the alternative of “childless by choice” faced significant opposition in family and social circles (Veevers, 1980). However, the second demographic transition that started in the 1960s brought about the understanding that fertility should be desired, and that it is legitimate to be “child free” in the pursuit of alternative life goals. With the rise in levels of divorce in the late 1960s, higher levels of cohabitation in the 1970s, along with delays in home leaving and union formation, uniformity in family behaviour decreased and the valuation of diversity and choice increased. In Roussel’s (1989) terms, family formation has become a “projet de couple” rather than conforming to an established structure.

While variety and choice are valued, young people at the beginning of adult ages indicate high priorities to three life goals: having satisfying work, living in an enduring union, and having children. These goals are largely placed in this order, both as priorities and within the life course sequence of events. The first goal is to establish economic independence, including not being economically dependent on a spouse or partner. There is also largely the goal of having “life as a couple” before having children. In this picture, the unexpected difficulties in establishing the work life and the enduring relationship can interfere with the original desire to have children.

These life course and structural factors can be further theorized as constrained decision making. Childlessness could be seen as a result of decision making processes that take place within structural and normative contexts, usually, over a protracted period of the life course. Veevers (1980: 20-29) argues that most couples do not make direct decision to be childless. Rather, childlessness is a result of “a waiting game”, or a series of postponement of child-bearing when transition from wanting to not wanting children occurs in stages, the first of which is postponing child-bearing for a definite time (say, after getting a satisfactory job), followed by postponement for an indefinite time (as when the couple feel ready to have a child), then, a period of deliberation of the pros and cons of parenthood acknowledging the possibility of not having children; and finally, acceptance of permanent childlessness.

Other life domains such as schooling and work impose structural context to one’s life course, with impacts on family life, including child-bearing. These domains have drastically changes over the past decades especially for women. In 1911 in Canada, for example, only about 1% of persons aged 20-24 were attending school; this increased to 8% in 1961, and to 48% in 1996 (Clark, 2000:4; Beaujot, Ravanera, and Burch, 2007). Between 1976 and 2001, the proportion of women aged 16 to 24 attending school full time increased from 30.7% to 52.5% (Morissette

2002:33). A similar trend has occurred with regards to paid work. In 1901 only 16.1% of women aged 15 and over were in the labour force, but this proportion increased in subsequent decades reaching 58% by 1996 (Beaujot, 2000: 144). By 2001, 51.9% of women were working full time, and 22.4% had part-time employment (Beaujot, Ravanera and Burch, 2007).

Not only actual work behaviour but also preferences for, or orientation towards, work and family have influence on childbearing. Hakim (2003) categorizes women into *family-centered*, *work-centered*, and *adaptive*, with the family-centered more likely to have children, and the work-centered more likely to have fewer or no children. She estimates that majority of women (around 60%) are the adaptive type, and the family- and work-centered women in the minority with around 20% each. In Canada, preferences seem to have changed over cohorts of women. Ravanera and Rajulton (2006), for example, find that women born around 1922-40 (roughly corresponding to pre-baby boomers) were more likely to be family-centered; those born around 1941-60 (baby boomers) placed greater importance to jobs; and the 1961-80 birth cohorts (the post-boomers) were more likely to give importance to both work and family.

Icek Ajzen (2005), a social psychologist, proposes an analytic framework to trace the process by which various factors influence behaviour. In his model, *behaviour* (such as childlessness) is influenced by *intention* that is in turn determined by *attitude* toward the behaviour, subjective (or internalized) *norms*, and perceived *control* over the behaviour, each of which is influenced by *beliefs*. The behavioural, normative and control beliefs are influenced by background variables including personal, cultural and situational factors (such as education, income, religion, and place of residence) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005). In this model, the typology of preferences proposed by Hakim (2003) could conceivably be viewed in terms of attitudes conditioned by certain beliefs.

Ajzen's framework has been used in the analysis linking intentions to actual fertility behaviour in European countries with longitudinal panel data (Philipov, Speeder, and Billari 2006; Testa and Toulemon 2006). Some of the important conclusions from the study include the following: factors influencing intentions change over the life course, wider societal contexts plays very important role in fertility behaviour, and childbearing needs to be seen as an evolving sequence of decisions (Vienna Institute of Demography 2007:29).

This paper presents the Canadian trends in childlessness and in the intention to remain childless, with some comparisons to other developed countries. We then use the 2006 General Social Survey on Families to study the determinants of childlessness and intention to remain childfree for women aged 30-49. Women aged 40-49 were born between 1957 and 1966, the last 10 years of the baby boom, and women aged 30-39 were born from 1967 to 1976, often referred to as "post-boomers" or "generation X". That is, we study childlessness and the intention to remain childless through the ages of respondents, their work orientation, and the marital and work constraints within which they are located. But first, we describe briefly the data and the methods of analysis.

Data and Methods

The General Social Survey on Family Transitions, conducted in 2006 by Statistics Canada, has for its target population all persons aged 15 years and older in Canada excluding residents of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, and full time residents of institutions (Statistics Canada, 2008). It gathered information about the respondents as well as some information about their households. The topics covered included parental history, home-leaving, marital and common-law unions, fertility and fertility intentions, social networks, main work activities and education.

There were 23,608 respondents to the survey. In this analysis we focus on 4755 women aged 30-49, though in some procedures, we excluded 309 who did not respond to the question on intended fertility. Results of the analysis are presented for 10-year birth cohorts, with focus on 5-year birth cohorts where deemed appropriate.

With data that are cross-sectional and with no direct information on attitudes and beliefs, we bring into the analysis a semblance of sequential decision-making and the psychological processes in the following ways:

- A separate analysis is done for two 10-year birth cohorts to capture the differences in the influence of background variables at different stages of the life course.
- Both childlessness and intention to remain childfree are analyzed instead of just one or the other.
- We derived a *work-family* orientation variable from two sets of information: (a) usual number of work hours per week (to categorize respondents into *full-time* for those working 35 hours or more per week, *part-time* with less than 35 hours of work, or *not employed*) and (b) work preferences (with responses that are categorized as: fewer hours for less pay, more hours for more pay, the same hours for the same pay, and none of the above.). The combination of these two variables allowed categorization of women into *family-centered*, *balanced*, or *work-centered*.

In the interpretation of our findings, we take advantage of the concepts of sequential decision-making.

We use three logistic regression models for multivariate analysis. For the dependent variable in Model 1, childless women are assigned a value of “1” and women who have children a value of “0”. In Model 2, women intending to remain childfree are assigned a value of “1” and women who have or are intending to have children a value of “0”. Finally, in Model 3, the analysis is confined to childless women with women intending to remain childfree assigned a value of “1”, and women still intending to have a child a value of “0”.

The following were used as independent variables: age group and marital status (as *life course* indicators), religion and religiosity (as indirect indicators of *norms*), respondent’s education and personal income (as indicator of *structural* variables at the individual level) family-work orientation (as an indicator of *attitude*), and region of residence (to capture variation over *geographic* area).

Sampling weights were used in all the analysis.

The results of the bivariate and multivariate analysis in their entirety can be found in Appendix Tables 1 and 2. For ease in presentation, parts of the Appendix Tables are extracted and embedded in the discussion as Tables 2A to 2C (for the bivariate), and Tables 3A to 3C (for the multivariate).

In the analysis of trends in childlessness, we also use the data from the 1991 Public Use Microdata File. The 1991 Census was the last census in Canada that asked women the number of children ever born, which we used to estimate childlessness by 5-year birth cohorts from around the turn of the 20th century. While there were also data for older cohorts from the 2006 GSS, we deemed the data from the census as more reliable and less subject to sampling error.

Levels of childlessness in other Countries and in Canada

Sardon (2006: 243-244), in his summary of the demographic patterns of developed countries, emphasizes the countries where the generations born at the end of the 1960s will include more than 20 percent of women remaining childless: Austria, Finland, England, West Germany and possibly soon Ireland and Netherlands. In contrast, Portugal shows a level under 10 percent, and the United States along with Scandinavian countries other than Finland, have levels closer to 15 percent.

In their summary of “30 years below replacement,” Frejka, Hoem, Sobotka and Toulemon (2008; Vienna Institute of Demography, 2007: 35) observe that in Austria, as well as in other countries in Western Europe, the proportion of women who have two children over their lifetime has risen steadily. The family size of two children is the most common for all cohorts born since WWII, while large families have declined rapidly since the baby boom; one-child families has shown little change, but childlessness has changed radically for different cohorts. The proportions of childless women in developed countries have increased in recent years (Frejka and Sardon, 2007). The levels have increased steadily for cohorts born since 1945, but the level is well below that of women born at the start of the 20th century. In their comparison across regions of Europe, the Vienna Institute of Demography (2007: 31) identifies the German-speaking countries as having particularly high levels of childlessness and intended childlessness.

The trend of childlessness in Canada is similar. As can be seen in Table 1 that uses data from the 1991 Census and the 2006 General Social Survey of Family Transitions, the lowest level of childlessness are for cohorts of women born from around 1927 to 1941. Many of the women in these cohorts were mothers of

Table 1: Proportion (%) of Childless Women by 5-year Birth Cohort, Canada

Birth cohort	Age in 1991*	Age in 2006**	Proportion (%) Childless
1972-76		30 - 34	30.5
1967-71		35 - 39	20.4
1962-66		40 - 44	19.5
1957-61		45 - 49	17.4
1952-56		50 - 54	16.6
1947-51		55 - 59	14.4
1942-46	45-49		13.9
1937-41	50-54		12.2
1932-36	55-59		12.5
1927-31	60-64		13.1
1922-26	65-69		15.0
1917-21	70-74		16.9
1912-16	75-79		19.9
1907-11	80-84		22.0
1906+	85 +		21.7

* 1991 Census PUMF

** 2006 GSS on Family Transitions

the baby boomers. The levels of childlessness increased with the 1942-1946 birth cohorts and have continued to increase with the succeeding cohorts. In 2006, the cohort of women born from 1967 are still in their 30s, and thus their high level of childlessness (20.4 for 1967-71 and 30.5 for the 1972-76 cohorts) will most likely decrease as a number of them move on to have their first birth.

The waiting game: Effects of life course variables

The intention to be childfree is low among the young. Using the 2001 Canadian General Social Survey on Family History, Stobert and Kemeny (2003) estimate that the proportion intending to remain childfree stays constant at 6 to 9 percent for men and women aged 20-34.

The trends in the levels of childlessness and intentions to remain childfree shown in Table 2A reflect the stages of postponement of childbearing culminating in acceptance of childlessness described by Veevers (1980). At age 30-34, about 30% of women are childless but only 6.8% intend to remain childfree. In their 30s, many women make a transition to motherhood and thus by ages 35-39, only 19.2% of the women are childless, although adjustments in intention to become childfree are made such that at this age the proportion intending to remain childfree increases to 10.5%. Not too many manage to have a first birth in their 40s so that at age 40-44, 19% remain childless, and further reconsideration is made in the intention to have children so that at this age, the proportion intending to remain childfree increases to 16.8%. At age 45-49, acceptance of permanent childlessness becomes evident – among the 17% still childless, almost all (or 16.4%) intend to remain childfree. (Had a real cohort been followed through from age 30 to age 49, the proportions would not be exactly the same as those presented in Table 2, however, the general trends over age in childlessness and intention to be childfree would be similar. As Edmonston, Lee and Wu (2008) note, the age effect has the most significant effect on fertility intention whereas period and cohort effects were weak or insignificant.)

Explanatory Variables	Age Group 30-39				Age Group 40-49			
	N	Total Child-less	Intend to have		N	Total Child-less	Intend to have	
			No Child	Child-ren			No Child	Child-ren
Total (%)	1927	24.2	8.8	15.4	2520	18.0	16.6	1.4
Life Course Variables								
Age Groups								
30-34/40-44	895	29.8	6.8	23.0	1245	19.0	16.8	2.2
35-39/45-49	1031	19.2	10.5	8.7	1275	17.0	16.4	0.6
Marital Status								
Married	1178	12.5	3.8	8.7	1620	12.4	11.4	1.0
Common-law	306	31.4	15.4	16.0	314	25.5	24.8	0.6
Wid/Div/Separated	142	14.7	7.7	7.0	354	10.2	9.6	0.6
Single	299	66.9	21.7	45.2	227	60.2	53.1	7.1

Note: * Excludes women with "missing data" on intention to have child/ren.
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions

Childlessness is greatly dependent not only on age but also on the family life course stage; that is, those who have made the transitions to having a relationship are less likely to be childless or to have the intention of being childfree. As seen in Table 2A, the married and formerly married have the lowest level of childlessness in both 10-year age groups. This implies that for most women, marriage is still a pre-condition for having children. This is evident also from the high proportion of childless women, expectedly among the never married (or single) but also among those in common-law unions. For those in common-law union, for example, 31% in age group 30-39 and 25.5% in age group 40-49 are childless, which are more than twice the level for the married women.

The postponement of child-bearing and eventual acceptance of childlessness could be seen from the proportions by marital status. At age 30-39, about 2/3 to a half of the childless women in each category of marital status intend to have children. At age 40-49, almost all of the childless women who are married, in common-law, or formerly married intend to remain child-free. The single are more optimistic in that 7% out of the 60% of women who are childless still intend to have children.

The influence of age and marital status remain after controlling for other variables. As seen in Model 1 in Table 3A, in comparison to women age 30-34, older women (aged 35-39) are less likely to be childless, an indication that in Canada, many women postpone childbirth to their mid-30s. Women age 35-39 are almost twice as likely as women aged 30-34 to have the intention of remaining childfree (Model 2, Table 3A). Among childless women, those aged 35-39 are 4.7 times more likely as women aged 30-34 to have the intention of remaining childfree, an indication as noted above that adjustment of intention is made as one gets older (Model 3, Table 3A). By age 40-49, the likelihood of childlessness and intentions to be childfree do not differ between age groups 40-44 and 45-49. That is, the small differences between these two age groups found in the bivariate analysis (shown in Table 2A) are shown to be statistically non-significant, particularly when other variables are controlled. (Model 3 for age group 40-49 is not shown in Table 3A as most childless women at this age intend to remain childfree and there are very few women still intending to have children.)

The influence of marital status discussed above (from the results of bivariate analysis) remains significant after controls for other variables. Thus, at both 10-year age groups, women in common-law unions and single women are significantly more likely to be childless, or to have the intention of remaining childfree. A difference between the results of the two analysis is that in the bivariate analysis (Table 2A), the proportion of single childless women aged 30-39 intending to remain childfree is half the proportion of those intending to have children, yet in Model 3 for age group 30-39, the odds ratio for the single is not significantly different compared to the married. The effect of marital status is most likely subsumed by the age variable as single women intending to have children are younger than those intending to remain childfree.

Table 3A: Odds Ratios of Childlessness and Intention to Remain Childfree Women Aged 30-49 by 10-year Age Groups and Life Course Variables, 2006					
Explanatory Variables	Age 30-39			Age 40-49	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2
	Child-less Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.
Life Course Variables					
Age Groups					
30-34/40-44	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
35-39/45-49	0.534 ***	1.934 ***	4.683 ***	0.883	1.028
Marital Status					
Married	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Common-law	3.293 ***	4.505 ***	2.475 ***	2.283 ***	2.502 ***
Wid/Div/Separated	1.119	1.615	1.593	0.777	0.775
Single	15.221 ***	6.505 ***	1.034	11.856 ***	9.049 ***
Model 1 - contrasts women childless with women with children					
Model 2 - contrasts women intending to remain childfree with women with children and intending to have children					
Model 3 - contrasts childless women intending to remain childfree with childless women intending to have children					
Model 1 analysis includes women with missing on intentions; Models 2 & 3 excludes women with missing on intention					
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions					

Constrained Choices: Effects of Education, Income and Work/Family Preference

The influence of education and personal income on childlessness may be thought of in terms of the postponement of child-bearing. Acquiring education and entering high-paying jobs require large investments of time. But they could also be seen as having an effect on the beliefs and attitudes toward fertility; that is, higher education and income may make available and preferable life options that do not include children.

At age groups 30-39 and 40-49, the levels of childlessness are highest among those with university education and those with income of \$50000 or more (Table 2B). However, at age 30-39, the intention not to have children is only slightly higher among those with higher education or higher income. For example, 9.3% of women with the lowest level of education intend to be childfree, which is only a 1% lower than women with university education; and the highest proportion intending to have children could be found among those with university education (21.6%) and women with highest income (28.2%). These indicate that women who have postponed childbearing in their 20s intend to have children in their 30s or later. By age 40-49 however, the levels intending to remain childfree are highest at 23.3% for university educated women and 25.9% for women with the highest level of income. The intention to have children at younger ages was not fulfilled and thus their stated intention is to remain childfree, most likely, with the acceptance that they are no longer capable of child-bearing.

The influence of work-family orientation suggests that there could be other factors at stake besides the postponement of child-bearing. As shown in Table 2B, work-centered women have the highest proportion childless. While they also have the highest proportion intending to have children among those aged 30-39 (24.3%), the proportion intending to remain childfree (at 12.7%) is double that of women who have balanced work-family orientation (at 5.9%). For women aged 40-49, the proportion childless and intending to remain childfree is also highest

among the work-centered women, although the differences in the levels between the work-centered and balanced types are smaller.

Table 2B: Proportion (%) of Childless Women* by Intention to have Children Aged 30-49, by 10-year Age Groups and "Structural" Variables, 2006								
Explanatory Variables	N	Age Group 30-39			Age Group 40-49			
		Total Child-less	Intend to have		N	Total Child-less	Intend to have	
			No Child	Child-ren			No Child	Child-ren
Indicators of Structures at Individual Level								
Respondent's Education								
Some HS or lower	108	11.1	9.3	1.9	231	10.8	10.8	0.0
HS & Some College	442	19.9	9.0	10.8	735	16.2	14.7	1.5
College or Trade	676	22.2	7.2	14.9	886	15.9	14.5	1.4
University & Higher	675	31.8	10.2	21.6	626	25.4	23.3	2.1
Personal Income								
Less than \$20000	533	15.0	6.2	8.8	584	13.9	12.0	1.9
\$20000 to \$49999	742	26.0	10.0	16.0	912	16.1	14.3	1.9
\$50000 and over	348	38.5	10.3	28.2	505	26.5	25.9	0.6
Missing	303	19.5	8.6	10.9	520	17.5	16.5	1.0
Work-Family Orientation								
Family-centered	376	2.6	1.3	1.3	356	10.2	9.6	0.6
Balanced	561	17.5	5.9	11.6	737	15.4	14.2	1.2
Work-centered	910	37.0	12.7	24.3	1240	21.0	19.3	1.7
Missing	80	26.3	18.8	7.5	187	23.5	21.4	2.1

Note: * Excludes women with "missing data" on intention to have child/ren.
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions

After controlling for other variables, the effect of education, income, and work-family orientation remains essentially the same. That is, childlessness is highest among women with highest education, highest personal income, and orientation centered on work (Table 3B). For age 30-39, work-centered women and those women who have balanced orientation are significantly more likely to have the intention of being childfree. Among the childless women aged 30-39, those highly educated are more likely to have the intention of having children. Those with lowest education would have become parents before age 30 whereas those with higher education would be doing “catch up” in child-bearing in their 30s. By age 40-49, both childlessness and intention to be childfree would have been set such that the highly educated, high income and work-centered women would have the highest proportions.

Table 3B: Odds Ratios of Childlessness and Intention to Remain Childfree Women Aged 30-49 by 10-year Age Groups and Life Course Variables, 2006					
Explanatory Variables	Age 30-39			Age 40-49	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2
	Child-less Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.
Achieved Variables					
Respondent's Education					
Some HS or lower	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
HS & Some College	3.300 ***	1.127	0.135 ***	1.533 *	1.368
College or Trade	3.822 ***	0.925	0.061 ***	1.413	1.251
University & Higher	6.133 ***	1.424	0.074 ***	2.457 ***	2.095 ***
Personal Income					
Less than \$20000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
\$20000 to \$49999	1.089	1.051	1.225	1.049	1.075
\$50000 and over	1.773 ***	0.823	0.594	1.631 ***	1.949 ***
Missing	1.146	1.051	1.681	1.317	1.461 *
Work-Family Orientation					
Family-centered	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Balanced	7.443 ***	4.106 ***	1.034	1.399	1.240
Work-centered	16.190 ***	7.696 ***	1.084	1.776 ***	1.549 **
Missing	16.621 ***	13.683 ***	2.009	3.068 ***	2.484 ***
Model 1 - contrasts women childless with women with children; includes women with missing on intention					
Model 2 - contrasts women intending to remain childfree with women with children and intending to have children					
Model 3 - contrasts childless women intending to remain childfree with childless women intending to have children					
Model 1 analysis includes women with "missing" on intentions; Models 2 & 3 excludes women with missing on intention					

Norms on Childlessness: Effects of Religion and Religiosity

The data that we used did not have information about norms regarding childlessness. However, questions about religion and religiosity were asked in the survey, which are usual indicators of values related to children. As seen in Table 2C, women who profess no religion or those who do not at all participate in religious services have the highest proportion childless and the highest proportion with intention to remain childfree. This holds true for both 10-year age groups.

Table 2C: Proportion (%) of Childless Women* by Intention to have Children Aged 30-49, by 10-year Age Groups and Cultural Variables, 2006								
Explanatory Variables	Age Group 30-39				Age Group 40-49			
	N	Total Child-less	Intend to have		N	Total Child-less	Intend to have	
			No Child	Child-ren			No Child	Child-ren
Cultural Variables								
Religion								
No Religion	436	30.7	12.6	18.1	405	24.4	23.7	0.7
Roman Catholic	709	24.0	7.0	16.9	1088	18.0	15.9	2.1
Protestant	517	23.2	9.1	14.1	803	14.2	13.4	0.7
Other Rel. & Missing	262	16.0	6.5	9.5	223	20.2	18.4	1.8
Religious Attendance								
Once a week	282	18.1	5.3	12.8	475	12.6	9.9	2.7
A few times a year	841	23.4	7.0	16.4	1048	14.6	13.7	0.9
Not at all	746	28.1	12.5	15.7	935	24.5	23.0	1.5
Missing	57	14.0	3.5	10.5	61	18.0	18.0	0.0
Note: * Excludes women with "missing data" on intention to have child/ren.								
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions								

In Canada, the number of people who profess religion other than Christianity has been increasing with recent immigrants coming from countries other than Europe or the United States. Inclusion of religions other than Catholicism or Protestantism would most likely capture differences in norms regarding childlessness. This is hinted at by the lowest level of childlessness (at 16%) among those categorized under “Other Religion & Missing” in Table 2C. However, the numbers of respondents belonging to these “other religions” are too few to allow meaningful analysis.

The high proportion of childlessness among women who profess no religion after controlling for other variables is seen in Table 3C by the lower odds ratios for Roman Catholic (for aged 30-39) and Protestant (for age 40-49) though with weak statistical significance. Also, women who do not participate in religious ceremonies have significantly higher likelihood of having the intention to remain childfree. However, the increments in R² with inclusion of these two variables are smaller than for the variables earlier discussed namely, life course and structure variables (results not shown in the Tables), a possible indication that these cultural variables are weaker predictors of childlessness and intention to remain childfree among these women.

Table 3C: Odds Ratios of Childlessness and Intention to Remain Childfree Women Aged 30-49 by 10-year Age Groups and Life Course Variables, 2006						
Explanatory Variables	Age 30-39			Age 40-49		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	
	Child- less Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	
Cultural Variables						
Religion						
No Religion	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
Roman Catholic	0.569 ***	0.603 **	0.671	0.860	0.765	
Protestant	0.891	1.015	1.013	0.706 *	0.712 *	
Other Rel. & Missing	0.737	0.883	0.982	1.083	0.937	
Religious Attendance						
Once a week	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
A few times a year	0.960	1.206	1.703	0.977	1.316	
Not at all	0.970	1.796 *	3.407 ***	1.740 ***	2.186 ***	
Missing	0.389 ***	0.104	0.379	0.510	0.523	
Model 1 - contrasts women childless with women with children						
Model 2 - contrasts women intending to remain childfree with women with children and intending to have children						
Model 3 - contrasts childless women intending to remain childfree with childless women intending to have children						
Model 1 analysis includes women with missing on intentions; Models 2 & 3 excludes women with missing on intention						
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions						

In addition to the variables discussed above, the region of residence was also included in the analysis. However, as can be seen in Appendix Table 2, after controlling for other variables, the effects of region of residence on both childlessness and intention to remain childfree are not statistically significant and thus are not further discussed in this paper.

Expressed Reasons for Intentions to be Childfree

The survey included a question as to reasons for the intention not to have a child (or an additional child for those already with children). As could be expected, when viewed for all women, the answer given by the highest proportion of those aged 30-35 is “has enough children” already with 30.3% giving this answer (Table 4). This is followed with about equal proportion by

“infertility”, “other health reasons” and “financial reasons”. For women aged 35-39, “old age” (with 21.1%) is the answer given in almost equal proportion to the “has enough children” (21.4). By age 40-44 and 45-49, “old age” is by far the most common reason for the intention not to have a child or another child. This reinforces the findings related to postponement of child-bearing discussed above.

Reasons for intention not to have a/additional child	5-year age groups			
	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
Childless Women and Women with Children				
Too old	4.8	21.1	46.0	60.9
Infertility	11.5	11.9	14.1	16.4
Other health reasons	12.3	10.9	9.5	6.8
Children will not fit with my life style	7.1	12.7	5.9	3.5
My spouse/partner already has children	2.4	1.3	1.6	0.6
My spouse/partner does not want to have children	6.5	5.2	2.8	1.9
Has enough children	30.3	21.4	12.0	9.1
Financial reasons	11.0	8.9	3.4	1.0
No particular reason	11.7	8.8	7.5	5.2
Other reasons	15.8	11.6	9.8	5.9
Total N (who do not intend to have a/another child)	462	821	1154	1241
Childless Women Only				
Too old	13.7	13.5	49.0	61.0
Infertility	13.7	11.5	13.9	17.4
Other health reasons	5.9	12.5	8.4	9.0
Children will not fit with my life style	19.6	30.8	14.4	5.0
My spouse/partner already has children	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
My spouse/partner does not want to have children	9.8	2.9	2.0	0.5
No particular reason	11.8	9.6	5.4	8.5
Other reasons	31.4	22.1	15.3	9.0
Total N (childless & intends not to have a child)	51	104	202	200
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions				

When the reasons are analyzed for childless women only, the most common reason cited by women in their 30s is “children will not fit with my life style”. This is also the 2nd most mentioned reason for women aged 40-45. In contrast to women postponing child-bearing who eventually have an acceptance of childlessness, this answer points to women deliberately choosing to have life style free of children. These may be women who have attained high education and have settled on jobs that are most likely high-paying, that is, women who are likely to be work-centered. It is not surprising to find a high proportion (61%) of childless women aged 45-49 citing “old age” as the reason for the intention to remain childfree.

Summary and Conclusion

At the outset, young people have a set of goals, one of which is having children. This is seen in the proportion intending to have a child that among the young is as high as 90 to 94%; that is, only about 6 to 9% explicitly state the intention to be childfree. However, this goal of having children comes only after the other two goals of having a satisfying work and an enduring relationship. In Canada, the cohorts of women that gave birth to the “baby boomers” had the

lowest proportion of childlessness at around 12 to 13%. The level of childlessness has increased in subsequent cohorts, which, on the basis of information from the 2006 General Social Survey, is approaching 20%.

As more young people, especially women, go for higher education and their entrance into the labour force is delayed to older ages, marriage and child-bearing are postponed as well. With this delay, some women adjust their intentions of having children, and thus, when childless women reach their mid-30s, the proportion intending to remain childfree increases. By age 40 and older, women who are still childless tend to accept that they will never have children, and thus the intention to remain childfree increases further. It is thus no surprise that a high proportion of childless women (61% by age 40-49) cite being “too old” as the reason for not wanting to have a child. For women who would have liked to have children the need to first establish themselves in the economic realm through education and work were constraints in the achievement of their fertility goals.

The high proportion of childlessness is most apparent in women who have university education and who have high-paying job. It would seem that in the second demographic transition that values diversity and choice in family life, women who wish to be childfree no longer have to contend with the inevitability of parenthood, referred to by Veivers (1980: 40) as “parenthood mystique”. Work-oriented women (as opposed to family-oriented) are more likely to be childless and intend to remain childfree. Further, a good proportion of women (31% among childless women aged 35-39) express the intention to remain childfree for the reason that children do not fit into their lifestyle. As far as norms are concerned, however, the norm that child-bearing has to occur within marriage seems to still prevail as the proportion of childlessness is highest among the never-married and next highest among cohabiting women. This norm may be eroding, especially in Quebec where cohabiting women are more likely to have children than in the other parts of Canada.

What would the level of childlessness in Canada be in the future – would it continue to increase, remain at the same level, or decrease? The trend will depend on the determinants alluded to in the analysis (including education- and work-related factors and norms on childlessness), and on social policies, a factor not previously mentioned. As seen in the analysis, the levels of childlessness have increased with the higher work involvement of women in the generations that followed the cohorts that gave birth to the baby boom. These are also the cohorts who had limited social policy support for work-life balance, and who also struggled to introduce better sharing of caring activities in couples. While younger women will face similar conflicts, there may be less pressure to postpone childbearing into the later 30s, leading to a lower level of childlessness. For the province of Quebec, for example, the Institut de la statistique du Quebec (2008) estimates that the proportion childless reached a peak of about 23 to 24% for the 1953-1961 cohorts of women. This high proportion is expected to continue for cohorts born until 1965, but is estimated to gradually decrease among recent cohort, with an estimate of 19% for those born in 1971-72. It remains to be seen whether a similar trend would occur in the rest of Canada.

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Appendix Table 1: Proportion (%) of Childless women by Intention to have Children Aged 30-49, by 10-year Age Groups and Various Explanatory Variables, 2006								
Explanatory Variables	Age Group 30-39				Age Group 40-49			
	N	Total Child-less	Intend to have		N	Total Child-less	Intend to have	
			No Child	Child-ren			No Child	Child-ren
Total (%)*	1927	24.2	8.8	15.4	2520	18.0	16.6	1.4
Life Course Variables								
Age Groups (30-39/40-49)								
30-34/40-44	895	29.8	6.8	23.0	1245	19.0	16.8	2.2
35-39/45-49	1031	19.2	10.5	8.7	1275	17.0	16.4	0.6
Marital Status								
Married	1178	12.5	3.8	8.7	1620	12.4	11.4	1.0
Common-law	306	31.4	15.4	16.0	314	25.5	24.8	0.6
Wid/Div/Separated	142	14.7	7.7	7.0	354	10.2	9.6	0.6
Single	299	66.9	21.7	45.2	227	60.2	53.1	7.1
Cultural Variables								
Religion								
No Religion	436	30.7	12.6	18.1	405	24.4	23.7	0.7
Roman Catholic	709	24.0	7.0	16.9	1088	18.0	15.9	2.1
Protestant	517	23.2	9.1	14.1	803	14.2	13.4	0.7
Other Rel. & Missing	262	16.0	6.5	9.5	223	20.2	18.4	1.8
Religious Attendance								
Once a week	282	18.1	5.3	12.8	475	12.6	9.9	2.7
A few times a year	841	23.4	7.0	16.4	1048	14.6	13.7	0.9
Not at all	746	28.1	12.5	15.7	935	24.5	23.0	1.5
Missing	57	14.0	3.5	10.5	61	18.0	18.0	0.0
Indicators of Structural Variables at Individual Level								
Respondent's Education								
Some HS or lower	108	11.1	9.3	1.9	231	10.8	10.8	0.0
HS & Some College	442	19.9	9.0	10.8	735	16.2	14.7	1.5
College or Trade	676	22.2	7.2	14.9	886	15.9	14.5	1.4
University & Higher	675	31.8	10.2	21.6	626	25.4	23.3	2.1
Personal Income								
Less than \$20000	533	15.0	6.2	8.8	584	13.9	12.0	1.9
\$20000 to \$49999	742	26.0	10.0	16.0	912	16.1	14.3	1.9
\$50000 and over	348	38.5	10.3	28.2	505	26.5	25.9	0.6
Missing	303	19.5	8.6	10.9	520	17.5	16.5	1.0
Work-Family Orientation								
Family-centered	376	2.6	1.3	1.3	356	10.2	9.6	0.6
Balanced	561	17.5	5.9	11.6	737	15.4	14.2	1.2
Work-centered	910	37.0	12.7	24.3	1240	21.0	19.3	1.7
Missing	80	26.3	18.8	7.5	187	23.5	21.4	2.1
Region of Residence								
Atlantic	136	19.1	8.1	11.0	186	17.2	16.7	0.5
Quebec	430	26.7	8.4	18.4	601	20.1	18.0	2.2
Ontario	773	23.5	7.5	16.0	987	17.9	16.8	1.1
Prairie	322	25.2	11.2	14.0	410	15.4	13.9	1.5
British Columbia	265	22.6	10.6	12.1	335	18.2	16.7	1.5

Note: * Excludes women with "missing data" on intention to have child/ren.

Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions

Appendix Table 2: Odds Ratios of Childlessness and Intention to Remain Childfree Women Aged 30-49 by 10-year Age Groups, 2006						
Explanatory Variables	Age 30-39			Age 40-49		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	
	Child- less Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	Intend to be Childfree Sig.	
Life Course Variables						
Age Groups						
30-34/40-44	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
35-39/45-49	0.534 ***	1.934 ***	4.683 ***	0.883	1.028	
Marital Status						
Married	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
Common-law	3.293 ***	4.505 ***	2.475 ***	2.283 ***	2.502 ***	
Wid/Div/Separated	1.119	1.615	1.593	0.777	0.775	
Single	15.221 ***	6.505 ***	1.034	11.856 ***	9.049 ***	
Cultural Variables						
Religion						
No Religion	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
Roman Catholic	0.569 ***	0.603 **	0.671	0.860	0.765	
Protestant	0.891	1.015	1.013	0.706 *	0.712 *	
Other Rel. & Missing	0.737	0.883	0.982	1.083	0.937	
Religious Attendance						
Once a week	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
A few times a year	0.960	1.206	1.703	0.977	1.316	
Not at all	0.970	1.796 *	3.407 ***	1.740 ***	2.186 ***	
Missing	0.389 ***	0.104	0.379	0.510	0.523	
Indicators of Structural Variables at Individual Level						
Respondent's Education						
Some HS or lower	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
HS & Some College	3.300 ***	1.127	0.135 ***	1.533 *	1.368	
College or Trade	3.822 ***	0.925	0.061 ***	1.413	1.251	
University & Higher	6.133 ***	1.424	0.074 ***	2.457 ***	2.095 ***	
Personal Income						
Less than \$20000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
\$20000 to \$49999	1.089	1.051	1.225	1.049	1.075	
\$50000 and over	1.773 ***	0.823	0.594	1.631 ***	1.949 ***	
Missing	1.146	1.051	1.681	1.317	1.461 *	
Work-Family Orientation						
Family-centered	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
Balanced	7.443 ***	4.106 ***	1.034	1.399	1.240	
Work-centered	16.190 ***	7.696 ***	1.084	1.776 ***	1.549 **	
Missing	16.621 ***	13.683 ***	2.009	3.068 ***	2.484 ***	
Region of Residence						
Atlantic	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	
Quebec	1.148	0.730	0.516	0.822	0.739	
Ontario	1.488	0.861	0.738	1.004	0.944	
Prairie	1.556	1.378	0.986	0.859	0.800	
British Columbia	1.588	1.147	0.780	0.972	0.887	
Constant	0.004	0.004	1.628	0.048 ***	0.043 ***	
Total N	2142	1901	463	2523	2475	
Nagelkerke R²	41.5%	22.3%	29.1%	24.2%	21.0%	
Model 1 - contrasts women childless with women with children; includes women with missing on intention						
Model 2 - contrasts women intending to remain childfree with women with children and intending to have children						
Model 3 - contrasts childless women intending to remain childfree with childless women intending to have children						
Model 1 analysis includes women with "missing" on intentions; Models 2 & 3 excludes women with missing on intention						
Source: 2006 General Social Survey on Family Transitions						