

Understanding Men's Fertility Preferences and Intentions: The Effects of Race, Class and Sexuality

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Extended Abstract

Because fertility has typically been considered the domain of women, the vast majority of sociological literature on the topic speaks only to the experiences of women (Smock and Greenland 2010). As a result, there is a prolific body of research on the factors that influence heterosexual women's fertility preferences and intentions (e.g., Hayford 2009; Hayford and Morgan 2008; Morgan 1996; Schoen et al. 2009; and others below). However, as family forms become more diverse—as seen through rising rates of single motherhood, cohabitation, and same-sex parents—it is increasingly important to consider the parenthood preferences of men *and* women from varied backgrounds. The fertility preferences and intentions of gay men and lesbians are particularly interesting theoretically because homosexual individuals face considerable barriers to achieving parenthood—especially gay men, who cannot procreate within a same-sex relationship. Moreover, due to their sexuality or social class position, some groups may perceive greater obstacles in achieving parenthood, a belief that may manifest as discordance between their preferences or ideals for having children and their intentions to have children, which take into account the constraints one faces.

In the current research, I address the following questions:

1. *How do men's fertility preferences and intentions vary across race and class groups?*
 - a. *Are the natures of these relationships similar for men as compared to women?*
2. *How do men's fertility preferences and intentions vary across sexuality groups?*
 - a. *Are the natures of these relationships similar for men as compared to women?*
 - b. *Do the answers to these questions vary depending on how sexuality is measured (i.e., sexual orientation, sexual attraction, or sexual behavior)?*
3. *Which groups of men and women display the greatest discordance between their reported preferences for children and their intentions to have children?*

While there is a growing literature on race and class variability in women's fertility intentions (e.g., Morgan 1996; Musick et al. 2009; Schoen et al. 2009), there is little known about the effect of race and class on men's fertility intentions (for an exception on class, see Augustine, Nelson and Edin 2009). What we do know suggests that factors influencing fertility intentions may be gender-specific, such that men and women come to form intentions for children in different ways. For example, while education tends to have a negative effect on women's fertility intentions (Musick et al. 2009), it appears to have a positive effect on men's fertility attitudes, although some of the evidence is mixed (Johnson and Lean 1985; Morgan and Rackin 2010; Weeden et al. 2006). In more recent years, greater attention has been paid to the experiences of men who already have become fathers. For instance, Roy's (2006) research on low-income black men demonstrates that the confluence of their race and class shapes their perspectives on fathering. However, there is little known about how race-ethnicity and class influence men's fertility preferences and intentions before having children (Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996; Greene and Biddlecom 2000). The current research helps fill this gap in the literature.

At a time when gay families are becoming increasingly visible, the fertility preferences and intentions of gay men and lesbians are important for a comprehensive view of family formation attitudes. Most

available research on fertility intentions among gay men and lesbians consists of small, qualitative studies that convey the stories of those who already have become parents (Carrington 1999; Lewin 2009; Mallon 2004; Mezey 2008a; Sullivan 2004), using retrospective reports that may not capture respondents' original intentions (Santelli et al. 2009). Additionally, many studies focus primarily on middle-class white individuals (Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007; Rabun and Oswald 2009). However, Mezey (2008b) and Moore (2011) demonstrate that race-ethnicity and class status can significantly shape the ways individuals experience their sexual identities and, in turn, how they form families. As such, it is important to consider not only the effects of sexuality, but also the ways in which sexuality interacts with experiences of race and class—all of which the current study is uniquely positioned to examine.

It is important to note there is no consensus on how to most effectively measure sexuality in quantitative research. Previous studies vary on their use of measures of sexual orientation, sexual attraction, or sexual behavior. Although research demonstrates that these categories do not measure the same thing (Mosher et al. 2005), little is known about how these identities and behaviors relate to fertility preferences and intentions. Using one measure in place of the other could potentially result in vastly different results (e.g., Regnerus 2012). Measuring sexuality based only on behavior may result in the inclusion of men who engage in same-sex behavior but plan to have children within the context of a heterosexual relationship. However, using sexual orientation may not capture men who engage in same-sex behavior and plan to have only same-sex relationships in the future, but currently identify as heterosexual due to social stigma. In the current study, I examine the effects of all three measures of sexuality and how they are associated with fertility preferences and intentions.

Fertility intentions are important predictors of fertility behaviors (Barber 2001; Schoen et al. 1999). A discrepancy between one's ideal preference have children and whether he or she intends to take action to have children may be indicative of one's weighing of "competing alternatives," such as education and career goals (e.g., Barber 2001). On the other hand, this discrepancy may signal his or her perception of barriers to parenthood that are beyond his or her control. Yet, few studies explore this potentially revealing discordance. Riskind and Patterson (2010) use 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) data to explore the effects of sexual orientation on the discrepancy between the expressed preferences and intentions to have children among childless men and women. They found that, compared to heterosexual men, gay men are less likely to express a preference and the intention to have children. Compared to heterosexual women, lesbians are much less likely to express parenting desires; however, among those who prefer to have children, lesbians were more likely than heterosexual women to express the intention to do so (Riskind and Patterson 2010: 80). The current study expands upon Riskind and Patterson's study, using a larger set of data and more specifically investigating the effects of gender, race-ethnicity and class status.

This research will provide a better understanding of the factors influencing preferences and intentions for children and whether these align among men and women within race-ethnic and class groups. Moreover, it will expand our knowledge of which groups are most likely to perceive barriers to achieving parenthood. Finally, the empirical piece of this analysis will add to our understanding of how to best measure sexuality and how sexuality shapes attitudes about family formation.

Data and Methods

To address the proposed research questions, I use data from the 2002 and 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), a nationally representative survey of men and women ages 15 to 44 (over 15,000 men and nearly 20,000 women). Respondents participated in in-person interviews as well as computer-assisted surveys to collect sensitive information. Using STATA statistical software, I apply sampling weights and survey estimation techniques for all descriptive statistics and analyses.

NSFG is well suited for the proposed study because it provides data on fertility preferences and intentions among women and men. To measure respondents' preferences to have children, I use a question that asks, "Do you, yourself, want to have a/another child at some time in the future?" Response options are yes or no. To examine fertility intentions, I use a question that asks of those who said they want to have a/another child, "Looking to the future, do you intend to have a/another child at some time?" with the clarification that "intend refers to what you are actually going to try to do." Response options are definitely yes, probably yes, probably no, and definitely no.

The key predictor variables are race-ethnicity, class and sexuality. Race-ethnicity is measured as Hispanic, non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, and non-Hispanic other. I measure class by completed levels of education: less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college, and college degree or more. The NSFG includes all three measures of self-identified sexuality—sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and sexual behavior—which is quite rare for a nationally representative survey.

I utilize logistic regression to investigate the factors that play a role in men's and women's preferences to have a/another child. In each of these analyses, I am primarily interested in the effects of race-ethnicity, education and sexuality, and also test for interactions among these three variables. Related to sexuality, I begin with the measure of sexual orientation. I control for variables that have been found to have an impact on fertility attitudes, including age, religiosity, mother's education, and whether or not the respondent already has children. I estimate identical models for men and women and compare the outcomes. Next, I run similar models using sexual attraction and sexual behavior variables in place of sexual orientation. Finally, I run a similar model using a variable that categorizes as non-heterosexual those who indicate non-heterosexual identity, attraction or behavior on any of the measures. From these analyses, I hope to gain a better understanding of how these various measures of sexuality relate to fertility preferences and intentions and whether the models similarly predict preferences and intentions. I use ordinal logistic regression to investigate men's and women's fertility intentions, employing similar strategies to explore the effects of different measures of sexuality. I am interested in discrepancies between one's preferences and intentions—e.g., which groups are more likely to express a preference for having children but do not intend to have children.

Preliminary Findings

(Note: The following findings were presented in a Poster Session at the 2012 PAA Conference. The current study expands upon these findings.)

Analyzing fertility preferences based on 2002 and 2006-2008 (Years 1 and 2) NSFG data, I find that among respondents ages 15 to 29, young men are *as likely or more likely* than young women to express a preference to have a/another child. Considering sexual orientation, gay men and lesbian women are *much less likely* to prefer to have children, as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. However, the effect of sexual orientation varies by education, and the nature of this relationship differs for men and women:

- Among young gay men, those with a college degree or more are *most likely* to want children, and are *much more likely* to want children compared to those with less than high school diploma.
- In contrast, among young lesbian women, those with a college degree or more are *least likely* to want children—*far less likely* than those with less than a high school diploma.

Moreover, the effect of sexual orientation also varies by race-ethnicity:

- Young Hispanic men and women want to have children, regardless of their sexual identities.
- However, among men and women of other race-ethnicities, a gay identity is associated with a *much lower* probability of wanting children, as compared with heterosexuals.

These results demonstrate the importance of examining men's fertility preferences separate from those of women. It is clear that men's fertility preferences cannot be accurately predicted by women's preferences for children. Moreover, it is crucial to understand how fertility preferences vary among men, particularly by sexual orientation. Some of the most interesting patterns in the data are found not only across sexual orientation groups but also within them, such that the effect of sexual orientation on fertility preferences varies by race and by education. Specifically, I find that the fertility preferences of Hispanic men who identify as homosexual or gay are not influenced by their sexual orientation in the same way that preferences of white, black, and other men are. In fact, Hispanic men of all sexual orientations are very likely to want children. The effect of sexual orientation on men's fertility preferences appears to not exist among Hispanic gay men (an interesting finding that I plan to explore in a future qualitative project).

I find a positive effect of education on men's fertility preferences generally and also specifically for homosexual or gay men. Among gay men, those who have attained the most education are most likely to prefer to have children. This is in contrast to women who identify as homosexual or lesbian, among whom the most educated are the least likely to prefer to have children.

In the final paper, I also examine the fertility intentions of men and women, and analyze the levels of discordance between respondents' expressed preferences and intentions for children. Moreover, I test the robustness of my conclusions using each of the three measures of sexuality.

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