

AN INVESTIGATION OF VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS
AND THE MARITAL SATISFACTION OF COUPLES
OVER THE LIFE CYCLE

By

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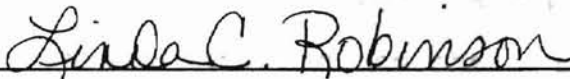
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Justification

Within the twentieth century, many alternative lifestyles have emerged within our society. Alternative lifestyles have included family structures such as single-parents, blended families, and gay and lesbian families. Within the last twenty years, however, family scientists discovered the emergence of an additional alternative lifestyle, the voluntary childless couple.

Voluntary childlessness was not observed as an alternative until the early 1970s (Veevers, 1983). Poston and Kramer (1983) further acknowledged it was not "until the mid-1970's, childlessness, its measurement and trends, received modest attention by sociologist, psychologists, demographers, and marriage and family life scholars" (p. 290). Consequently, "empirical knowledge of the causes and consequences of deliberate childlessness remains scanty and inconclusive" (Veevers, 1983, p.93).

Like other alternative lifestyles the voluntary childless face challenges from our society. These couples are either pressured to conform (eventually become parents) or they are bombarded with negative stereotypes. For example, Rowland (1982) pointed out that "the dominant

pronatalist attitude in our society ensures that couples who decide to marry, but voluntarily remain childfree, "are subjected to considerable pressure to conform and produce children" (p. 17). If these couples are able to withstand this pressure, society then may form negative stereotypes towards these couples. These stereotypes propose voluntary childless couples are selfish, uncaring, and childhaters (Rowland, 1982).

The study of the voluntary childless has been limited by the fact that "much of the research has either focused exclusively on wives, or studied the couple through the eyes of one respondent, the wife" (Hoffman & Levant, 1985, p. 198). It is for this reason in particular that the current study will focus on voluntary childless couples.

Veevers (1983) speculated the voluntarily childless lifestyle may be a choice for "15 or 20 percent of all married couples" (p. 93). Furthermore, Westoff predicted that by the year 2000 "about 30 percent of women would never have children" (Bram, 1985, p. 47). Such speculations make it necessary to gain a more in depth view of those who choose to remain childless.

Statement of the Problem

A myth that has existed in our society for many years is that childless couples cannot possibly remain happy or be satisfied with their marriages. In fact, we are

socialized to believe that having children is not an option; it is just part of what is considered "normal." Ritchey and Stokes (1974) stated "socialization is sufficiently effective that a cultural press toward childbearing prevails: most couples accept the value of having children without question" (p. 349). Yet, when couples fail to conform, they are considered deviant. Veevers (1972) recognized society's narrow speculations when she wrote:

Voluntary childlessness constitutes deviant behavior in that husbands and wives who decline the opportunity to have children violate norms both of behavior and of motivation. Such deviance is not illegal and is not met with any formal sanctions. It is, however, associated with a number of informal punishments. The voluntarily childless are stigmatized for their "blemished characters," and are subjected to many pressures to have children. As with other deviant groups, they are perceived as being relatively abnormal, unnatural, immature, sexually inadequate, unhappy, and prone to divorce (p. 587).

Perceptions of the voluntarily childless as deviant could be considered associated with times past, especially with the onset of the Women's Movement. However, it has been suggested advocates of the Women's Movement promote

postponing children rather than voluntary childlessness.
(Schapiro, 1980). . . . have lower marital

As scientists have conducted research on the voluntary childless they have neglected one minor detail. It is likely that most of this research has been conducted by family scientists who themselves are part of a traditional family setting. According to Schapiro (1980), "it seems a reasonable assumption that most researchers on the family are themselves in the mainstream of family lifestyles, meaning that they are likely married and have children themselves" (p. 155). Family scientists who choose voluntarily childless couples as an area of study need to be sensitive to the choices these couples have made. Before working with couples who choose not to have children researchers should also deal with any biases they may have. It is not necessary to be childless to study those who do not have children, but it is necessary to study with an open and accepting mind.

Relatively little thought has been given to the voluntary childless and marital satisfaction, with little or virtually no thought at all given to the idea of marital satisfaction over the life cycle. Research has indicated, however, that couples who choose to remain childless experience high levels of marital satisfaction. For example, Polonko, Scanzoni, and Teachman (1982) point out "the weight of recent evidence from cross-sectional and

longitudinal studies indicates that couples with children, particularly young children, have lower marital satisfaction and adjustment, on average, than do childless couples" (p. 545). In taking the concept further it is important to explore marital satisfaction over the life cycle for voluntary childless couples. In particular, how does voluntary childlessness relate to marital satisfaction for young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore marital satisfaction over the life cycle for voluntary childless couples. Although the voluntarily childless attracted the attention of researchers in the 1970s, few of these researchers acknowledged the importance of the marital relationship for these couples. It is the purpose of this study to explore the marital satisfaction of voluntary childless couples ages 20 to 69, thus making a contribution to the limited research on voluntary childlessness and marital satisfaction, and one that takes on a life cycle approach as well.

The knowledge generated within this study will aid those who work with couples who may be contemplating parenthood as well as those who choose not to have children.

Definition of Terms

Voluntary Childlessness: Couples who have chosen to remain

childless throughout the life cycle.

Marital Satisfaction: Marital satisfaction can be defined as the individual's overall satisfaction with the marital relationship. Operationally, marital satisfaction is defined using Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Therefore, marital satisfaction is defined in terms of levels of dyadic cohesion, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression.

Life Cycle: Life cycle is defined using an adaptation of Duvall's (1971) family life cycle stages. In this study the part of the life cycle selected are those couples who are twenty years of age to those who are sixty-nine years of age.

Delimitations

Since an exploratory approach was taken in reviewing the above problem it was estimated that ten couples (20 participants) was sufficient. However, there was not an equal representation of young adult couples, middle aged couples and older couples. Future research should consider using a larger, randomized sample in order to generalize findings to the larger population.

Future research may also want to concentrate its efforts on the comparisons of the voluntarily childless and other groups (postponers, parents, etc.) over the life cycle.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature will include the following:

1. A theoretical framework directly related to the voluntarily childless.
2. The history of childlessness.
3. Characteristics of the voluntarily childless.
4. Marital satisfaction over the life cycle for the voluntarily childless.

Theoretical Framework - Social Exchange Theory

Transactions between people take place every day. These transactions sometimes bring reward, and often bring cost. Just as transactions can bear a reward or a cost so to can the choice of an alternative lifestyle such as remaining childless. The rewards and costs of voluntary childlessness can best be described utilizing social exchange theory. The following paragraphs will be devoted to the discussion of assumptions associated with social exchange theory, major concepts related to the framework, and finally the application of social exchange theory to couples who choose to remain childless.

There are six basic assumptions in exchange theory. These assumptions can be summarized as (1) individuals look

for rewards and avoid penalty; (2) through interactions with others, people maximize benefits for themselves while reducing costs; (3) people are rational beings who make choices based on limited information; (4) when evaluating rewards and costs, people use different standards which may change over time; (5) people attach different meanings to others behaviors, which may change over time; and (6) as the reward exceeds an individual's expectations it becomes less valued later on (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

Four major concepts have been identified within exchange theory. First, each person brings certain characteristics into the relationship. Characteristics include resources, views about what constitutes rewards and costs, expectations for relationships, perceptions of alternatives, and exchange orientations. Second, norms and rules regulate exchange relationships. Third, the emergent characteristics of the exchange relationship influence the decisions about whether to remain in or leave the relationship. Finally, there are concepts that address relationship dynamics (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

There are many parallels between exchange theory and choosing to remain childless. The rewards and costs of bearing and rearing children have been evaluated by the voluntarily childless. Houseknecht (1982b) identified three rewards for choosing to remain childless. First, the voluntarily childless are not plagued by the financial cost

of children. Second, those choosing to remain childless are able to enjoy the fruits of their labor (financial benefits derived from employment). Finally, the voluntarily childless may enjoy social rewards that emerge from employment. Other rewards of remaining childless have been identified by other family scientists. For example, in their comparison of childless women and mothers, Houser, Berkman, and Beckman (1984) found that 53 percent of the childless women and 14 percent of the mothers identified less responsibility, worry and stress as rewards for not having children. Bram (1985) compared the voluntarily childless, delayed parents, and parents; the results indicated three costs of children. First, over-population was a concern of all groups. Second, each group noted children provoke a loss of freedom within the marriage. Finally, each group recognized that children interfere with the woman's career. Although interference with the woman's career has been identified as a cost, it should be noted that Beckman (1979) found "satisfaction with employment was much greater for childless women than for other women, and childless women saw many fewer costs of employment than did other women" (p. 161). A final cost is that as the voluntarily childless grow old they may regret their decision and become lonely and isolated (Bram, 1985). Research has shown otherwise. Houser, et al. (1984) found "childless older women did not conform to the classic

unsatisfied, unhappy stereotype. Rather they appeared to perceive certain advantages to their life state" (p. 398).

Within an exchange context, change is allowed to occur. For example, Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) stated "the standard that humans use to evaluate rewards and costs differ from person to person and can vary over the course of time" (p. 396). It is possible that the voluntarily childless, at this point in their lives, find remaining childless to be more of a reward than a cost. However, it is also possible that the voluntarily childless might perceive parenthood as a greater reward later in life.

History

Although voluntary childlessness was not recognized until the mid-1970's (Poston & Kramer, 1983), it actually dates back as early as 1920. In fact, Poston and Kramer (1983) noted "from the 1920s until 1940, although more than half of the childlessness occurring was typically involuntary, a good percentage of couples were having no children by choice" (p. 291).

By the early 1940's a decline in childlessness occurred. Childlessness in the early 1940's was usually not one of choice, but was a result of fecundity impairments (Poston & Kramer, 1983). Tolnay and Guest (1982) report findings contradictory to those of Poston and Kramer:

Childlessness apparently reached a peak among the cohorts of ever married white women who bore most of their children during the Depression and early 1940s. Of ever married white women who were 45 to 49 years old in 1950, 19.5 percent reported being childless, a figure not surpassed by other cohorts of white women who completed childbearing in the twentieth century (p. 201).

Existing research does agree, however, that an increase in childlessness can be attributed to the 1960s. During this period, childlessness, both voluntary and involuntary, increased (Poston & Kramer, 1983). The increase in childlessness was noted in a study conducted by Ritchey and Stokes (1974); accordingly, "in 1967 about one in seven white wives, 15 to 39 years of age and living with spouse was childless" (p. 351). This increase in childlessness remained steady throughout the mid-1970s. In fact, Schapiro (1980) indicated "according to the Census Bureau, in 1975 4.6% of married women age 18-39 expected or wanted to remain childless" (p. 155).

So, why the increase in childlessness from the early 1960's to 1975? During this period of time, an increasing number of women were participating in the labor force and showing a greater commitment to their careers. Also, women were asserting their independence. These years also proved to be a time of increased tolerance for those

choosing alternative lifestyles (Houseknecht, 1982b).

What does the future hold for the voluntarily childless? Predictions regarding the future of childlessness remain ambiguous. Speculations of some family scientists predict a return to a more traditional family form, which would inevitably lead to the decline in the rate of voluntary childlessness. In fact, Houseknecht (1982a) pointed out:

Many believe that young people specifically and the society generally have changed in recent years so that there is now a greater inclination to be traditional, conservative, and family oriented. The anti-ERA, anti-abortion and traditional family movements are all part of the change. This assessment fits with the finding that more young women are having children earlier in life (p. 54).

Only future research and time will tell.

Characteristics

The scientific study of the voluntarily childless have revealed characteristics that seem to emerge time and time again. The following paragraphs will present these characteristics in greater detail.

One of the most salient characteristics of the voluntarily childless is that they are usually well educated. In fact, Houseknecht (1982b) reported "of the

subjects in the research reviewed, most of the women who stated that they would prefer not to have children had at least some university experience; in fact, bachelors' and graduate degrees were common" (p. 462).

Employment of the voluntarily childless is often mentioned within the literature. The voluntarily childless are usually employed in high status positions. In Ramu's (1985) comparison of voluntarily childless and parental couples it was noted "the gains made by childfree couples over parents stem from the contributions of wives" (p. 138). It is possible that the childfree woman is able to dedicate more of her time to work, whereas a parent may not have this option. For example, in Bram's (1985) longitudinal study of voluntarily childless couples, delayed parents, and parents it was found that the voluntarily childless women worked more hours per week (37.9 on the average) compared to the delayed (30.2 on the average) and the parents (33.7 on the average). Working more hours per week contributes to a higher income level. Education levels may also contribute to higher income levels for the voluntarily childless.

An interesting finding which has emerged in the literature is the fact that the voluntarily childless seem to place little or no emphasis on religion. In fact, Veevers (1983) pointed out "voluntarily childlessness is associated with low religiosity, as measured by self-

designation as an atheist or agnostic, by an absence of religious affiliation, or by irregular church attendance" (p. 80).

A final characteristic concerns the marital satisfaction of voluntarily childless couples. Hoffman and Levant (1985) indicated the childfree experienced intense marital interaction as well as equal sex roles. Lupri and Frideres's study (as cited in Veevers, 1983) compared the childless to parents. The childless in this study were more likely to acknowledge their marriages as being "very happy."

These are but a few of the characteristics that surround the voluntarily childless; however, these are the characteristics which are more salient in the voluntarily childless lifestyle. Perhaps other characteristics will emerge within this study that are attributable to the family life cycle of the voluntarily childless.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is one of the more popular concepts studied when reviewing relationships within marriages and the family (Spanier, 1976). However, family scientists have utilized this concept infrequently as it applies to those married couples who choose not to have children. Since we know relatively little about the quality of marital relationships among the voluntary childless it was appropriate to apply the concept.

Evidence for marital satisfaction over the life cycle for voluntarily childless couples is severely limited. However, marital satisfaction for these couples has been assessed through comparative studies. The following paragraphs will discuss the marital satisfaction of the voluntarily childless in relation to other groups as well as present the results of a study conducted by Lupri and Frideres (1981). This particular study presents data on marital satisfaction over the family life cycle.

Polonko, Scanzoni, and Teachman (1982) referred to three particular studies that compared the voluntarily childless to mothers. They first considered Houseknecht's (1979) study, in which the voluntary childless wives not only scored higher on marital cohesion, but also were happier with their marriages and had a stronger desire to maintain their marriages. According to Feldman (1981), childless couples were likely to engage in conversation more frequently. These couples were also more likely to have positive marital interactions. Finally, in Bram's (1978) comparison of voluntarily childless couples to postponers and parents it was indicated:

The voluntarily childless had more companionate, interactive, and interdependent marital relationships than did postponers or parents. The voluntarily childless couples also had more egalitarian marriages in terms of decision making

and the household division of labor (Polonko, Scanzoni, & Teachman, 1982, p. 547).

Lupri and Frideres (1981) considered marital satisfaction over the family life cycle, although their focus did not rely exclusively on the childless. Accordingly, "a higher proportion of childless spouses report very happy marriages than couples with children" (Lupri & Frideres, 1981, p. 292).

Luckey and Bain (1970) analyzed 80 couples who had been categorized as being either satisfied or unsatisfied. A large percentage of the satisfied group (84% wives; 82% husbands) indicated companionship as being one of the more satisfying aspects of marriage. Couples identified as being unsatisfied indicated children as the primary satisfaction in their marriage. In fact, the study revealed that children may be the only source of satisfaction for unsatisfied couples. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Renne (1970) it was found that childless couples are more satisfied with their marriages. Regardless of the couples race, age or income level the findings indicated "people currently raising children were more likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages than people who had never had children or whose children had left home" (p. 66).

Although a life cycle approach is not common within existing literature, there are those who consider the approach valuable. For example, Burr's (1970) study of 116

couples utilized a life cycle approach when exploring the satisfaction with various aspects of the marital relationship. Although earlier studies had indicated a decline in satisfaction over the life cycle, Burr's (1970) study found no such decline. In fact, the study revealed a slight increase in a few of the areas explored.

Summary

Although there has been very little research to date on the marital satisfaction of voluntarily childless couples, the literature does provide us with the history of childlessness, characteristics of the childless, and a small amount on the marital satisfaction of voluntarily childless couples.

The history of voluntary childlessness can be dated back as early as 1920. The 1960s brought about new ideas and concepts, and it also saw an increase in childlessness, an increase which remained steady throughout the mid-1970s. Predictions on the growing rate of the voluntarily childless remain scanty and inconclusive.

Like all alternative lifestyles the voluntarily childless have been associated with certain characteristics. One of the more common characteristics of the voluntarily childless is their remarkably high education level. Quite possibly it is their education level that contributes to another established characteristic of the voluntarily childless, their employment status.

Typically these individuals are employed in high status positions. These couples have also been found to place little to no emphasis on religion. And when research has acknowledged the marital satisfaction of these couples it has found that these couples experience high levels of marital satisfaction.

This study focuses entirely on the voluntarily childless population. It will be interesting to see if the levels of marital satisfaction persist over time for these couples or if they shift, as do the levels of marital satisfaction for other couples, parents in particular.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In her assessment of individual, couple and family life cycle stages, Rogers (1989) was unable to locate any literature focusing on the developmental tasks of couples. However, the demographics of this sample, specifically age and length of time married, would suggest Duvall's (1971) family life cycle approach as an appropriate way to divide the sample into developmental stages. Although Duvall's family life cycle approach includes children it can also be used to explore the lives of voluntarily childless couples. In fact, Duvall referred to the family life cycle in the following way:

It is based upon the recognition of the successive patterns within the continuity of family living over the years. It opens the way for study of the particular problems and potentials, rewards and hazards, vulnerabilities and strengths of each phase of family experience from beginning to end (1971, p. 113).

For the purposes of this study couples aged twenty to sixty-nine years of age were selected for the study.

The participants who responded were from the mid-western region of the United States. A small sample (10 couples) was generated primarily through a snowballing technique. Two of the couples responded to advertisements the author placed in the Stillwater News Press and the Daily O'Collegian. A majority of the participants were generated through word of mouth. Often acquaintances of the author knew couples that would qualify for the study. These acquaintances were then asked to contact the couple to attain their permission to be contacted. These couples knew other couples who qualified for the study and the process was repeated. Each of the couples were interviewed in their homes with the exception of one couple who was interviewed at the author's residence. The couples were asked a series of seventeen open-ended questions. Following the interview the couples were asked to complete the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the General Background Questionnaire. The author did not ask the couples to fill the questionnaire out during the interview due to the length of the questionnaire. Instead the author provided each couple with a stamped envelope and asked the couples to return the questionnaire by mail. The length of the entire process typically lasted one and a half hours.

Instrumentation

Miller (1986) defines qualitative research as being "based on the nonnumerical examination and analysis of

observation, interviews, or written materials" (p. 30). For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose a qualitative approach. During the interviews the researcher chose to use open-ended questions. This type of questioning is common in an exploratory study. "The purpose of exploratory research is to generate ideas about, and insights into, a relatively little-understood issue" (Miller, 1986, p. 31).

Thoen's (1977) Family Living Questionnaire was used to obtain a large portion of the information on each of the participants. The questionnaire was originally used in Thoen's (1977) study on voluntary childfree couples. Some of the questions from the questionnaire were eliminated, while others were rearranged to form the General Background Questionnaire. This questionnaire provided the author with information on the participants general background, education, occupation, religion, general lifestyle, social network, contraception, family size preference, and partners.

Although this study was predominantly qualitative, quantitative measures were taken to measure the levels of marital satisfaction among the voluntary childless. To measure marital satisfaction the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) was utilized. The scale is a Likert-type scale consisting of 32 items. The Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale supplies a total score of dyadic

adjustment. The instrument also provides four subscale scores which measure dyadic cohesion, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression (Spanier, 1976).

Validity of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale was assessed in three areas. Content validity was established by observing the following: "(1) relevant measures of dyadic adjustment for contemporary relationships; (2) consistent with the nominal definitions suggested by Spanier and Cole (1974) for adjustment and its components (satisfaction, cohesion, and consensus); and (3) carefully worded with appropriate fixed choice responses" (Spanier, 1976, pp. 22-23).

Criterion-related validity was established by comparing the scores of divorced participants with those of married participants. Answers on each of the 32 items were found to be significantly different at the .001 level. Furthermore, total scores were also found significantly different at the .001 level.

Construct validity was established by comparing the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale. A correlation between the scales showed .86 between married respondents and .88 between divorced respondents.

The internal consistency reliability of the DAS was measured by utilizing Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (1951). Reliability of the subscales were established as: (1) dyadic consensus .90, (2) dyadic satisfaction .94, (3) dyadic cohesion .86, and (4) affectional expression .73. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (total scale) showed a reliability of .96. Spanier (1976) pointed out "the data indicate that the total scale and its components have sufficiently high reliability to justify their use" (p. 24).

Reliability and Validity of the Interviews (Qualitative)

Reliability and validity is difficult to establish when using qualitative measures. However, measures can be taken to establish reliability within a qualitative study. To establish reliability within the study, the interviews were coded independently by the author and a second researcher. After each interview was coded the consistency among the coded interviews was examined.

A small sample size (20 participants) was interviewed for the purposes of this study. However, small samples make it difficult to establish validity. However, validity was established by comparing the findings of this study with the findings of other studies. The findings of this study as well as the findings of other studies yield similar results.

Generalizability of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale
(Quantitative) and the Interviews (Qualitative)

In making generalizations it is important to not only have a large number of participants, but to also have a randomized sample. This particular sample was not large, nor was it randomized. However, it should be noted, being able to generalize is not a goal of qualitative research. The goal of this study was to explore the marital relationship and the couple's marital satisfaction for voluntary childless couples.

Procedure

Prior to the interviews each of the couples were asked three screening questions to determine if they qualified to participate in the study. Those couples who remained childless because of fertility issues were not included in the study. Couples not returning the General Background Questionnaire also were not included in the study. Before the interviews were conducted a written letter of informed consent was signed by the participants. A copy of the letter was given to the participants as well as the researcher. After the letters were signed the author proceeded with the interview. A series of 17 open-ended questions were asked by the author. The Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale was administered following the interview. This order was selected to avoid any bias that could have occurred from the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

The couples were interviewed together with the average interview lasting 1.5 hours, the longest interview lasting three hours, and the shortest interview lasting thirty minutes.

Data Analysis

Since each of the interviews was recorded on tape it was necessary for the author to transcribe each of the interviews. Transcription included reviewing each of the tapes and recording the participant's responses on paper. After each of the interviews was transcribed, key words relating to marital satisfaction were identified and coded. Following the coding of key words data was categorized into reoccurring themes. Themes declared as important were those that had properties of marital satisfaction.

Scores on the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Since a life cycle approach was taken, couples of all ages were interviewed. Ten percent of the participants were between the ages of 20-29. Thirty-five percent of the participants were between the ages of 30-39. Forty percent of the participants fell into the age group of 40-49. Finally, fifteen percent of the participants were between the ages of fifty and sixty-nine.

Quantitative Results

An interesting finding relating to the birth order of the participants emerged within the study. The literature has indicated that voluntarily childless couples tend to be the oldest children within their families of origin (Veever, 1983). The present study also suggests that these individuals are typically the oldest in their families of origin. In fact, forty-five percent of the participants indicated they were the oldest child in their families of origin, while only fifteen percent indicated they were the youngest child (see Table 1).

The literature has indicated that the voluntarily childless are typically well educated (Houseknecht, 1982b). The results of the present study indicated twenty percent of the sample had graduated from college, forty percent had

received a masters degree, and ten percent had received a doctorate degree (see Table 1).

Compared to the U.S. population, the participants in this study reported higher levels of socioeconomic status, which is not uncommon for the voluntary childless. This was observed when 85% of the participants reported having a combined income of \$40,000 or more. In fact, in their comparisons of the childfree and the child-anticipated, Hoffman and Levant (1985) found that both groups represented a higher socioeconomic level, with incomes within the top five percent of all related two-person households in the United States (United States Bureau of the Census, 1978) (see Table 1).

Studies, including this one, have suggested that the voluntarily childless are typically well educated and represent a higher socioeconomic level. The present study also explored the careers of these individuals. The findings illustrated seventy-five percent of the participants always assumed they would have a career. Furthermore, 68.4 percent of the participants indicated having children gets in the way of a woman's career success. In addition, 73.7 percent of the sample indicated not having children influenced their job flexibility (see Table 2).

Veever's (1983) has suggested that the voluntarily childless place relatively little emphasis on religion. The

results of this study offer a somewhat different interpretation. For example, 35% of the participants indicated that religion was unimportant in their marriages; 30% found it to be moderately important; and a final 35% found it to be very important in their marriages (see Table 3).

The present study explored the attitudes of voluntarily childless couples regarding the lifestyles of those who have children and of those who do not. The participants in the current study replied that couples without children generally have a better sex life (60%), more companionship (80%), more opportunities available to them (60%), and a better social life (50%). However, the data also suggests that the participants believed both couples without children and couples with children are equally happy (75%) (see Table 4).

Those who choose not to have children have been identified as child haters who distance themselves from children. The current study was unable to lend support to this particular myth. In fact, when asked "How many of your good friends have children?" 65% of the participants indicated most of their good friends have children. Furthermore, when asked "How many of your good friends do not have children?" 65% answered a few. In addition to having friends with children, 30% of the participants indicated inviting friends over mostly with kids,

occasionally alone. An additional 15% indicated inviting friends over almost always with kids. The current study would seem to indicate that these individuals do maintain contact with children. For example, many of the couples mentioned having contact with siblings children (see Table 5).

Since each of the couples had been identified as voluntarily childless, the current study explored whether temporary or permanent measures had been taken to maintain the couples current status. The data revealed 65% of the couples had chosen a temporary contraception method, while 30% had chosen a permanent method. However, when asked "When you first used contraception, how permanent was your desire not to have children?" 50% of the participants indicated it was a permanent measure (see Table 6).

American society has put much emphasis on the procreation of children. With such an emphasis on the bearing and rearing of children, one would assume that voluntarily childless couples receive pressure regarding their decision. However, the data from the current study suggests that 70% of the participants currently experience no pressure. When asked "How is this different than in the past?" 55% indicated feeling the same, while 35% suggested feeling less pressure now. Finally, when questioned about whom they felt the most pressure from, 60% indicated no pressures felt (see Table 7).

Previous studies found the voluntarily childless experience high levels of marital satisfaction. The results of this study lend support to previous studies. For example, when asked, "When you are feeling low, whom do you seek out first for comfort?" 75% of the participants indicated that it was their partner. Further indication of marital satisfaction was found when 55% of the participants reported their marriages as having been "very happy" for them (see Table 8).

Scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale range from 0 to 151. The scores for this group of individuals, however, ranged from 98 to 127. The mean score for the group was 112.450 with a standard deviation of 8.876. These estimates are comparable to Spanier's (1976) married sample. The mean score for his married sample was 114.8 with a standard deviation of 17.8. The results of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale indicated 75% of the participants fell within the normal range for this particular group of individuals; 10% scored above the norm, and the remaining 15% fell below. The majority of the group (75%) fell within one standard deviation of the mean. Therefore, these couples as compared with other couples in this sample, as well as those in Spanier's married sample, experience a normal degree of marital satisfaction.

Table 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Category	N	%
Age	20-29	2	10.0
	30-39	7	35.0
	40-49	8	40.0
	50-69	3	15.0
Gender	Male	10	50.0
	Female	10	50.0
Children in Family (1)	No Other Kids	1	5.0
	Yes	19	95.0
Birth Order (2)	Only	1	5.0
	Oldest	9	45.0
	Intermediate	7	35.0
	Youngest	3	15.0
Education (6)	Grade 12	1	5.0
	1-2 yrs college	1	5.0
	3-4 yrs college	3	15.0
	college graduate	4	20.0
	masters degree	8	40.0
	doctorate degree	2	10.0
	vocational training	1	5.0
Individual Income (8)	5,000-9,000	1	5.0
	15,000-19,000	1	5.0
	20,000-24,999	1	5.0
	25,000 +	17	85.0
Couple Income (9)	0-9,000	1	5.0
	20,000-29,999	1	5.0
	30,000-39,999	1	5.0
	40,000 +	17	85.0
Length of Marriage (5)	0-5 years	4	20.0
	6-10 years	2	10.0
	11-15 years	6	30.0
	16-20 years	0	0
	21 + years	8	40.0

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 2

CAREER CHOICES

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Category	N	%
Career (11)	Always Assumed I would have one	15	75.0
	In high school	4	20.0
	Never considered having a career	1	5.0
Goals (12)	As a child	1	5.0
	In high school	5	25.0
	In college	4	20.0
	In grad school	3	15.0
	After working several years	5	25.0
	Still haven't decided	2	10.0
Career (13) Success	No	6	31.6
	Yes	13	68.4
	*	1	5.0
Career (14) Children	None	1	5.0
	A few	10	50.0
	Some	7	35.0
	Many	2	10.0
Career (15) Flexibility	No	5	26.3
	Yes	14	73.7
	*	1	5.0

* Indicates missing data

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 3

RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Categories	N	%
Religious Background (16)	Catholic	1	5.0
	Protestant	13	65.0
	Jewish	1	5.0
	Other	2	10.0
	None	3	15.0
Religion Practiced (17)	Protestant	10	50.0
	Other	2	10.0
	None	8	40.0
Importance of Religion in Marriage (18)	Unimportant	7	35.0
	Moderately Important	6	30.0
	Very Important	7	35.0
Religious Events (19)	Never	7	35.0
	About 1 or 2 a year	6	30.0
	About every other month	1	5.0
	About 1 a week	4	20.0
	More often than 1 a week	2	10.0

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 4

GENERAL LIFESTYLE ATTITUDES

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Choices	N	%
Life and (20) Happiness	Couples w/out Children	5	25.0
	Both are Equal	15	75.0
Life and Sex (21)	Couples w/out Children	12	60.0
	Both are Equal	8	40.0
Life and (22) Companionship	Couples w/out Children	16	80.0
	Both are Equal	4	20.0
Life and (23) Opportunities	Couples w/out Children	12	60.0
	Both are Equal	8	40.0
Life and (24) Social Life	Couples w/out Children	10	50.0
	Both are Equal	8	40.0
	Couples w/Children	2	10.0

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 5

FRIENDSHIP NETWORK

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Category	N	%
Friends with Children (25)	A few	4	20.0
	Some	3	15.0
	Most	13	65.0
Friends with No Children (26)	A few	13	65.0
	Some	2	10.0
	Most	5	25.0
Invite Friends Over Alone or With Children (27)	Almost Always Alone	1	5.0
	Mostly Alone,	5	25.0
	Occasionally w/Kids		
	About the same both ways	5	25.0
	Mostly w/Kids,	6	30.0
	Occasionally Alone		
Other Childfree Couples Known Before Decision (28)	Am Temporarily Childfree	2	10.0
	None	4	20.0
	1-2 couples	8	40.0
	3-4 couples	5	25.0
	5 or more couples	1	5.0
Friendships Changed by Children (29)	I see those people much less	9	45.0
	I see those people somewhat less	6	30.0
	I see those people about the same	5	25.0
Know Voluntary Childless Couples (30)	1-2 couples	9	45.0
	3-4 couples	8	40.0
	5 + couples	3	15.0
Know Middle Aged or Older VC (31)	none	2	10.0
	1-2 couples	12	60.0
	3-4 couples	6	30.0

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 6

METHODS OF CONTRACEPTION

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Category	N	%
Method of (32) Birth Control	Permanent	6	30.0
	Temporary	13	65.0
	None	1	5.0
Responsibility For Method (33)	Husband	3	15.0
	Wife	10	50.0
	Both	3	15.0
	Does not apply	4	20.0
First Use of BC Method and Permanency of Decision (34)	Temporary measure wanted child in future	2	10.0
	Temporary measure hadn't decided one way or the other	8	40.0
	Permanent measure never wanted a child	10	50.0

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 7

FAMILY SIZE PREFERENCE

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Category	N	%
Comfortableness w/Decision Now (35)	Quite Uncomfortable	2	10.0
	Comfortable Most of the time	1	5.0
	Somewhat Comfortable	2	10.0
	Quite Comfortable	15	75.0
Comfort Level Change Since Decision Was First Made (36)	Less Comfortable	1	5.0
	About the Same	16	80.0
	More Comfortable	3	15.0
Pressure Now (37)	No Pressure at All	14	70.0
	A Little Pressure	5	25.0
	A Moderate Amount of Pressure	1	5.0
Pressure Past (38)	Less Pressure Now Than in Past	7	35.0
	Feel The Same	11	55.0
	More Pressure Now Than in Past	2	10.0
Pressure In What Situations (39)	Don't Feel Any Pressure	12	60.0
	Holidays	3	15.0
	Family Gatherings	2	10.0
	Friend or Close Relative Has Baby	1	5.0
	Other	2	10.0
Pressure Changed (40)	Feels A Lot Less Pressure	4	20.0
	Feels Slightly Less Pressure	1	5.0
	It Hasn't Changed	14	70.0
	Feels Slightly More Pressure	1	5.0
Pressure From Whom (42)	No Pressures Felt	12	60.0
	Parents	3	15.0
	Friends	1	5.0
	Employer	1	5.0
	Mass Media	1	5.0
	Myself	2	10.0

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Table 8

PARTNERS

Variable Name (Item #)	Variable Category	N	%
Whom Do You Seek For Comfort (43)	No One	2	10.0
	My Partner	15	75.0
	Pet	1	5.0
	Other	2	10.0
Marriage Could Be Happier (44)	Disagree	11	57.9
	Agree	8	42.1
	*	1	5.0
Spare Time Spent Together or Apart (45)	A Little Together	1	5.0
	Some Together	7	35.0
	Most Together	12	60.0
Feelings About Spare Time Spent Together (46)	Dissatisfied	1	5.0
	Satisfied	18	90.0
	Indifferent	1	5.0
Happiness of Marriage (47)	Very Unhappy	2	10.0
	Happy	7	35.0
	Very Happy	11	55.0
Happiness of Marriage for Partner (48)	Happy	10	50.0
	Very Happy	10	50.0
Marriage Is Not Perfect Success (49)	Disagree	5	26.3
	Agree	14	73.7
	*	1	5.0
Satisfaction of Current Relationship (50)	Somewhat Less	2	11.1
	About the Same	2	11.1
	Somewhat More	8	44.4
	Much More	6	33.3
	*	2	10.0
Times I Do Not Feel A Great Deal Of Love For Partner (51)	Disagree	15	88.2
	Agree	2	11.8
	*	3	15.0
Have Needs Not Met By Marriage (52)	Disagree	11	64.7
	Agree	6	35.3
	*	3	15.0

* Indicates Missing Data

** The number located by the variable name indicates the item number in the General Background Questionnaire.

Qualitative Results

Each of the interviews consisted of seventeen open-ended questions. These questions were used to explore marital satisfaction, lifestyles, remaining voluntarily childless, attitudes towards couples with children, and past and present contact with children.

Each of the couples were asked "What has been the greatest contributor to the success of your marriage?" An overwhelming response to this question was the ability to maintain a sense of humor. In fact, one participant commented "Sometimes you've got to have a sense of humor about things." A second contributor to the success of these couples' marriages was the maintenance of independence. Independence was expressed by one participant as they explained "We're both independent. She does her thing and I do mine, but in between we somehow seem to get together there." Three couples expressed a somewhat different attitude. In fact, one participant commented "We do a lot of things together, we always have." Many of the couples also indicated compatibility as being a contributor to the success of their marriage. For example, after one individual made comments about having similar backgrounds and personalities her partner agreed by stating "I agree, we're just extremely compatible." The couples were later asked "What value does being married have for couples who do not intend to have children?" A majority of the couples

indicated that companionship was valued in their marriage. In fact, two participants indicated marriage doesn't have to include children by explaining "Marriage is what life's all about without kids," while the another commented "You're looking for a partner, a lifetime partner, someone to share things with, someone to help you work through goals. And that's a whole lot more important than whether you do or don't have children." Perhaps one participant's comment summed it up when they observed "I don't know where it's written anywhere that says that you're supposed to have children when you get married."

In order to gain a broader understanding of the voluntarily childless it was helpful to learn more about their lifestyle. For example, the current study was able to examine the couple's lifestyles by asking about the things they enjoyed together as a couple. A majority of the couples responses centered around eating. In fact, one of the couples had arranged to have lunch together every day. A second couple had a set dinner time where they could sit and eat dinner with one another. A majority of the couples also mentioned travel as a mutual enjoyment. Finally, couples indicated pets and getting together with friends as things shared together.

The present study also wanted to explore the couples' attitudes in terms of how the couples felt remaining childless had affected their lifestyle. The couples felt

their lifestyle enabled them to not only have more freedom, but it also provided them with financial security. In the words of one participant "We do what we want, when we want to do it." The couples also seemed to have a sense of the time requirements involved with a child because they indicated having more free time. One individual commented "I would clearly have to rearrange my time and it probably still wouldn't be enough."

Each couple was asked "Did you both agree to not have children, or did one partner feel stronger about it than the other?" A majority of the couples agreed that it was a mutual decision. However, issues of communication were found within the couples' responses to this question. For example, although many of the couples agreed that it was a mutual decision, often times it had not been discussed prior to marriage, or discussed at all for that matter. In fact, one couple indicated that having children was not discussed until several years after marriage. Within the couple dyad attitudes expressed were sometimes divergent about remaining childless. For example, one wife in particular made it clear that her decision was permanent, while her husband expressed a less than adamant attitude by commenting "I think it was your idea. I really didn't have an opinion."

The literature has suggested how society perceives childless couples; however, it has failed to address the

perceptions of the voluntarily childless regarding those couples who choose to have children. When couples were asked "How do you think becoming a parent affects couples' relationships?" many of the couples talked about how the relationship becomes child centered. These couples also suggested that roles change with the onset of children. For example, one individual commented on how it reinforces gender roles. Couples also expressed that children are straining to the marital relationship. In the words of one participant, "People who have kids tend to go crazy." To further illustrate how childless couples perceive couples with children, each couple was asked "Do you think having children influences the activities couples engage in?" An overwhelming response to this question was yes. Couples suggested that the activities tended to be more child-focused. As one respondent stated "The world revolves around children."

Past studies have identified childless persons as individuals who do not particularly care for children, thus distancing themselves from them. The present study sought to explore the contact childless couples had with children in the past and contact they presently have. The contact couples had in the past was examined by asking "Growing up, did you ever have the opportunity to babysit?" A majority of the couples responded yes. In fact, only four individuals indicated they had not babysat. The experience

of babysitting did help contribute to one participant's decision on remaining childless. In fact, when asked about babysitting she responded "Oh I did alot, and maybe that helped make me decide I didn't want 'em." A majority of the couples also indicated presently having contact with children. In fact, one individual expressed a very positive attitude towards his nieces by stating "But I've got some nieces that are just, they're a kick in the pants man. I love 'em you know." Similar attitudes were expressed regarding siblings children. For example, one participant explained "It's kind of nice to be an aunt and uncle. You can really enjoy 'em but you can give 'em back too." Other couples commented on the importance of maintaining some kind of contact with children. Maintaining contact with children was obviously important to one participant as she commented "Yeah, I like to be in contact with kids, 'cause I think it kind of keeps you young and um keeps you thinking the way kids think and what they're into and you know keeps you in the know about what's going on in the real world."

Voluntary Childlessness and the Life Cycle

The participant's chronological age and length of time married is congruent with Duvall's family life cycle stages, although these individuals presently have no children. For example, individuals in their twenties had been married 10 months. Persons in their thirties had been

married an average of 9.85 years. Individuals in their forties had been married on the average 17.87 years. Finally, persons in their early fifties to late sixties had been married an average of 29 years.

Although there was not an equal representation of couples across the life cycle in the present study, differences did occur.

Two couples in their 30s had not made childlessness a permanent choice. In fact, one of the couples maintained a desire for children, but had been unable to reach a consensus as to when an appropriate time would be. It is possible that using temporary methods of birth control is related to the couples' stage in the life cycle, however, five other couples reported using temporary methods as well. A larger sample is needed to help determine whether this is life cycle related or if the choice is one that carries over into many stages within the life cycle.

Although responses to the question "What value does being married have for couples who do not intend to have children?" typically centered around companionship, two couples in their 30s and 40s gave a response not mentioned by others. Both couples talked about the legal advantages of being married. For example, one participant explained "I guess for me, the biggest benefit to being married is just the legal things, as far as owning cars and houses.

Similar attitudes were expressed by three women in their 30s and 40s in reference to their feelings about children. Two of the women expressed a dislike of children, while another woman commented "I'm just not that attracted to children."

It appears that differences did occur within the sample, however, it is difficult to make generalizations with such small numbers. Future family scientists utilizing a life cycle approach should consider using a larger randomized sample.

Discussion of Results

Even though many of the couples' responses were similar, they differed as well. For example, six couples expressed an independent quality while three couples commented on doing everything together.

Although voluntary childlessness has been characterized as an untraditional lifestyle many of the couples expressed traditional attitudes. For example, several couples expressed a desire for the wife to be able to stay home with the children if they, of course, were going to have children.

When reviewing the results of the present study one should consider the small size of the sample. Future research should make a concentrated effort to obtain a larger, randomized sample. Only then can the results be generalized to the larger population.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Voluntary childlessness has only recently been recognized as a lifestyle chosen by many couples in American society (Veevers, 1983; Poston & Kramer, 1983). Although its recognition has facilitated much needed research, it has ignored some vital aspects of this lifestyle. For example, research on the voluntarily childless has typically focused on women. Furthermore, when the couple has been studied research has typically relied on responses from the wife (Hoffman & Levant, 1985). Since the voluntarily childless couple has virtually been ignored the author of the present study sought to explore this relationship in greater depth. The present study also chose to incorporate a life cycle approach to explore marital satisfaction over the life course for these couples. In essence, the purpose of the present study was to explore marital satisfaction over the life cycle for voluntary childless couples.

The findings of the study lend support to previous findings. Overall the couples tended to be well educated with incomes representing a higher socioeconomic level. In regards to religion, however, the findings of the present study differed somewhat from previous studies (Veevers,

1983). Previous studies have indicated that the voluntarily childless place little to no emphasis on religion. However, the findings of the present study indicate that sixty-five percent found religion to be moderately to very important in their marriages. Finally, the results of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale indicated normal levels of marital satisfaction within this particular sample. The General Background Questionnaire also provided information regarding the marital satisfaction of the participants. In fact, the results of the questionnaire indicated that 90% of the sample reported their marriages as being happy to very happy.

The implications of this study point to a couple of possible differences between couples who chose to participate and couples who chose not to participate. It is possible those choosing not to participate received more pressure regarding their choice. It is also possible that couples who chose not to participate were uncomfortable with the interview method utilized in this study, particularly the author interviewing the couples in their homes.

An unexpected finding emerged within the present study. The author speculated that the voluntarily childless would use more permanent measures of birth control to prevent having children. However, 65% of the sample chose to use a temporary method. The results would seem to

indicate that the decision to remain childfree is based on a continuum. In fact, the decision is not always clear cut. The choice is complicated, and for some it is not a choice that they are ready to make permanent.

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

APPENDIX A

IRB FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 02-09-96

IRB#: HE-96-035

Proposal Title: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTS OF VOLUNTARY
CHILDLESSNESS ON THE MARITAL SATISFACTION OF COUPLES OVER THE
LIFE CYCLE

Principal Investigator(s): Kay Murphy, Angela Foust

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A
CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD
APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR
APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval
are as follows:

*On the informed consent form, please add the name "Jennifer Moore" for the IRB contact.
Please also change the IRB address to 305 Whitehurst. Thank you.

Signature:



Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: February 14, 1996

APPENDIX B
SCREENING QUESTIONS

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Work Phone Number: _____

Response to screening questions:

1. Do you intend to have children? (check one)

- no
 don't know
 yes
 already have children

2. Have you ever consulted a physician regarding lack of fertility?

- no
 yes

3. Do you have children from a previous marriage?

- no
 yes

Best possible times to interview:

Set date for interview: _____

Consent form signed: _____ no or _____ yes

Thank you note sent: _____ no or _____ yes

Summary of results sent: _____ no or _____ yes

Referrals: _____

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, voluntarily consent to participate in a research study titled "An Investigation Of Voluntary Childlessness And The Marital Satisfaction Of Couples Over The Life Cycle." I understand that the purpose of the study is to explore marital satisfaction over the life cycle for voluntary childless couples. I also understand that the information I provide will help to shed light on the lifestyle of those who choose to remain childless.

I understand that during the interview I will be asked a series of open-ended questions by the researcher that will take approximately one hour. I understand that I may answer the questions as completely as I feel comfortable, or not at all; there is no perceived risk for me. I understand the information I give during the interview will be tape recorded. I understand the information contained on the audio tapes will be kept confidential by securing the tapes in a safety deposit box. I also understand that these tapes will be destroyed after the researcher completes her thesis. I understand that after the interview I will have the option of filling out the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale. I understand that all the information I give will remain confidential, and the only place my name will appear is on this document.

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director.

I may contact Angela Foust, the project investigator, at (405) 377-6658, or Dr. Kay Murphy, faculty advisor, at (405) 744-8353, should I have further questions regarding the study. I may also contact Jennifer Moore at University Research Services, 305 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK. 74078, (405) 744-5700, concerning my legal rights as a research subject.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Signature

Date

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the participant before requesting the participant to sign it.

Project Investigator: _____

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Your age _____ Your sex _____

1. In the family in which you were raised, were there children other than yourself? (include all other children raised in your household)

_____ no other children
 _____ yes (specify largest number while you lived there) _____

2. What was your position among your brothers and sisters, according to ages? (include all other children raised in your household) (check one)

_____ only child
 _____ oldest child
 _____ youngest child
 _____ intermediate child

3. What has your marital experience been? (check one)

_____ married once (check here if present marriage is your only marriage)
 _____ married twice - first marriage ended in divorce
 _____ married twice - first partner died
 _____ married more than twice
 _____ other (specify) _____

4. How long have you and your partner been living together?

_____ months or _____ years

5. How long have you and your partner been married at the present time?

_____ months or _____ years

Education

6. Last year of formal education you completed.

_____ grade 8
 _____ grade 9-11
 _____ grade 12
 _____ 1-2 years of college
 _____ 3-4 years of college

- college graduate
 masters degree
 doctorate degree
 vocational training
 other (specify?) _____

7. How much do you think your decision to not have children has influenced your educational opportunities?

- none
 a little
 some
 quite a bit
 a lot

8. What is your approximate income?

- 0-\$4,999
 \$5,000-9,999
 \$10,000-14,999
 \$15,000-19,999
 \$20,000-24,999
 \$25,000 +

9. What is the approximate combined income of you and your partner?

- 0-\$9,000
 \$10,000-14,999
 \$15,000-19,999
 \$20,000-29,999
 \$30,000-39,999
 \$40,000 +

Occupation

10. What is your occupation? _____

11. When did you first consider a career? (check one)

- always assumed I would have one
 in high school
 before marriage
 after marriage
 never have considered having a career

12. When did you decide on your career goals? (check one)
- as a child
 in high school
 in the military
 in college
 in grad school
 after working several years
 I still haven't decided
13. Do you think having children gets in the way of a woman's career success?
- no
 yes
14. How many females do you know who have (in your opinion) successfully combined children and careers?
- none
 a few
 some
 many
15. Do you think your not having children has influenced your job flexibility?
- no
 yes

Religion

16. What is your religious background? (check one)
- Catholic
 Protestant
 Jewish
 other (specify) _____
 none
17. What religion do you practice?
- Catholic
 Protestant
 Jewish
 other (specify) _____
 none

18. How important is religion in your marriage?
- unimportant
 - moderately important
 - very important
19. About how often do you attend religious events?
(check one)
- never
 - about once or twice a year
 - about every other month
 - about once or twice a month
 - about once a week
 - more often than once a week
-

GENERAL LIFESTYLE

20. Who do you think are generally happier? (check one)
- couples without children
 - both are equal
 - couples with children
21. Who do you think generally have a better sex life?
(check one)
- couples without children
 - both are equal
 - couples with children
22. Who do you think generally have more companionship
with each other? (check one)
- couples without children
 - both are equal
 - couples with children
23. Who do you think generally have more opportunities
open to them? (check one)
- couples without children
 - both are equal
 - couples with children
24. Who do you think generally has a better social
life? (check one)
- couples without children
 - both are equal
 - couples with children

Social Network

25. How many of your good friends have children? (count a couple as 1, single parents as 1) (check one)
- none
 a few
 some
 most
 do not know
26. How many of your good friends do not have children? (check one)
- none
 a few
 some
 most
 do not know
27. Of your friends or relatives with children, how frequently do you invite them over alone, as opposed to with their children? (check one)
- almost always alone
 mostly alone, occasionally with kids
 about the same both ways
 mostly with kids, occasionally alone
 almost always with kids
28. If you have decided to remain childfree, how many other voluntary childfree couples did you know before you made your decision? (check one)
- am childfree temporarily
 none
 1-2 couples
 3-4 couples
 5 or more couples
29. To what extent have your friendships with other couples (before they had children) been changed by their having children? (check one)
- I see those people much less
 I see those people somewhat less
 I see those people about the same
 I see those people somewhat more
 I see those people a lot more

30. How many voluntary childfree couples do you know currently?
- _____ none
 _____ 1-2 couples
 _____ 3-4 couples
 _____ 5+ couples
31. How many middle aged or older voluntary childfree couples do you know now?
- _____ none
 _____ 1-2 couples
 _____ 3-4 couples
 _____ 5+ couples

Contraception

32. What method of birth control do you and your partner currently use?
- _____ permanent (surgical procedure for husband or wife)
 _____ temporary (pill, diaphragm, condom, IUD, rhythm, etc.)
 _____ none (am of reproducing age)
 _____ none (am beyond reproducing age)
33. Who assumes the responsibility for using that method? (check one)
- _____ husband
 _____ wife
 _____ both
 _____ does not apply
34. When you first used contraception, how permanent was your desire not to have children? (check one)
- _____ it was a temporary measure since we felt we wanted a child in the future
 _____ it was a temporary measure, but we hadn't decided one way or the other
 _____ it was a permanent measure since we were sure we never wanted a child
 _____ never used contraception

FAMILY SIZE PREFERENCE

35. How comfortable are you with your decision nowadays? (check one)
- quite uncomfortable
 somewhat uncomfortable
 comfortable most of the time
 somewhat comfortable
 quite comfortable
36. Has your level of comfort about your decision changed since you first made that decision? (check one)
- less comfortable
 about the same
 more comfortable
37. About how much pressure do you now experience about being childfree? (check one)
- no pressure at all
 a little pressure
 a moderate amount of pressure
 quite a bit of pressure
 really a lot of pressure
38. How is this different than in the past? (check one)
- I feel less pressure now than in the past
 I fee the same
 I feel more pressure now than in the past
39. In what situations do you feel the most pressures against being childfree? (check as many as apply)
- don't feel any pressure
 holidays
 family gatherings
 when a friend or close relative has a baby
 when around small children
 other (specify) _____
40. How has the pressure you feel about being childfree changed since you first made the decision? (check one)
- I feel a lot less pressure
 I feel slightly less pressure
 It hasn't changed
 I feel slightly more pressure
 I feel a lot more pressure

41. What kind of pressures have you experienced about being childfree? (check as many as apply)
- no pressure felt
 - people asking us when we are going to start our family
 - people asking if we have a fertility problem
 - people giving us things for babies
 - being discriminated against for being childfree
 - people raving to us about how great children are
 - being left out of social activities
 - my own feeling
42. From whom do you feel the most pressure about being childfree? (check one)
- no pressures felt
 - parents
 - partner
 - brothers and sisters
 - friends
 - neighbors
 - employer
 - mass media
 - myself

PARTNERS

43. When you are feeling low, whom do you seek out first for comfort? (check one)
- no one
 - a parent
 - a friend
 - my partner
 - pet
 - other (specify) _____
44. My marriage could be happier than it is.
- disagree
 - agree
45. When you and your partner have spare time simultaneously, do you spend it together or separately? (check one)
- have no spare time that occurs simultaneously
 - none of it together
 - a little of it together
 - some of it together
 - most of it together

46. How do you feel about the spare time you and your partner spend together? (check one)
- dissatisfied (comment) _____
 satisfied
 indifferent
 do not know
47. Everything considered, how happy has your marriage been for you? (check one)
- very unhappy
 unhappy
 happy
 very happy
48. Everything considered, how happy do you think your marriage has been for your partner? (check one)
- do not know
 very unhappy
 unhappy
 happy
 very happy
49. My marriage is not a perfect success.
- disagree
 agree
50. Compared to right after you began living together, how satisfying is your current relationship with your partner? (check one)
- much less satisfying
 somewhat less satisfying
 about the same
 somewhat more satisfying
 much more satisfying
51. There are times I do not feel a great deal of love for my partner.
- disagree
 agree
52. I have some needs which are not being met by my marriage.
- disagree
 agree

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What has been the greatest contributors to the success of your marriage?

2. Describe to me some of the things you enjoy together as a couple.

3. How has not having children affected your relationship with relatives and friends who have children?

4. Are there any circumstances under which you would consider having children? What are those circumstances?

5. Did you both agree to not have children, or did one partner feel stronger about it than the other? How was the decision ultimately made?

PROBE: When did you and your partner first begin considering the alternative of remaining childfree permanently?

PROBE: When did you and your partner make the decision to remain childfree permanently?

PROBE: How firm is your decision?

6. What factors have influenced you and your partner the most to remain childless?

PROBE: For example,

- _____ parental pressure
- _____ not able to spend time the way you chose
- _____ not willing to give up career
- _____ staying at home all day with children
- _____ handling a job and a child simultaneously
- _____ loss of flexibility (lifestyle changes)
- _____ interference with goals and aspirations
- _____ prefer self-dev. to child's dev.
- _____ not willing to give up privacy
- _____ prefer to have neat, orderly home

- _____ prefer predictable daily routines
- _____ interference with intellectual growth
- _____ concern for ecological implications
- _____ maintenance of the couple (togetherness)
- _____ want to keep our freedom
- _____ want to keep our mobility
- _____ fear loss of aims, affection and money
- _____ religious differences with spouse
- _____ stress on relationship with the spouse
- _____ not enough time for children because of mate
- _____ spouse wants to remain childless
- _____ financially not able
- _____ health reasons
- _____ can't physiologically have children

7. If your decision to remain childfree was at one time temporary, what led to it becoming a permanent decision?

8. Do you think having children would have an impact on how satisfied you are in your relationship with your partner? How?

9. Has there ever been a time when you or your partner considered ending the relationship? If so, what helped to maintain the relationship?

10. What has contributed to the success of your relationship with your partner?

11. How has remaining childless affected your lifestyle?

PROBE: How important do you think your decision to not have children has been in determining your lifestyle?

12. Some people think the purpose of marriage is to provide a family for raising children. What value does being married have for couples who do not intend to have children?

13. Is there anything you would change about your relationship with your partner if given the opportunity? If so, what?

14. How do you think becoming a parent effects couples' relationships? (relationships, interests, mobility, traditional, etc.)

PROBE: How much do you think you would have to give up in order to be a parent?

15. Growing up, did you ever have the opportunity to babysit? If so, whose children did you care for?

16. Do you presently have any contact with children? If so, what is the nature of the relationship?

17. Do you think having children influences the activities couples engage in? If so, give many examples.

APPENDIX F

SPANIER DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

14. Leisure time
interests and
activities ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
15. Career decisions ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
-

For this section 1=All the time; 2=Most of the time; 3=More often than not; 4=Occasionally; 5=Rarely; 6=Never.

16. How often do you discuss or have you considered
divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a
fight?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
18. In general, how often do you think that things between
you and your partner are going well?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
19. Do you confide in your mate?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
20. Do you ever regret that you married?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each others
nerves"?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6
-

For this section, 1=Every day; 2=Almost every day;
3=Occasionally; 4=Rarely; 5=Never.

23. Do you kiss your mate?
 ___1 ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

- I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.
- I want very much for my relationship to succeed and will do all I can to see that it does.
- I want very much for my relationship to succeed and will do my fair share to see that it does.
- It would be very nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.
- It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
- My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

APPENDIX G
ADVERTISEMENT

* This is the advertisement that appeared in the Stillwater and Grove newspapers as well as the Shop-N-Swap.

GRADUATE STUDENT IS SEEKING VOLUNTARILY CHILDLESS COUPLES,
AGES 20 TO 69, TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY.
INTERESTED COUPLES SHOULD CALL (405) 377-6658 TUESDAY -
FRIDAY AFTER 5:00 P.M.

APPENDIX H

RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR THE CHILDFREE

Childless By Choice
PO Box 695
Leavenworth, WA 98826

Childfree Network
7777 Sunrise Blvd., Suite 1800
Citrus Heights, CA 95610

No Kidding!
Box 27001
Vancouver, BC Canada V5R 6A8

VITA

Angela Foust

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: AN INVESTIGATION OF VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS ON THE
MARITAL SATISFACTION OF COUPLES OVER THE LIFE
CYCLE

Major Field: Family Relations and Child Development

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Siloam Springs, Arkansas,
On November 28, 1969, the daughter of
Junior and Sheila Hartley

Education: Graduated from Jay High School, Jay,
Oklahoma in May 1988; received Bachelor of
Science degree in Family Relations and
Child Development from Oklahoma State
University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December
1992. Completed the requirements for the
Master of Science degree with a major in
Family Relations and Child Development
at Oklahoma State University in July 1996.

Experience: Raised on a farm near Jay, Oklahoma;
employed by Oklahoma State University,
Department of Family Relations and Child
Development as a graduate research
assistant; Oklahoma State University,
Department of Family Relations and
Child Development, 1994 to 1996.