Voluntary, Involuntary and Temporary Childlessness in the United States

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Introduction

This is a near complete paper on childlessness among White, Black and Hispanic women in the U.S. We first review the childlessness literature. Then we examine childlessness trends from 1910 to 2008 for the three groups. Then we use data from the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth to examine the degree of voluntary, involuntary, and temporary childlessness among the women. Having categorized the women according to their type of childlessness, we then estimate multinomial regression equations predicting the likelihood of a woman being in each of the childlessness groups versus being in the group of women having children. In this

paper we focus on non-Hispanic (NH) White women. If our paper is accepted for presentation at the PAA meetings, we will also report results of our accomplishing the last two objectives for NH Black women and for Hispanic women.

Recent years have seen dramatic increases in the percentages of ever-married women in the United States who are childless. In the 1970s almost one-half of White women who were born in the 1950s were childless at age 25. Rindfuss and his colleagues (1988) expected that as many as 20 percent of these White women would still be childless at the end of their childbearing years (Rindfuss, Morgan and Swicegood, 1988). More recently, data from the June 2008 *Current Population Survey* indicate that 53 percent of White women in the age group 25-29, and 30 percent of women aged 25-29, are childless. (The corresponding percentages for Black and Hispanic women are 33 percent and 24 percent for Blacks, and 31 percent and 18 percent for Hispanics) (see U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). As many as 20 to 25 percent of these White women are likely to be childless at the end of their childbearing years, with somewhat smaller percentages of permanent childlessness among the Black and Hispanic women (Morgan and Chen, 1992; see also Rindfuss, Morgan and Swicegood, 1988).

In this paper we first examine overall trends since 1910 in levels of childlessness among ever-married White, Black and Hispanic women for the years to 1995, and then among all women for the more recent years. Then we use data from the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), Cycle 7, to determine three categories of childlessness (voluntary, involuntary, and temporary), plus a fourth category representing women with children. This separation strategy is done for White, Black and Hispanic women. We then estimate multinomial regression equations for women in

each race/ethnic group examining the extent to which various characteristics of the women have an effect on their being in each of the three childless categories as opposed to being childed, i.e., having children. We turn first to a review of the childlessness literature.

Review of Literature

Childlessness is, and has been since the 1970s, a much more prevalent phenomenon compared to the 1950s when childlessness was low and little of it, if any, was voluntary (Poston and Kramer, 1983). Indeed demographers noted that in the 1950s, "voluntary childlessness … (was) nearly extinct" (Whelpton, Campbell and Patterson, 1966: 163). Until the early 1970s, the norms relating to marriage and procreation were pervasive and pronatalist, much more so than they are today. The literature written thirty to forty years ago indicates that childlessness was neither supported nor encouraged by the society's normative and value structure (Poston, 1974). The childed state was heavily valued in its own right (Griffith, 1973), and those remaining without children often experienced severe negative sanctions (Veevers, 1973; Blake, 1974).

We have mentioned the low prevalence of childlessness in the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S., yet we believe it would be a mistake to refer to the increases in childlessness since the 1970s as reflecting a so-called secular phenomenon and not as representing the more distant past. For instance, using data from the 1900 and later censuses, Morgan (1991) has shown that levels of childlessness in the nineteenth century were much higher than those reported for the 1950s and early 1960s (see also Poston and Gotard, 1977). Nonetheless, little attention was given to childless women in the United States before the 1970s, and the research that was being conducted at that

time focused mostly on involuntarily childlessness (Poston and Kramer, 1983). Earlier studies assumed childlessness was caused primarily by sterility or subfecundity and not by voluntary decisions to stay childless (Poston, 1976).

Interestingly, the percentages of married women aged 15-44 who were childless in the United States have fluctuated over time. In the 1970s when childlessness was increasing, researchers believed that most of the increase was due especially to white women choosing to be childless (Poston and Gotard, 1977). More recent literature supports this idea of increased childlessness especially at the older ages. Abma and Gladys (2006) focused on childlessness among older women (ages 35-44) and reported that voluntary childlessness rose from 5 percent in 1982 to 8 percent in 1988, and was maintained until 1995 at 9 percent before falling slightly to 7 percent in 2002. They also reported that women who were voluntarily childless tended to have the highest incomes, work experiences and lowest religiosity. Also, Downs (2003) reported that in 2002, 18 percent of older women (ages 40 to 44) were childless, compared to 10 percent of the women in the same age group in 1976.

Research on women of all fecund ages has yielded fairly similar results. In 1997, Abma and colleagues reported that 9 percent of all women in the U.S. between the ages of 15 and 44 in 1995 were and expected to remain childless, of which 7 percent were voluntarily childless. They showed an increase in voluntary childlessness in 1982 from 5 percent to 6 percent in 1988 (Abma et al., 1997). Similarly, Abma and Peterson in 1995 reported that in the 1970s, 12 percent of all the women who were childless were childless by choice, while in 1990 the percentage had risen to 25 percent (Park, 2005). Therefore, the continued study of voluntary childlessness is certainly warranted.

The increases in voluntary childlessness are likely due in part to changes in gender norms, as researchers hypothesized in the 1960s. Cox and Pendell (2007) examined data from the National Surveys of Families and Households for 1987-1988 and 1992-1994 and discovered that more than 86 percent of the respondents were neutral or agreed that childless individuals could have fulfilling lives. Their research showed that more positive attitudes towards childlessness were found among females who were college educated and/or childless; the less positive attitudes were found among older, less educated males who were religiously conservative. This suggests that attitudes and norms towards childlessness are becoming more positive overall, which may explain in part the increased childlessness in the U.S.

Furthermore, it is very important to distinguish between voluntary childlessness and involuntary childlessness and the mediating stage termed temporary childlessness. Involuntary childlessness usually refers to biological reasons why a person cannot reproduce or to issues of subfecundity, or "the diminished capacity to reproduce" (McFalls, 1979a). Causes of subfecundity include "genetic factors, psychopathology, disease, nutritional deficiencies and environmental factors" with genetic factors including abnormalities in chromosomes and metabolism, anemia, and red blood cell incompatibility between partners (Poston, et al, 1983: 441-442). Environmental factors include radiation and toxic chemical exposure and occupational hazards (McFalls 1979a, 1979b). In the more developed countries as opposed to the developing countries, additional issues are likely to contribute to subfecundity such as drug abuse, psychoses and stress (Poston, et al., 1983).

Voluntary childless on the other hand, refers to a woman's decision to have no children at all. There are various factors associated with a woman's likelihood of being

voluntarily childless. Often it is not a choice decided on at one point in time but a collection of decisions postponing motherhood which results in childlessness (Poston, et al., 1983). It is also important to acknowledge that a woman's status as being either voluntarily childless or involuntarily childless is not always easily distinguishable (Park, 2005). Although some women may believe they know where they belong on the childlessness spectrum, other women place themselves somewhere in between, or feel their classification shifts with the passage of time (Letherby, 2002). The childlessness literature has distinguished between women who are *early articulators*, i.e., those who decide to be childless early on in their life, often before marriage, and *postponers*, i.e., women who become childless as a result of various decisions to delay motherhood (Houseknecht, 1987: Veevers, 1973). For the purpose of this paper, women who are childless at the time of the NSFG interview but plan on having children in the future will be considered temporarily childless (Poston and Kramer, 1983).

In any event, childlessness is certainly an important and relevant fertility response among women in the U.S today. We need to know more about its current levels, its dynamics, and the kinds of characteristics that are likely and not likely to be associated with women who are childless. We now examine census data in a detailed examination of childlessness trends.

Trends in Childlessness

Since 1940, the U.S. Bureau of the Census has published data on the number of children ever born to women in the United States. The Bureau typically obtains these data in the decennial censuses and the *Current Population Surveys*. When the Bureau published data from the 1940 census, it also provided fertility data from the 1910 census

(U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1943: 1-6). We are thus able to assemble percentage rates of childlessness for ever-married U.S. women for eleven time periods from 1910 to 1995, and for all women for three more time periods from 2000 to 2008.These data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 presents schedules of age-specific rates of childlessness for White, Black and Hispanic ever-married women, and for all women, for the time periods just noted. The rates for all three racial/ethnic groups of women vary considerably within any one time period, as well as over time within any one age group; this is especially true for White women. To illustrate, as few as 5 percent of ever-married White women 35-39 years old were childless in 1975; in 1995 as many as 14 percent of women in this age group had no children, whereas way back in 1950 the corresponding figure was 18 percent. Among all women aged 35-39, the percentages in 2000, 2004 and 2008 are between 20 and 21 percent.

The percentage data in Table 1 for the periods of 1960 to 1995 permit an examination of changes in childlessness for eight open cohorts of ever-married White and Black women, and for seven open cohorts of ever-married Hispanic women, with each cohort being identified by the year in which its members were 20-24 years old. We are unable to carry the cohort analysis beyond 1995, because starting in 2000, the data refer to all women, not only the ever-married women. For White and Black women these are the 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1995 cohorts. For Hispanic women, data are available for the last seven cohorts. Only the 1960, 1965, 1970 and 1975 cohorts have completed their childbearing years.

Let us consider the childlessness rates for the cohorts of White women. The 1960 cohort began its childbearing years (which, for the purposes of our analysis, is at

age 20-24 – see endnote 2) with a childlessness rate of 25 percent; by the time it was in its last years of childbearing (at age 40-44), 6.4 percent of its members were childless. The 1965, 1970 and 1975 cohorts have also completed their childbearing years. At each age, the childlessness rates of the 1965 cohort are higher than those of the 1960 cohort, at each age the rates of the 1970 cohort are higher than the rates of the 1960 and 1965 cohorts, and at each age the rates of the 1975 cohort are higher than those of the 1960, 1965 and 1970 cohorts.

The remaining four cohorts, i.e., those of 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995, have not yet completed their childbearing years, but all four have started with age-specific rates at age 20-24 that are lower than the childlessness rate at age 20-24 of the 1975 cohort. However, with the exception of the 1995 cohort for whom we only have data for one age, viz., 20-24, the childlessness rates at the last age for the other three cohorts are equal to or higher than the childlessness rate for that age of the 1975 cohort. Thus we may conclude that since 1960, with but one or two exceptions, the age-specific childlessness rates for every cohort are higher than those of the cohorts preceding them.

There is not as much regularity in the cohort-specific childlessness rates for Black women. The 1960 cohort has the lowest age-specific childlessness rates of all the cohorts. The 1980 cohort has the highest rate of all the cohorts at age 20-24 (almost 44 percent) and at age 35-39 (almost 11 percent). Unless there are drastic reductions in the rates at the older ages for the 1985 cohort, it could well have childlessness rates at ages 35-39 and 40-44 higher than those of the earlier cohorts. It is still too early to be able to say much about the future childlessness rates of the 1990 and 1995 cohorts.

The rates for Hispanic women for the most part are lower than those for the White women. However, the childlessness rates at each age are generally higher for the later cohorts than for the earlier cohorts.

This discussion of childlessness trends for ever-married White, Black and Hispanic women provides a broad perspective for our consideration of the childlessness phenomenon. For the most part, our analyses show higher levels of age-specific rates of childlessness for the more recent cohorts as compared with the earlier cohorts. This is also the case for women in 2000, 2004, and 2008. We turn next to a cross-sectional analysis of childlessness in which we distinguish several types of childlessness among the childless women. Data from the *Current Population Survey* as reported in Table 1 do not allow us to distinguish among those who are voluntarily, involuntarily, and temporarily childless. But these are very important distinctions because, among other considerations, some of their causes are not likely the same.

Categories of Childlessness

There are several methods for separating childless women into various categories (Poston and Kramer, 1983; Wilkie, 1984; Houseknecht, 1987; among others). We will discuss two, namely, the cognitive approach and the behavioral approach. We will use data for the women sampled in the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth.

The first separation approach is referred to as a cognitive method and relies on the women's knowledge of their ability to conceive children. The second approach is called a behavioral method and is based on the contraceptive behavior of the women. Let us now discuss these two separation strategies.

In endeavoring to separate various categories of childlessness, we begin with a population of ever-married childless women who are not pregnant. We omit childless women who were pregnant at the time of interview because their accurate categorization is ambiguous, if not impossible. Working thus with childless women who were not pregnant, we then ascertain their fertility intentions. Those who had no children at the time of interview but intended to have children in the future are set aside as temporarily childless.

It is at this point that the distinction between the cognitive and behavioral approaches becomes apparent. The cognitive method involves inquiring about the woman's knowledge of her fecundity. If a woman with no children who was not pregnant at interview time knew that she was capable of having children, yet planned to have none in the future, we categorize her as voluntarily childless. On the other hand, if a woman with no children who was not pregnant knew that she was unable to have children in the future, we categorize her as involuntarily childless, as long as her inability to conceive is not the result of a sterilizing operation performed for contraceptive reasons.

The behavioral approach at separation involves examining the contraceptive behavior of women with no children who were not pregnant. If a childless woman who did not intend to have children was contracepting, we then assume she was choosing of her own volition not to have children in the future. But if she was not contracepting, we cannot immediately conclude that she is involuntarily childless because she might not have been contracepting because she (or her male partner) had been sterilized for contraceptive reasons. Therefore, the noncontracepting woman with no operation, and the one who was sterilized but not for contraceptive reasons, are both assumed to be

involuntarily childless. However, the noncontracepting woman who had (or her partner had) had a sterilization for contraceptive reasons is assumed to be voluntarily childless.

The categories of childlessness produced by both methods are not perfect; they have some reliability and validity problems. Some of the voluntarily childless may be biologically incapable of having children, but are not aware of their sterility or subfecundity; however, defining themselves as voluntary, warrants to some extent classifying them as voluntary. For as W. I. Thomas observed many years ago, if persons "define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (cited in Merton [1957: 421]).

In a similar vein, many of the involuntarily childless may not define as problematic their presumed biological inability to produce children. They could well have intended in the first place to have no children, and then either discovered they were biologically incapable of having children or became sterile through an operation not performed for contraceptive reasons. Thus, although they are not now able to have children, they may not have been inclined to have children anyway.

The temporarily childless are even more enigmatic. They will eventually join the ranks of the voluntarily childless, the involuntarily childless, or the childed. At this point, no one knows for certain which group they will join, irrespective of their childbearing intentions (see Veevers, 1973; Poston and Kramer, 1983).

These are only a few of the problems that are inherent in any attempt to identify various categories of childlessness with data from fertility surveys. Veevers noted many years ago that "in order to place individuals in the appropriate (childlessness) category, it is necessary to know details concerning not only their health, but also their innermost motivations and aspirations. Such data can be gleaned only in intensive personal

interviews and are not readily available from representative samples of large populations" (Veevers, 1972).

Despite the problems discussed above, these childlessness separation procedures will at worst provide tentative approximations of the percentages of women in the various categories of childlessness. We now apply the cognitive approach to data from the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) for NonHispanic (NH) White women. If our paper is accepted for presentation at the PAA meetings, we will also present an analysis using the behavioral approach for NH White women, and both approaches for NH Black women and for Hispanic women.

We begin with the 6,850 women in the 2006-08 NSFG (see Figure 1). Of these, 3,833 are non-Hispanic Whites, 1,592 are Hispanics, and 1,452 are non-Hispanic Blacks. We illustrate now how we used the cognitive approach with data from the NSFG to identify the NH White women according to categories of childlessness.

From the sample of 3,833 NH White women, we exclude those 144 women who were pregnant at the time the interviews were conducted because of the difficulty in classifying them accurately. As we have already noted, they are neither childless nor childed. Remaining for analysis are 3,689 NH White women. Of these, 1,923 were childless, and 1,766 reported having one or more live births. We are able now to complete the identification of the "childed" category; 1,766 women are childed.

Next, we separate out the temporary childless women by examining responses to the NSFG question, "Do you want a(nother) baby some time?"; 1,130 women intend to have one or more children, but as of the date of the survey, they are childless. We thus categorize these 1,130 women as "temporarily childless."

Remaining for analysis are 793 NH white women who are childless and who do not intend to have any children in the future. Our task now is to separate these 793 childless women into voluntarily and involuntarily childless groups. We do this in Figure 1 using the cognitive approach. If this paper is accepted for presentation at PAA, we will also do the childlessness separation using the behavioral approach.

We first refer to the questionnaire item concerning fecundity. Women who responded "yes" to the question "As far as you know, is it physically possible for you to have a baby" are classified as fecund; 585 were so classified. However, 208 women answered "no" or did not know the answer, and they are designated as sterile or subfecund. Of these 208 women, 57 had had an operation and 151 had not had an operation. The 151 who have had no operation become part of the group of involuntarily childless women. We then took the 57 women who had had an operation and determined if the operation was for contraceptive purposes. We determined that 44 had had an operation for contraceptive purposes (thus they too are voluntarily childless), and 13 had had an operation but not for contraceptive purposes (they thus are involuntarily childless).

The voluntarily childless women, therefore, are identified by adding the 585 normally fecund women to the 44 sterile women who had an operation for contraceptive reasons, for a total of 629 voluntarily childless women. The number of involuntarily childless women is determined by adding the 151 sterile women who had not had an operation to the 13 sterile women who had an operation but not for contraceptive purposes**,** for a total of 164 involuntarily childless women. As already noted there are 1,130 temporarily childless women, and 1,766 childed women.

If this paper is accepted for presentation at the PAA, we will apply both separation approaches to determine the childlessness types for White, Black and Hispanic women.

We turn next to the multivariate analysis of factors associated with the childlessness categories. Here we will restrict the analysis to White women, but will estimate equations for all three groups of women if our paper is accepted for the PAA conference.

Multivariate Analyses of Childlessness

There is a modest literature on the characteristics associated with various forms of childlessness, particularly the voluntary and involuntary categories (Poston, 1976, 1990; Jacobson, Heaton and Taylor, 1988; Rovi, 1994; among others). For the most part, education has been shown to be positively related to the probability of being voluntarily childless and negatively related, or not related, to the probability of being involuntarily childless. Age should be positively associated with both voluntary and involuntary childlessness. There should also be associations with marital status. We turn now to the results of our multivariate analyses.

We use four independent variables, namely, age of the respondent measured in years, the respondent's education measured as highest year completed, a dummy variable indicating whether or not the woman is never-married, and a dummy variable indicating if she is separated (for both dummy variables, yes is scored as 1, no as 0).

In the multivariate analysis of childlessness among White women, we estimate one multinomial logistic regression using the childlessness (dependent variable) categorization based on the cognitive approach.

We first need to attend to an important methodological issue. We noted earlier that the 2006-08 NSFG consists of data for women and men, aged 15–44, in households in the United States. Mosher (2010: 33) has written that the 2006–2008 NSFG sample "is a nationally representative multistage area probability sample drawn from 85 areas across the country...Persons were selected for the NSFG in five major steps: Large areas (counties and cities) were chosen first. Within each large area or ''Primary Sampling Unit,'' groups of adjacent blocks … were chosen at random. Within segments, addresses were listed and some addresses were selected at random. The selected addresses were visited in person … (If it was determined that a person 15-44 lived at the address, then) … one person was chosen at random for the interview and was offered a chance to participate."

Since the 2006-08 NSFG is based on multistage probability sampling, one cannot make inferences with the data to the larger population of U.S. adults from which the sample was drawn without first taking into account the sampling design. Otherwise, the data will be treated by the statistical software as based on a simple random sample. This will tend "to understate the true extent of sampling error in the data … (because) when observations are clustered (i.e., drawn from a few selected sampling points as is the case with the 2006-08 NSFG), for many variables the within-cluster variance tends to be smaller than the variance across the population as a whole. This in turn implies that the between-cluster variance, i.e., the variance of the cluster means, which gives the standard error for clustered samples, is inflated relative to the variance of the same variable computed from a simple random sample drawn from the same population. Reduced within-cluster variance, especially with respect to sociodemographic variables, is typical within the small areas that make up … (a) stage of multistage probability

samples: areas of a few blocks tend to be more homogeneous with respect to education, age, race, and so on than the population of the entire country. The result is that when we use statistical procedures based on the assumption of simple random sampling, our computed standard errors typically are too small. What we need to do is to take account not only of the variance among individuals within a cluster, but of the variance between clusters" (Treiman, 2009: 207-208).

Thus in the empirical analysis reported here, we use the "svy" suite of statistical sample adjustment methods available in the Stata 12 statistical package (StataCorp, 2011) that introduce survey adjustment estimators. We are thus able to adjust our analyses according to the various population and strata weights available in the 2006-08 NSFG.

We use multinomial logistic regression because our dependent variable is both categorical and unordered (Hanushek and Jackson, 1977). The dependent variable is the four category variable of temporarily childless, voluntarily childless, involuntarily childless, and childed. The childed category is the reference category.

Table 2 reports the results from the maximum-likelihood multinomial logistic regression estimated for White women. The F-test value is 62.79 and is statistically significant at the level of .000 and is easily large enough to reject the null hypothesis that all the logit coefficients are zero.

Table 2 shows the odds ratios which we have calculated from the logit coefficients ($\boldsymbol{\Omega} = \boldsymbol{e}^{\mathbf{logit}}$). Since the childed category is the reference category, each odds ratio, $\boldsymbol{\Omega}$, for an independent variable reports the odds of a woman for each unit of the independent variable of being in one of the childlessness categories, relative to being childed.

In Table 2 we see that education is both positively and significantly associated with being voluntarily, involuntarily, and temporarily childless, relative to having children. The odds ratio, **Ω**, for education, represents the effect of a change of one year of education in changing the odds of being in one of the childlessness categories versus being childed. Specifically, the **Ω** of 1.126 (that is, $\boldsymbol{e^{0.1190}}$) for the voluntarily childless women (second row, first column of data) means that for every year of education, the odds of a woman being voluntarily childless versus being childed increase by 1.1 times.

The dummy variable indicating whether the woman is never married is positive and significant for all three categories of childless women. Never married women are 8.7 times more likely to be voluntarily childless relative to having children, they are 6.5 times more likely to be involuntarily childless relative to having children, and are 5.3 times more likely to be temporarily childless compared to being childed. As expected, this marital status variable has by far the strongest effects of all the independent variables. It is best used as a control variable rather than as an explanatory variable, and this is especially the case for White women.

Age has no statistically significant effect on being voluntarily or involuntarily childless, but is negatively and significantly associated with being temporarily childless; this confirms the earlier point that the temporarily childless tend to be younger and, by definition, cannot remain temporarily childless through their reproductive years.

Conclusion

In this paper we first examined overall trends since 1910 to 1995 in the levels of childlessness among ever-married White, Black and Hispanic women, and among all women from 2000 to 2008. For the most part, our analyses showed higher levels of age-

specific rates of childlessness for the more recent cohort s compared with the earlier cohorts. However, the census and *Current Population Survey* data we used in the analysis of childlessness trends did not permit us to distinguish among women who are voluntarily, involuntarily, and temporarily childless. These are important distinctions because, among other considerations, some of their causes are not necessarily the same.

We then drew on data from the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth to determine for ever-married women three categories of childlessness (voluntary, involuntary, and temporary), plus a fourth category representing women with children. This separation strategy was done for White women, and we plan to also do so for the PAA conference for Black and Hispanic women. We discussed two separation approaches, a cognitive method based on the woman's knowledge of her fecundity, and a behavioral approach based on the extent of the woman's contraceptive behavior; however, we only implemented the cognitive approach, but will also show results at the PAA conference using the other strategy.

Finally, for the White women, we set forth a few hypotheses about the characteristics of childless women, and tested these hypotheses with results from a multinomial logistic regression. We found that an important predictor of whether a woman was childless (in any of the three categories) versus having children was her level of education. The higher her level of education, the more likely she was to be in one of the childless categories, as opposed to being childed.

Finally, there is an interesting empirical inconsistency in our above analyses, which deserves mentioning. The census and *Current Population Survey* data reported in this paper, and elsewhere, show increases since the 1970s in the levels of permanent childlessness of ever-married women in the United States; we saw similar increases

among all women for the years of 2000, 2004 and 2008. However, the survey data from the 2006-08 NSFG on childless show considerably lower levels of voluntary and involuntary childlessness among older ever-married women, and higher levels of temporary childlessness. Therefore, there seems to be a lack of correspondence between these two sources.

This difference may be understandable given the apparent hesitation, even these days, for some women to admit specifically that they are permanently childless. Instead, the easy response, from a normative point of view, is to note that the childlessness is temporary, which may well be a truthful response for many women.

However, research conducted since the 1970s has continually shown that whereas many of the temporarily childless eventually end up having children, there are also many of them who "continue to postpone having their first child, maintaining the advantages of their childless lifestyles" (Poston and Kramer, 1983: 295). The work of Veevers (1973) is especially applicable in this regard. In her studies of voluntarily childless wives, she showed that two-thirds of the childless women in her sample did not decide on childlessness prior to marriage, but "remained childless as a result of decisions to postpone having children until some future time, a future which never came" (1973: 359).

This would suggest that about one-half of the temporarily childless women in the 2006-08 NSFG sample could well end up being permanently childless. This sort of resolution would be one way of addressing the empirical inconsistency regarding levels of childlessness that is reflected in the data. The National Center for Health Statistics could address this inconsistency head-on by including questions in future fertility

surveys that probe in greater detail the fertility intentions and dispositions of the childless respondents.

Endnotes

1. These cohorts are open cohorts. Women become members as they marry. Once married, they retain membership, irrespective of subsequent changes in marital status. For examples from the cohort literature in demography, see Price (1968; 1974). In a few instances, the rate of childlessness at a later age, e.g., 40-44, may be slightly higher than its rate at an earlier age, e.g., 35-39; this phenomenon is due to both sampling and cohort attrition.

2. Since proportionally few women in the U.S. marry before age 20, and since most childbearing is completed by age 44, we restrict the ages of the cohorts to 20 to 44, as against the conventional (and larger) age interval of 15 to 49.

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Table 1
Percent of Ever-Married Women (1910-1995) or All Women (2000-2008)
Who Are Childless, By Age, and Race/Ethnicity
For Selected Years Between 1910 and 2008: United States

	Age Group White Women				
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
2008~~	77.3	52.8	29.6	21.1	17.9
2004~	75.4	49.6	30.9	21.3	20.0
2000	71.1	48.8	30.0	20.5	20.3
1995*	37.5	29.7	19.3	13.6	12.5
1990**	40.3	30.6	17.4	12.1	11.5
1985#	41.3	30.0	19.5	12.3	8.4
1980##	42.3	26.6	14.1	8.1	6.4
1975++	44.7	21.6	8.9	5.2	6.5
1970++	37.7	16.1	8.1	7.0	8.1
1965!	28.7	11.8	7.0	8.1	10.2
1960!!	25.0	12.3	9.7	10.2	13.0
1950$	34.0	20.1	15.8	17.5	18.9
1940$$	36.9	27.2	20.6	17.1	15.2
1910||	24.2	16.8	13.4	11.5	10.4

	Black Women				
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
2008~~	56.5	32.6	23.9	17.7	18.0
2004~	57.0	33.3	18.9	17.0	21.3
2000^	46.1	36.4	24.9	21.6	17.7
1995*	29.4	16.4	13.9	10.7	11.7
1990**	26.2	14.7	11.7	8.8	9.8
1985#	33.5	16.5	8.4	6.9	6.1
1980##	43.8	23.4	15.2	10.1	10.6
1975++	20.2	15.9	8.3	6.4	11.4
1970++	20.8	12.3	9.1	9.8	13
1965!	22.4	10.5	8.5	13.3	17.8
1960!!	17.4	14.5	15.5	19.3	23.7
1950$	28.6	29.6	30.2	31.9	29.6
1946$$	34.9	31.4	28.5	26.3	23.4
1910||	24.1	19.5	16.4	13.2	10.4

	Women of Spanish Origin				
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
2008~~	54.4	30.9	18.4	12.9	18.9
2004~	52.8	31.5	18.6	15.1	13.8
2000^	44.6	27.5	18.9	15.3	10.9
1995*	25.5	16.1	14.7	6.9	6.6
1990**	26.2	19.4	11.4	4.3	7.0
1985#	28.8	17.3	13.1	5.7	5.0
1980##	30.0	15.1	7.0	8.4	6.9
1975++	31.2	15.6	6.3	2.6	4.1
1970+++	24.3	11.3	7.0	6.0	7.8
1960$$$	15.8	7.9	6.5	7.0	8.8
1950$	21.0	10.8	10.7	12.0	11.5

DATA SOURCES FOR TABLE 1.

|| U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1943, Table 2.
$$ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1943, Table 1.
$ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1955, Table 2.
$$$ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973, Table 11.
! U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1969, Table 1.
!! U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1964, Table 4.
+++ U.S. Bureau of Census, 1973, Table 13.
++ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1976, Table 17.
U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982, Table 12.
U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986, Table 1.
** U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991, Table 1.
* U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997, Table 1.
^ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001, Table 1.
~U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005, Table 1.
~~U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010, Table 1.

Table 2
Odds Ratios from Multinomial Logistic Regression of Women Being Childless Versus Childed on Selected Social and Demographic Factors: White Women 20-44 Years of Age, United States, 2006-08

	Childlessness Category (Versus Childed)		
Independent Variables	Voluntarily Childless	Involuntarily Childless	Temporarily Childless
	COGNITIVE SEPARATION METHOD		
Age (years)	0.968	0.999	0.780*
Education	1.126*	1.156*	1.422*
Never married (Yes=1)	8.732*	6.467*	5.296*
Separated/Divorced (Yes=1)	1.668	3.180*	1.170
Intercept	-3.535*	-5.641*	0.800
N	629	164	1,130
F-Test	62.79*		

NOTES
*p < .05
The reference group is Childed Women (N = 1,766)

Figure 1.
Decision Tree:
Women Categorized by Type of Childlessness, Using the Cognitive Approach, Non-Hispanic Whites, U.S., 2006-08