RUNNING HEAD: Evidencing Intention Emergence

When Do Family Formation Intentions Emerge? Evidencing Distinctness Among Early Adolescent Youth

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Abstract

Using the NLSY79 and NLSY97, this study examines adolescents' expected adulthood parity and compares adolescents across intended parity categories to assess whether adolescents intending zero parity (voluntary childlessness) (a) differ from adolescents intending children in terms of marital goals, family formation values, parented experiences, and intention certainty; and (b) typologically resemble willingly childless adults regarding individual characteristics (e.g., attitudes, goals, demographics). Statistical tests confirmed these hypotheses. Findings verify (1) voluntary childlessness intentions emerge in adolescence (as early as age 14), (2) the prevalence of youth intending childlessness greatly increases over one generation's time, and (3) a sizable proportion of youth expect to never marry. This paper highlights implications of increasing intended childlessness prevalence rates and expected permanent singlehood. Most importantly, this study contributes to our empirical knowledge of intended alternative family forms in an understudied population of persons who will constitute an increasing proportion of adults foregoing parenthood and marriage in current and future generations.

Introduction

Despite extensive research on the transition to parenthood and nature of romantic unions, researchers still do not know *why* people have children, *why* they engage in certain types of unions, and, most importantly, *whether*, *when*, and *how* family formation decisions are made (Schoen, Kim, Nathansom, Fields, & Astone, 1997). Most fertility intention knowledge is limited to adult populations. From these studies we learn that a sizable minority (30.7%) of married adults and a sizable majority (over 70%) of unmarried adults who experience a pregnancy report that it was unintended (Henshaw, 1998). Our understanding of adolescent fertility (intentions, behaviors, and relations between the two) is limited to youthful childbearing, an area of research that lacks a consensus about the degree to which youthful childbearing is purposeful (Luker, 1996; Zabin, Hirsch, Smith, & Hardy, 1984; Zabin, Astone, & Emerson, 1993).

In contrast to unplanned fertility, one form of planfulness – voluntary childlessness – has increased substantially within the United States since the mid-1960s (Daniluk & Herman, 1984; Hoffman & Levant, 1985) with a projection of a 22 percent childless rate in the near future (Heaton, Jacobson, & Holland, 1999). Intentional childlessness is rarely studied among youth and serves as a great comparison for understanding how fertility intentions develop differently for people who make an active decision never to have children, people who make a deliberate decision to have children, and those in between these two poles of the decision-making spectrum.

With an ever-increasing proportion of adults in this country choosing a life without rearing children, two major questions concerning the decision to remain childless include: when and how did these adults come to this decision; and, how do voluntarily childless persons differ from people who want to rear children? Most of the existing literature on childlessness primarily focuses on two issues: (1) proposed negative outcomes of childlessness for adults (divorce rates, coping without offspring caregivers in old age); and (2) personal and relational characteristics by which childless persons differ from persons who have chosen to engage in parenthood (e.g., egalitarian versus traditional attitudes, self- versus other-oriented, career versus family oriented).

This study examines the extent to which youth report specific fertility and union intentions and the degree of certainty they attribute to those intentions. The research question specific to this study is: to what extent do youth articulate fertility intentions and to what extent do youth intending permanent childlessness differ from youth intending to become parents report varying levels of intention certainty. Data collected on youth ages 14 to 22 via the NLSY79 and 16 to 22 via the NLSY97 are used to test the following hypotheses: (1) the distribution of expected family size among these cohorts of youth will parallel the prevalence distribution for adults, and (2) youth with permanent childless intentions will intend to transition into marital unions at a slower pace than youth with intentions to have children.

Previous research has not directly documented, in terms of prospective data, whether early articulation of childless fertility intentions occurs during adolescence. Furthermore, no one has examined whether youth make *conscious decisions* about parenting fertility intentions and marital intentions, status quo responses. Some research suggests that people become parents or marry by default because they go along with the status quo (e.g., the majority of people have children and the majority of adults marry) or because they do not make future-oriented plans (e.g., happenstance).

Fertility intentions have implications for sexual behaviors and union formation among youth. For instance, youth who intend not to have children or not to have children until later adulthood are more likely to use contraceptives or to delay sexual activity onset (Kirby, 2001; Luker, 1996). In contrast, youth who intend to have children or who want to have children at an early age may engage in sexual activity or marital relationships at an early age and may decide against using contraceptives. Understanding when and how fertility intentions emerge and how intentions translate into outcomes has major implications for understanding family formation. If the process begins prior to or during adolescence, research needs to focus more on this earlier stage of development as opposed to dismissing it as being untrustworthy and susceptible to change. It may be family formation preferences develop at earlier developmental stages (e.g., early adolescence), calling into question the commonly held belief that it is one of the fundamental developmental tasks of young adulthood (Erikson, 1960) and suggesting a window of opportunity for

family formation education programs.

Hypotheses

Do youth report specific fertility and union intentions as early as age 14 and does the distribution of expected family size parallel the distribution characteristic of adults? To what extent do youth who report wanting no children report different levels of intention *certainty* relative to youth intending to have children? It is hypothesized that youth will voice specific fertility intentions in early and middle adolescence (age 14 for the NLSY79 and age 16 for the NLSY97) and that a non-marginal percent of youth will report permanent childlessness intentions. Hypothesized differences for youth as a function of fertility intentions, in words and schematically, are outlined below:

1. *Marital expectations:* Percent chance of marrying will be lower for youth intending to have smaller families given that marriage and childbearing are intimately connected. Furthermore, youth expecting to have no children or only one child will be more likely to postpone marriage or be less likely to marry within a certain time period (1 year or 5 years in the case of the NLSY97) relative to youth who intend average and large size families. These latter youth place a higher priority on family and are hypothesized to want begin childbearing earlier than youth who want no or few children. Having larger family sizes equates to the need to begin childbearing earlier than those who intend small families. Given marriage continues to be the preferred union status for bearing and rearing children, marital timing will be earlier and chance of marrying within a year or five years will be higher for these youth. Schematic of marital expectations as a function of EFS: percent chance will marry within one year: none < small < average < large; percent chance will marry within five years: none < small < average < large; proportion of those who expect to marry (relative to expecting not to marry) within a year: none < small < average < large.

2. *Percent chance of having children:* Youth who expect to have no children will report the smallest chance likelihood of having any children across their lifespan. Youth expecting average or large families will report the highest percent change of having children with youth expecting small families falling in the middle in terms of percent chance likelihood. Schematic of percent chance of having children as a function of EFS: none < small < average < large for percent chance of having any/ anymore children; none < small < large < average for percent chance of having

exactly two (more) children; none < small < average < large for percent chance of having three or more children.

Method

Participants

This study utilizes data from The National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) and 1997 (NLSY97). For the NLSY79, the total sample included both military and civilian subsamples. This study is limited to 2013 never-married zero-parity civilian youth in 1979 ranging in age from 14 to 22 (mean age = 17.8 in 1979) living in a single-respondent household (to ensure independent samples). For the NLSY97, the total sample consists of two subsamples: the first was a cross-sectional sample and the second was an oversample of African American and Hispanic youth[1]. The analyses and results of this study pertain to a random subset of the total sample youth to whom fertility expectation questions were limited. During round five (data collection year 2001), youth were randomly divided into four "experimental" groups. Each group answered the core set of questions (e.g., fertility and pregnancy, family background, and employment among others). Only one "experimental" group, however, answered fertility intention and expectation questions. Hence, this study's analyses are restricted to this random subsample of 1603 never-married zero-parity nationally representative cross-section of youth ranging in age from 16 to 22 (mean age = 18.81 in 2001).

Analytic Strategy

Both parametric and nonparametric statistics are used to assess fertility intention emergence among NLSY79 and NLSY97 youth because normality assumption violation poses less of a threat. Hence, analyses used for this study include median comparisons (ANOVAs on medians) and chi-square tests of parent-adolescent relationships, childbearing expectations, marital expectations, education expectations, and attitudes toward family (importance of family events) to determine whether youth who report childless intentions (a) resemble adult childless persons, and (b) differ from youth who report small, average, and large family size intentions.

NLSY79 Measures

[1] For more detailed sampling procedure information for the NLSY97, the *NLSY97 User's Guide* is a helpful resource (Center for Human Resource Research, 2003).

The surveys used across the 20 waves of data collection contained questions for numerous topics including marital expectations, fertility expectations and histories, self-esteem, sex role attitudes, occupational and educational aspirations, employment histories, and sexual activity. Expectation questions pertaining to fertility were limited to 14 points of measurement. Marital expectations were only collected at two time points. Admittedly, although the NLSY79 contains vast amounts of data, it provides relatively little information regarding future plans, expectations, and intentions outside of fertility. Given the emergence impetus of this study, analyses are restricted to the first time expectation questions were posed.

Expected family size. Beginning in 1979 and throughout 14 rounds of data collection, respondents answered a series of questions about intended or expected family size. Questions pertained to several constructs: intentions/expectations, desires/ wants, and ideals. NLSY79 analyses for this study primarily utilize fertility intentions captured by "expectation" questions that direct ask youth to report numbers of children they expect to have (e.g., "Altogether, how many (more) children do you expect to have?"). Given the wording of this expected fertility question, total expected completed family size was generated using a single item referring to respondents' expected number of any (more) children for those youth who were currently childless (defined as zero-parity). Youth were categorized into expecting no children, a small family (only one child), an average size family (two or three children), and a large family (four or more children).

Youth marital expectations. In 1979, youth responded to two marital expectation questions and in 1982 youth responded to one marital expectation question: (1) "Do you expect to be married in five years?" answered dichotomously as "yes" or "no", and (2) "At what age do you expect to marry?" answered on a categorical scale with the following demarcations: 1=less than 20, 2= 20-24, 3=25-29, 4=30 or older, 5=never. These variables were analyzed only for never-married youth in 1979. It is hypothesized that youth intending permanent childlessness will be characterized by disproportionately high responses to "never" and "30 or older" categories. Youth intending to have small family sizes are hypothesized to report later-age marriage intentions relative to youth intending average size families and large size families (these latter youth are expected to have the lowest age at marriage expectations).

Youth education aspirations. Youth responded to various educational aspiration and expectation questions in 1979. In 1979, youth reported either yes or no (nominal scale) to the following question: "Do you expect to be in school in five years from now?". In 1979, 1981, and 1982 youth answer two additional educational expectation questions: "What is the highest grade or year of regular school, that is, elementary school, high school, college, or graduate school that you would like to complete?" and "As things now stand, what is the highest grade or year you think you will actually complete?" Both questions utilized a continuous scale from 1= first grade to 13=first year of college to 18 = sixth or higher year of college.

Future plans – Work, family, or other. In 1979, youth were asked about their future plans at age 35 in terms of whether they wanted to work, raise a family, or do something else: "And now we have a question about the future. What would you like to be doing when you are 35 years old?" with four response categories (1=present job, 2=some occupation, 3=married/ family, 4=other). Given Bongaarts's Life Course Competition Theory highlighting the zero-sum nature of selecting, prioritizing, and fulfilling roles under constraints (e.g., temporal, social), it is hypothesized that youth intending permanent childlessness will be characterized by disproportionately low responses to "married/ raising a family" and disproportionately high responses for "some occupation" followed by youth expecting small families, youth expecting average families, and youth expecting large families, in that order for each of the two response categories.

Sex-role attitudes. Youth self-reported on their sex-role attitudes using a four-point Likert scale from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree. Three items were recoded such that for all items higher values on the scale represent more traditional (less egalitarian) sex role attitudes for youth. Given the correlation between attitudes and behaviors, it is hypothesized that egalitarian sex role attitudes strongly characterize youth intending to be childless (egalitarian attitudes coupled with a nontraditional lifestyle choice) whereas traditional sex role attitudes strongly characterize youth intending to be parents (traditional attitudes coupled with a traditional institution). The psychometric properties for these scales are reported in Appendix 1 along with the specific items asked of youth. The scale used eight items and has a moderately high Cronbach alpha (.71) suggesting good internal

consistency and reliability.

NLSY97 Measures

The survey used in each round contained questions for numerous topics including health, school, employment, marriage, and fertility. Expectation questions about educational attainment and chance of becoming pregnant or impregnating a partner among others were limited to rounds one, four, and five. Intended family size questions were only asked in round five (survey year 2001); most data for these analyses stem from this round/survey year 2001. During round five, however, not all experimental groups were asked the same questions. Hence, data from round four is used in instances when youth were not asked questions of interest in round five. Given only one year intervened between rounds, the limitation of not using concurrent data is recognized and deemed minimal in comparison to knowledge gained using another round as opposed to not using any data.

Expected family size. In 2001 during round five of data collection, youth in experimental group two (n=1991) were asked several questions about intended or expected family size. They answered two types of questions: questions directly asking youth to report numbers of children they expect to have and questions asking youth the percent chance they anticipated a fertility event occurring. For expected family size, youth were asked "altogether, how many (more) children do you expect to have?" with responses ranging from 0 to 10 or more. Results for this study focus on zero-parity youth. Total expected family size was generated from reports of expected number of any (more) children. A new variable for expected completed family size was created whereby youth were categorized into expecting no children, a small family (only one child), an average size family (two or three children), and a large family (four or more children).

Certainty about lifetime fertility. Supplementary expected fertility questions addressed youths' perceived chance they would have specific numbers of children. Response categories for these questions ranged from zero to 100 percent. Questions of interest for this study include: (1) "Now looking across your entire life, what is the percent chance that you will ever have [any/ anymore] children?", (2) "What is the percent chance that you will have three or [more/ more additional] children?", (3) "What is the percent chance that you will have exactly [two/ two more]?", and (4)

"What is the percent chance that you will have [a/another] child within the next five years?" To analyze these variables, a new composite expected completed family size variable was created to coincide with the family sizes specified in each question – no children (none), one child (small), two children (average), and three or more children (large).

Youth marital expectations. In 2001, youth responded to three marital expectation questions: (1) "Think about yourself one year from now. What is the percent chance that you will be married?" answered on a scale ranging from zero to 100 percent, (2) "Now think about five years from now, you will be [respondents calculated age in 5 years] years old. What is the percent chance that you will be married?" answered on a scale ranging from zero to 100 percent, and (3) "Do you expect to be married a year from now?" answered on a binary scale of 0="no" and 1="yes." These variables were analyzed only for those youth who were never married. This reduced the sample of currently childless by 38 youth whom were currently married.

Results and Discussion

Statistical Procedures

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percents, and averages, were used to describe patterns of responses on variables of interest for the sample. Hypothesis testing, the use of inferential statistics, were used to assess whether one group meaningfully differs from another group in their characteristic responses as well as assessing why two groups differ from each other. Inferential statistics encompasses two domains of testing procedures: parametric and nonparametric. This study relies upon nonparametric statistics[2]; principally Mann-Whitney (Wilcoxon) and Kruskal-Wallis

[2] Nonparametric statistics, although considered less statistically powerful than parametric statistics, do not make few assumptions about data distributions. Furthermore, nonparametric statistics are not constrained to minimal sample size requirements or balanced group designs. Nonparametric statistics typically rely upon median comparisons or rank sums, thereby minimizing the leverage influence of outliers. Nonparametric statistics are useful in detecting group differences despite small group sizes. Before employing inferential statistics, tests for normality were conducting on all relevant outcome variables to determine whether parametric or nonparametric analyses applied to the data. Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test statistics were used as well as normal probability plots to assess whether variables were normally distributed. The Null Hypothesis of KS tests states that data are normally distributed; hence, for these statistics a significant p-value results in rejecting the Null Hypothesis and concluding the variable is not normally distributed, in turn, warranting nonparametric analyses. Given that all of the predictor variables of interest resulted in significant KS test statistics, nonparametric hypothesis testing was conducted (significance tests comparing two groups used Mann-Whitney (Wilcoxon) tests; significance tests comparing more than two groups employed Kruskal-Wallis

tests. Descriptive statistics for demographic chrematistics as a function of cohort and expected completed family size groups status for never-married currently childless youth are reported in Table 1.

Expected Completed Family Size Prevalence

Changes over one generation – NLSY97 relative to NLSY79. For never-married youth with current zero parity (currently childless), 169 (8.40%) of currently childless NLSY79 youth and 271 (16.91%) of the currently childless NLSY97 youth responded they did not expect to have any children thereby conferring intentional permanent childlessness status. To put this into perspective relative to the analog of youthful permanent childlessness, proportional rates of never-married teenage parenthood for these two samples are much smaller in comparison (2.93% for the NLSY79 and 9.38% for the NLSY97 by round five)[3].

As shown in Table 2, for both the NLSY79 and NLSY97 samples the percentage of currently childless youth responding they expect to remain permanently childlessness is greater than the proportion of youth expecting small (6.46% for NLSY79 and 11.92% for NLSY97) family, but smaller than the proportion of youth expecting average (71.04% for NLSY79 and 60.76% for NLSY97). Interestingly, for the NLSY79 sample, youth intending large families comprised a greater proportion of the sample (14.11%) relative to intentionally childless youth; but, this relationship reversed for the NLSY97 sample whereby intentional childlessness (16.91%) usurped intentions for a large family (10.42%). Not only has preference for reduced family size been evidenced; within one generation's time, the prevalence of intended childlessness among nationally representative youth ages 14-22 increased two-fold (chi-square = 64.7, $p < 0.0001$).

Previous literature suggests that approximately one-fifth (20%) of adults remain childless at the end of their reproductive life cycle and the suggested ratio of intentional to 'unintentional' is two to one (in other words, twice as many childless individuals at the end of their reproductive cycle chose not to have

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tests). Where applicable, parametric statistics serve as the preferred statistical procedure for these analyses. Given data characteristics and limitations, however, nonparametric statistics are frequently used.

[3] Specifically, 63 (2.93%) of the never-married NLSY79 cross-sectional sample youth (n=2126) were teenage parents in 1979. Similarly, 177 (9.38%) of the never-married NLSY97 experimental group 2 sample youth (n=1886) were never-married teenage parents by 2001.

children relative to individuals who experienced fecundity-related concerns). Remember that these statistics are based on a sample comparable to the NLSY79 birth cohorts. One-twelfth of NLSY79 youth intended permanent childlessness in adolescence and their generation produced a one-fifth proportion of childless adults. According to the NLSY97 analyses of this study, one-sixth of NLSY97 adolescents intend to remain childless. This suggests that the proportion of childless adults, even if some of these youth change their intentions over their reproductive years, are extremely highly likely to contribute to an even greater proportion of childless adults than the NLSY79 youth.

It is important to remember that these intentionally childless adolescents comprise only one of the three groups who constitute voluntarily childless adults (these youth represent early deciders); the addition of youth who become later deciders and perpetual postponers most likely will increase the proportion of voluntary childless adults over the one-fifth mark characteristic of childless adults. This cannot be determined with this sample, however, until at least 2030 if the NLSY97 follows youth that far and continues to ask about fertility intentions and actual fertility outcomes. These findings contradict Bongaarts's hypothesis that expected family size will not approach zero. It appears that the trend toward smaller family size may gravitate toward zero in greater proportions than previously thought.

It should be noted, however, that average family size characterized by two or three children prevails as the dominant expected family size with approximately 60 percent of the sample expecting this family size. This large majority of youth providing status quo responses, however, begs the question: to what degree do these responses represent meaningful decisions rather than normative, pat responses? To answer this question, fertility certainty items regarding percent chance of actualizing expected fertility were assessed.

Gender difference patterns – NLSY79 and NLSY97. When assessing expected completed family as a function of gender, anticipated patterns emerge. Patterns will first be discussed for the NLSY79 sample, then the NLSY97 sample, and finally compared across the two. For the NLSY79 sample, for never-married currently childless youth the majority of both males and females expect to have average size families (two to three children) (72.9% for males and 69.02% for females), followed by expectations to

have large families (12.88% for males and 15.44% for females), then no children (8.49% for males and 8.29% for females) and small families of only one child (5.73% for males and 8.29% for females). This is consistent with past fertility trend residuals from the 1950s that continued to influence the 1960s through the early 1980s toward larger family sizes. For the NLSY97 sample, the majority of both males and females expect to have average size families (two to three children) (62.76% for males and 58.46% for females) followed by expectations to have no children (16.82% for males and 17.0% for females), then small families of one child only (11.6% for males and 12.28% for females) and large families for females (12.28%), and last large families of four or more children for males (8.58%). This is consistent with current fertility trends toward smaller family sizes. Interestingly, for both samples, males constitute a greater proportion of youth intending average size families whereas females are more likely to report large or small families. This may reflect the fact that parenthood is more closely linked to motherhood (rather than fatherhood) identity and that the costs associated with role conflict (parent, worker) force females to make more calculated, rational decisions to make family size choices that go against the status quo (e.g., no children and smaller families for more career-oriented females and larger families for more family-oriented females). These patterns become more salient for the more recent NLSY97 cohort; not surprising given more recent inroads into the labor force and higher educational attainment for females in recent decades.

Race/ethnicity difference patterns – NLSY79 and NLSY97. Expected completed family size was assessed as a function of race and ethnic group for both the NLSY79 and NLSY97. Not surprisingly, average expected completed family size assumed the lion's share of responses across racial/ethnic groups and samples (even though the proportion of respondents expecting an average completed family size for each racial/ethnic group declined when comparing NLSY79 to NLSY97 youth). Interestingly, and consistent with previous literature, Caucasian youth espoused permanent childlessness at a higher rate than minority youth (Black and Hispanic for both the NLSY79 and NLSY97 samples). What did change across samples, however, was the increasing espousal of permanent childlessness (second to average expected completed family size) for Black and White/ Non-Hispanic NLSY97 youth.

Specifically for the NLSY79, Black, Hispanic, and White - Other/ Non-Hispanic

never-married currently childless youth are most likely to espouse average size families (59.81%, 73.55%, and 72.25%, respectively) followed by large size families (18.18%, 15.70%, and 13.49%, respectively), then small family size for Black and Hispanic youth (13.88% and 6.61%) and permanent childless intentions for White-Other/ Non-Hispanic youth (8.73%), and last permanent childless intentions for Black and Hispanic youth (8.13% and 4.13%) and small family size for White-Other/ Non-Hispanic youth (5.53%).

For the NLSY97 sample, both Black and White/ Non-Hispanic youth are most likely to espouse average size families (53.92% and 64.39%, respectively) followed by permanent childless intentions (19.12% and 15.03%, respectively), then small family size (18.38% and 10.12%, respectively), and last large size families (8.58% and 9.39%, respectively). Currently childless Hispanic youth, however, differ in expected family size ordering. Similarly to Black and White/ Non-Hispanic youth, Hispanic youth are most likely to report they want average size families (60.46%). Hispanic youth, however, differ from Black and White youth in terms of expecting large family size (16.01%), followed by intended childlessness (15.03%), and last small family size (8.5%). This may be the result of subcultural norms and assimilation and acculturation processes whereby "native land" norms, even if a generation or two removed, encourage higher order parity for Hispanic youth more so than Black and White youth.

The lack of significance among these racial/ ethnic groups with respect to intended permanent childlessness suggests that researchers should not regard preferences for permanent childlessness as specific to Caucasian populations. Instead, these findings evidence that permanent intended childlessness is non-negligibly prevalent among youth of all racial/ ethnic groups. The relative difference between Caucasian and Hispanic youth intending permanent childlessness substantially declined in one generation's time (from 0.72 to 0.07)[4]. In turn, the study justifies and highlights the claim that permanent childlessness intentions warrant further examination across diverse groups of youth. Interestingly in the NLSY97 cohort, a greater proportion of Black youth are intending permanent

[4] Calculation: (8.73-4.13)/6.43 = 4.6/6.43 = 0.72 for NLSY79 versus (16.1-15.03)/15.57 = 1.07/15.57 = 0.07 for NLSY97.

childlessness and smaller family sizes relative to White and Hispanic youth. This may suggest a shift in actual fertility patterns for minority populations as these youth traverse their reproductive life course, a pattern that we must wait to see unfold as the NLSY97 data collection continues in years to come.

Marital Expectations and Expected Completed Family Size

NLSY79. It was hypothesized that youth expecting to have no children would be less likely to articulate positive marital expectations (e.g., expecting to marry within the next five years) and more likely to report never expecting to marry or to marry at older ages (e.g., over age 30). Furthermore, as expected completed family size increases, it was hypothesized that positive marital expectations within the next five years would increase and the expected age at marriage would decrease (marked by higher proportions of these youth falling within lower marital-age categories). These hypotheses were analyzed only for never-married youth. Youth are grouped according to the number of children they expect to have for currently childless youth. These hypotheses were confirmed and analytical results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

For the NLSY79 currently childless never married youth (n=2013), expectations about marrying within five years were assessed for each expected completed family size category. For youth expecting to have no children, only 15.63 percent reported that they expected to marry within five years. Of the youth expecting to have a small family of one child, 33.33 percent expected to marry within five years. The percent of youth expecting to marry within five years was 49.52 for youth expecting average size families and 55.88 percent for youth expecting large size families (Chi-square = 84.46, DF=3, $p < .0001$). When analyzed as a function of those who want to have children versus those who do want to have children, youth expecting to have children are over three times (3.13) more likely to expect to marry within five years relative to youth who do not want to have children (49.37% versus 15.63%, respectively; Chi-square = 67.10, DF=1, $p=.0001$). In terms of odds ratios, for this sample it was determined that youth intending to have children were over five times more likely to report intending to marry within the next five years relative to youth who intended permanent childlessness (odds ratio = 5.26, Pearson chi-square = 67.1, $p < 0.0001$). This confirms the hypothesis that individuals who intend to have children will have more positive attitudes toward marriage and greater intentions of marrying in the near

future relative to individuals who do not intend to have children and are not subject to social marital and pronatalist norms. Not surprisingly, for those youth intending to have children, nearly 50 percent intend to marry between ages 19 and 27 (initial ages of 14 to 22 plus five years). Given the mean age of the sample is nearly 18 years old and the normative age at marriage for this cohort was around 23 years old, expected marital timing of 23 years, on average for this sample, coincides with social norms for this cohort of youth.

Three years later in 1982 (average age of youth = 20.78), the hypothesized pattern emerged (see Table 4) whereby never-married currently childless youth intending permanent childlessness were significantly less likely to expect to be married within the next year (1.44%) relative to youth expecting to have a small family (10.31%), an average family (10.54%), and a large family (9.72%) (Chi-square = 11.83, DF=3, p<.0080). The greatest difference among these groups was characterized by how low the expectation for marriage within one year was for youth who expected permanent childlessness from youth who expected to have at least one child. When dichotomously analyzed, there is over a seven-fold increased probability (7.24) of marital expectations within the next year as a function of wanting children relative to not wanting children (10.43% versus 1.44%, respectively; Chi-square=11.73, DF=1, p=.0006; odds ratio=0.14). These patterns confirm the hypothesized relationship that youth expecting to have no children would be least likely to articulate marital intentions relative to youth expecting to have children (more specifically, these youth are 7.14 times less likely to report marital expectations for the next year relative to their peers). By chance alone more than two out of 139 youth are expected to report intentions to marry within the next year. The fact that so few youth intending permanent childlessness report intentions to marry within the next year provides convincing and powerful evidence that these early articulating youth are a meaningful, distinct group warranting attention.

The most telling finding stems from expected *marital timing* results. In 1979 youth reported the age at which they expected to marry. The response categories for this variable are categorical with the last category representing “never” intending to marry. As exhibited in Table 3, the hypothesized pattern emerged as a function of expected completed family size whereby an overwhelming majority of youth reporting

intentions to never marry were youth who intended permanent childlessness (64.00% expected to have no children, 10 percent expected to have a small family, 26 percent expected to have an average size family, and no youth intending to have a large family). When evaluated dichotomously as a function of whether youth want any children or not, youth intending permanent childlessness are over 19 times more likely to report expectations to never marry relative to youth who intend to have any children (19.0% versus 0.98%, respectively; Chi-square = 282.76, df=4, p<.0001). When the odds ratio for youth intending permanent childlessness and youth intending to have at least one child was calculated with respect to marital age expectation, an odds ratio of 4.03 was generated (Pearson chi-square = 45.37, p < 0.0001)[5]; in other words, for this sample if a youth intends to have no children, the likelihood he/she expects to never marrying is 4.03 times that of youth intending to have any children.

In terms of proportions in each completed expected family size category of never-married currently childless youth, nearly 20 percent of youth intending permanent childlessness reported they never expected to marry, slightly over 2 percent reported they would marry under age 20, approximately 40 percent reported marrying between ages 25 and 29, and barely over 19 percent expected to marry for each of the remaining two age groups (20-24 and over age 30). In short, never-married currently childless youth intending permanent childlessness were least likely to intend marriage prior to age 20 and most likely to intend marriage between ages 25 and 29 (Chi-square = 314.86, df=12, p<.0001). These youth were disproportionately high in terms of intending to never marry or to marry over age 30 and disproportionately low in terms of intending to marry prior to age 20 and between ages 20 and 24 relative to the other three completed expected family size groups (refer to Table 3). The reverse pattern held for never-married currently childless youth intending to have average or large size families whereby intentions to never marry were least likely to be reported followed by over age 30 and under age 20 with expected marital age between 20 and 24 representing the most likely response.

It was hypothesized that youth expecting to have no children would be less likely to articulate positive marital expectations (e.g., expecting to marry within a year or within five years) and less likely to report chances of marrying soon (e.g.,

[5] Associated risk ratio is 3.30.

within a year or five years). Furthermore, as expected completed family size increases, it was hypothesized that marital expectations and chance of marrying would increase. These analyses were conducted only for never-married youth currently childless youth. Analytical results support these hypotheses and are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

NLSY97. For the NLSY97 cohort of currently childless never married youth who provided meaningful responses to marital expectation questions (n=1590), expectations about marrying within a year and five years were assessed for each expected completed family size category. For youth expecting to have no children, only 2.23 percent reported that they expected to marry within the year. Of the youth expecting to have a small family of one child, 8.4 percent expected to marry within the year. The percent of youth expecting to marry within the year was 6.5 for youth expecting average size families and 8.0 percent for youth expecting large size families (Chi-square = 10.0, DF=3, p <.02). When analyzed as a function of those who want to have no children versus those who do want to have children, youth expecting to have children are over three times more likely to expect to marry within a year relative to youth who do not want to have children (6.96 % versus 2.23%, respectively; Chi-square = 8.66, DF=1, p=.0033). Given the mean age of the sample is nearly 19 years old and social norms against marrying young (average age at marriage is 25 for women and 27 for men) and before finishing a college education if youth intend to pursue one, it is not surprising that expectations for marrying within a year are low for all of the groups.

Marital expectation differences become more pronounced as the timeframe for marriage increases from one year to five years, at which point youth would be 24 years old, on average. In terms of expecting to marry within five years, positive responses were lowest for youth who did not want to have any children (25.9%), followed by youth expecting small families (47.3%), then youth expecting average size families (50.1%), and last, youth expecting large size families reporting the greatest expectation of marrying within five years (55.6 %) (Chi-square = 55.3, DF=3, p<.0001). The greatest difference among these groups was characterized by how low the expectation for marriage within five years was for youth who expected permanent childlessness from youth who expected to have at least one child. When dichotomously analyzed, there is

a nearly two-fold increased probability of marital expectations within the next five years as a function of wanting children relative to not wanting children (50.4% versus 25.9%, respectively; Chi-square=52.8, DF=1, p<.0001). These patterns confirm the hypothesized relationship that youth expecting to have no children would be least likely to articulate marital intentions relative to youth expecting to have children.

In terms of the percent chance of marrying within the next year and next five years, the hypothesized pattern emerged whereby currently childless youth intending to have no children reported markedly lower percent chance of marrying within the next year (M=9.24 percent, CI: 6.6, 11.8) and next five years (M=29.7, CI: 25.9, 33.5) relative to youth who expected to have a small family size (M=12.2, CI: 8.6, 15.8 within one year and M=39.2, CI: 34.4, 44.0 within five years), average family size (M=12.4, CI: 10.9, 14.0 within one year and M=48.7, CI: 46.6, 50.7 within five years), and large family size (M=14.9, CI: 10.6, 19.1 within one year and M=54.8, CI: 49.8, 59.8 within five years). Although the results for percent chance marital expectations within one year are in the hypothesized direction, overlapping confidence intervals suggests nonsignficant differences within a parametric framework. When assessed using the Kruskal-Wallis test on mean rank sums, the results reach significance (Chi-square=8.0995, DF=3, p=0.0440) whereby youth intending permanent childlessness have lower mean rank scores (744.9) relative to other youth (794.4 for small family size, 810.6 for average size family, and 848.7 for large family size). Results for marital expectations within one year are further substantiated using ANOVA based on medians (Chi-square 7.76, DF=3, p=0.05). These findings not only confirm the hypothesis, but speak to the need to use the correct statistical framework given the distribution of variables of interest.

When assessing percent chance of marriage within five years, however, these findings reach statistical significance when using both parametric and nonparametric tests whereby youth expecting to have no children are statistically significantly less likely to expect to marry within the next five years relative to youth who expect to have a small family who, in turn, are significantly less likely to expect marriage within five years relative to both youth who expect average and large size families. These results were confirmed using the Kruskal-Wallis test (Chi-square=93.3, DF=3, p<0.0001) whereby mean rank scores for youth expecting to have no children (583.4)

were substantially lower than for youth expecting a small family (721.3), expecting an average size family (853.9) and expecting a large size family (932.1). Results for marital expectations within five years were further substantiated using ANOVA based on medians (Chi-square 66.7, DF=3, $p<0.0001$).

Conclusion

Study Contribution

Despite higher prevalence among these nationally representative youth samples, intentional childlessness among youth remains relatively ignored compared to the attention garnered by nonmarital youthful fertility. Granted, youthful childbearing presents many proximal and a sizable amount of distal social costs. But, the proximal and distal *costs and benefits* of increasing permanent childlessness warrant research attention as well.

The existent literature on fertility intentions and family formation decision-making lacks information on when decisions form or why people want to have children. This study begins to fill this gap by exploring whether and to what degree youth express fertility intentions. The findings from this study are encouraging and suggest that the phenomenon warrants future study. This study is a prospective assessment of family size intentions beginning in adolescence. The findings of this study support the claim that fertility intentions emerge early in youth and that youth articulating different family size intentions qualitatively differ on numerous characteristics. This study evidences that youth as young as age 14 articulate permanent childless intentions and evidence distinctiveness in intentions to never marry or postpone marriage until later ages or more than five years in the future (thereby pushing them beyond the average age of marriage for their peer group). Not only do these patterns exist for NLSY79 youth; they also exist with increasing prevalence and strength for NLSY97 youth representing a subsequent cohort of individuals whom society as a whole relies upon to create additional generations of workers, productive citizens, social security contributors, and aging parent caregivers; this is a declining proportion of the population and decisions to forego parenthood and marriage begin with family-formation intentions in childhood and early adolescence.

The important point remains that intentions have changed over the course of the

past generation for youth such that increasing prevalence of permanent childlessness is evidenced in this study across all racial and ethnic groups in two nationally representative samples representing two generations; coupled with the longstanding empirically validated finding that intentions predict subsequent behavior, the emergent patterns of this study suggest downward shifts in completed family size and increased proportions of voluntary childless individuals over the course of the next 20 or more years when the NLSY97 youth are at the end of their reproductive years.

Limitations and Strengths

Some researchers may find fault with the simplicity of these analyses and the use of nonparametric statistics; yet, there is something to be said about parsimony and understanding emergent patterns prior to modeling the determinants of those patterns. Others may claim that one cannot trust articulated intentions among youth because those intentions may change over time. In response: first, change (and stability) in intentions represents data and ought to be modeled in its own right when posing research questions related to change in intentions over time; second, understanding youth intentions to not have children may contribute to our understanding of protective factors and resilience with respect to youthful childbearing. This study employs two large, nationally representative longitudinal data sets. As a result of this study, the hypothesized emergent findings were not only confirmed, but also replicated across two nationally representative cohorts of individuals representing two different generations. The generated findings of this study serve as a springboard for future studies designed to answer various research questions that utilize the longitudinal nature of these data.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics for Never-Married Zero-Parity Youth as a Function of Cohort and Expected Completed Family Size

Variable	Cohort																			
	NLSY79 Never-Married Currently Childless (n=2013)										NLSY97 Never-Married Currently Childless (n=1603)									
	Want 0 (n=169; 8.4%)		Want 1 (n=130; 6.46%)		Want 2 or 3 (n=1430; 71.04%)		Want 4+ (n=284; 14.11%)		Total		Want 0 (n=271; 16.91%)		Want 1 (n=191; 11.92%)		Want 2 or 3 (n=974; 60.76%)		Want 4+ (n=167; 10.42%)		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Age																				
14	18	8.53	13	6.16	148	70.14	32	15.17	211	10.48	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
15	24	6.16	23	7.26	219	69.09	51	16.09	317	15.75	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
16	23	8.01	24	8.36	205	71.43	35	12.2	287	14.26	4	26.67	1	6.67	10	66.67	0	0	15	0.94
17	27	9.78	18	6.52	193	69.93	38	13.77	276	13.71	51	15.41	50	15.11	188	56.8	42	12.69	331	20.65
18	18	7.41	11	4.53	176	72.43	38	15.64	243	12.07	77	19.15	56	13.93	231	57.46	38	9.45	402	25.08
19	16	6.87	13	5.58	165	70.82	39	16.74	233	11.57	55	17.24	29	9.09	194	60.82	41	12.85	319	19.9
20	18	8.04	17	7.59	158	70.54	31	13.84	224	11.13	48	16.11	33	11.07	193	64.77	24	8.05	298	18.59
21	19	10.8	10	5.68	129	73.3	18	10.23	176	8.74	33	15.14	20	9.17	144	66.06	21	9.63	218	13.6
22	6	13.04	1	2.17	37	80.43	2	4.35	46	2.29	3	15	2	10	14	70	1	5	20	1.25
Gender																				
Male	89	8.49	60	5.73	764	72.9	135	149	1048	52.06	145	16.82	100	11.6	541	62.76	76	8.82	862	53.77
Female	80	8.29	70	7.25	666	69.02	12.88	15.44	965	47.94	126	17	91	12.28	433	58.43	91	12.28	741	46.23
Race/Ethnicity (created collapsed variable)																				
Black	17	8.13	29	13.88	125	59.81	38	18.18	209	10.38	78	19.12	75	18.38	220	53.92	35	8.58	408	26.6
Hispanic	5	4.13	8	6.61	89	73.55	19	15.7	121	6.01	46	15.03	26	8.5	185	60.46	49	16.01	306	19.95
White (Non-Hispanic)	147	8.73	93	5.53	1216	72.25	227	13.49	1683	83.61	132	16.1	83	10.12	528	64.39	77	9.39	820	53.46

Table 2: Expected Completed Family Size for Never-Married Zero-Parity Youth – Comparing across ECFS Groups and between Nationally Representative Cohorts

Variable	Sample/ Cohort			
	NLSY79 Currently Childless (n=2013)		NLSY97 Currently Childless (n=1643)	
*Expected Completed Family Size^*	*Frequency*	*Percent (by group status)*	*Frequency*	*Percent (by group status)*
0 (intended permanent childlessness)	169	8.40	271	16.91
1 (small)	130	6.46	191	11.92
2 (average)	1430	71.04	974	60.76
3 (large)	284	14.11	167	10.42

^ Variable created by adding responses of "expected number of any (more) children" to current actual parity. Expected Completed Family Size scale: 0=want no children total; 1= small (want only one child total); 2=average (want 2 or 3 children total); 3=large (want 4 or more children total).

Table 3: 1979 Expectations of Marriage as a Function of Number of Expected Completed Family Size^ - NLSY79

Variable	Currently Childless (n1=1910; n2=1999)							
	Want None (n1=160) (n2=168)		Small (Want 1) (n1=123) (n2=128)		Average (Want 2 or 3) (n1=1355) (n2=1422)		Large (Want 4+) (n1=272) (n2=281)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Expect to be married within 5 years (% yes)	**25**	**15.63**	41	33.33	671	49.52	152	55.88
Expected Marital Age								
Less than 20	**4**	**2.38**	11	8.59	68	4.78	22	7.83
20-24	32	19.05	44	34.38	**774**	**54.43**	**159**	**56.58**
25-29	**68**	**40.48**	**54**	**42.19**	495	34.81	84	29.89
30 or older	**32**	**19.05**	14	10.94	72	5.06	16	5.69
Never	**32**	**19.05**	5	3.91	13	0.91	0	0
	Want 0 (n=168)				Want at Least One Child (n=1831)			
Expected Marital Age					101	5.52		
Less than 20	**4**	**2.38**			**977**	**53.36**		
20-24	32	19.05			633	34.57		
25-29	**68**	**40.48**			102	5.57		
30 or older	**32**	**19.05**			18	0.98		
Never	**32**	**19.05**			101	5.52		

^ Variable created by adding responses of "expected number of any (more) children" to current actual parity. Expected Completed Family Size scale: 0=want no children total; 1= small (want only one child total); 2=average (want 2 or 3 children total); 3=large (want 4 or more children total). Analyzed for never-married youth only. Percents are reported within EFS category (e.g., the percent of youth who report "yes" to marital expectations relative to youth who report "no" for each EFS category). Sample sizes changed for each EFS category due to missing responses. Symbolically, n1=the number of youth within the EFS group responding to the first question and n2 = the number of youth within the EFS group responding to the second question.

Table 4: 1982 Expectations of Marriage as a Function of Number of Expected Completed Family Size^ - NLSY79

Variable	Currently Childless (n=1405)							
	Want None (n=139)		Small (Want 1) (n=97)		Average (Want 2 or 3) (n=1025)		Large (Want 4+) (n=144)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Expect to be married within 1 years (% yes)	**2**	**1.44**	10	10.31	108	10.54	14	9.72

^ Variable created by adding responses of "expected number of any (more) children" to current actual parity. Expected Completed Family Size scale: 0=want no children total; 1= small (want only one child total); 2=average (want 2 or 3 children total); 3=large (want 4 or more children total). Analyzed for never-married youth only. Sample sizes changed for each EFS category due to missing responses.

Table 5: Expectations of Marriage as a Function of Number of Children Expected ^ - NLSY97

Variable	NLSY 97 Currently Childless (n=1590)							
	Want 0 (n1=269) (n2=263)		Want 1 (n1=190) (n2=182)		Want 2 or 3 (n1=968) (n2=938)		Want 4+ (n1=163) (n2=160)	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Expect to be married within 1 year (% yes)	6	2.23	16	8.42	63	6.51	13	7.98
Expect to be married within 5 years (% yes)	68	25.86	86	47.25	470	50.11	89	55.63
	Want 0 (n1=269) (n2=263)				Want at Least One Child (n1=1321) (n2=1280)			
Expect to be married within 1 year (% yes)	6	2.23			92	6.96		
Expect to be married within 5 years (% yes)	68	25.86			645	50.39		

^ Variable created by adding responses of "expected number of any (more) children" to current actual parity. Expected Completed Family Size scale: 0=want no children total; 1= small (want only one child total); 2=average (want 2 or 3 children total); 3=large (want 4 or more children total). Analyzed for never-married youth only. Percents are reported within EFS category (e.g., the percent of youth who report "yes" to marital expectations relative to youth who report "no" for each EFS category). Sample sizes changed for each EFS category due to missing responses. Symbolically, n1=the number of youth within the EFS group responding to the first question and n2 = the number of youth within the EFS group responding to the second question .

Table 6: Percent Chance of Marrying as a Function of Expected Completed Family Size^ - NLSY97

Variable	Parity Status															
	Currently Childless								NLSY97 Currently Childless							
	Want 0 (n1=271) (n2=271)		Want 1 (n1=191) (n2=190)		Want 2 or 3 (n1=974) (n2=972)		Want 4+ (n1=166) (n2=167)		Want 0 (n1=271) (n2=271)		Want 1 (n1=191) (n2=190)		Want 2 or 3 (n1=974) (n2=972)		Want 4+ (n1=166) (n2=167)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Percent Chance of being married in one year	9.24 CI [6.6, 11.8]	21.7	12.2 CI [8.6, 15.8]	25.1	12.4 CI [10.9, 14.0]	25.1	14.9 CI [10.6, 19.1]	27.9	9.24 CI [6.6, 11.8]	21.7	12.2 CI [8.6, 15.8]	25.1	12.4 CI [10.9, 14.0]	25.1	14.9 CI [10.6, 19.1]	27.9
Percent Chance of being married within five years	29.73 CI [25.9, 33.5]	31.9	39.2 CI [34.4, 44.0]	33.5	48.7 CI [46.6, 50.7]	33.5	54.8 CI [49.8, 59.8]	32.7	29.73 CI [25.9, 33.5]	31.9	39.2 CI [34.4, 44.0]	33.5	48.7 CI [46.6, 50.7]	33.5	54.8 CI [49.8, 59.8]	32.7

^ Variable created by adding responses of "expected number of any (more) children" to current actual parity. Expected Completed Family Size scale: 0=want no children total; 1= small (want only one child total); 2=average (want 2 or 3 children total); 3=large (want 4 or more children total). Analyzed for never-married youth only. Sample sizes changed for each EFS category due to missing responses. Symbolically, n1=the number of youth within the EFS group responding to the first question and n2 = the number of youth within the EFS group responding to the second question.

Appendix 1
Psychometric Properties for Youth Sex Role Attitudes – NLSY79

Scale	Cronbach Alpha Reliabilities	Number of Items	Scale Items*
Sex-Role Attitudes (1979)	0.715 (raw) 0.714 (std)	8	We are interested in your opinion about the employment of wives. I will read a series of statements and after each one, I would like to know whether you Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree: A woman's place is in the home, not in the office or shop. A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities doesn't have time for outside employment. A working wife feels more useful than one who doesn't hold a job.^ The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency. Employment of both parents is necessary to keep up with the high cost of living.^ It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family. Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth. ^ Women are much happier if they stay home and take care of their children.

* 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree. Scale was created by summing scores on each item. Higher values denote more traditional/ less egalitarian. ^ recoded items.