

DECLINING MARRIAGE RATES AND GENDER INEQUITY IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: TOWARDS AN ADEQUATELY COMPLEX EXPLANATION FOR CHILDLISSNESS

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A recent newspaper report pitted McDonald's and Birrell's explanations for Australia's below-replacement fertility against each other. This article presents data from qualitative research into the experience and understandings of 35 childless women aged 28 to 42. Childless women were best understood as those who were Childless by Choice and those who were Childless by Circumstance. On the basis of their baseline orientation to motherhood — namely, the place, durability and stability of motherhood in their imagined futures and identities — the latter group was categorised as either 'Thwarted Mothers' or 'Waiters and Watchers'. While the applicability of the findings are limited because of the small, self-selected sample, the data shed some light on the relative contributions of gender inequity and declining partnering rates to childlessness, and thus on the dispute between McDonald and Birrell.

Recently, an article in the *Melbourne Age* pitted the theories of eminent demographers Peter McDonald and Bob Birrell against one another in seeking an explanation for Australia's below-replacement fertility.¹ McDonald is well-known for his claim that gender inequity in family-related social institutions plays a critical role in Australia's sustained low fertility. He argues that a:

...combination of high gender equity in individual institutions (education and market employment) with the persistence of only moderate gender equity in family-oriented institutions (particularly the family itself) operates to lower fertility.²

There are similarly strong associations between Birrell and his assertion that low marriage rates are key to explaining Australia's below-replacement fertility. For instance, in a 2004 report Birrell and his co-authors state that:

The decline in fertility in Australia correlates with the fall in married partnering rates...There has been no decline since 1986 in the propensity of married women...to have a child. What has changed is the proportion of women in married relationships during their late twenties and early thirties. This decline in

partnering levels is a major contributor to the decline in fertility.³

McDonald's and Birrell's theories are rightly seen as differing in emphasis, rather than contradictory. In other words, their disagreement is about the relative rather than absolute importance of gender equity and marriage rates in accounting for below-replacement fertility. As Birrell puts it:

[We claim that the] decline in partnering levels is a major contributor to the decline in fertility. This position is at odds with explanations which focus exclusively on the growing cost of children, particularly as manifested in loss of earnings for women who have to leave the labour force in order to fulfil the early motherhood role. Though not denying the disincentives to having children for women who find it difficult to combine paid work and motherhood, this study argues more attention should be placed on why men and women are not partnering and thus are not in a situation to begin contemplating having children.⁴

However, Birrell et al. do note that marriage is not essential for all women to embark on motherhood. In *Men + Women Apart* they argue that, were it not for the

increasing number of births to unpartnered women, Australia's fertility rate would be languishing far below current levels. Such women comprise those separated from their children's fathers, and women who did not have a partner living with them when their child was born. Of such women they hypothesize that:

Women with a low investment in education and living in areas with relatively few job opportunities are likely to be interested in parenting and parenthood. However, within the marriage markets in which they move, they are not likely to encounter many men who have the security of employment or level of income which might prompt either of the prospective parents to enter a marriage relationship.⁵

Recently, I conducted in-depth 'life history' interviews with a purposive sample of 35 Australian and American women⁶ aged between 28 and 42 who had never had children, but believed themselves to be fertile.⁷ The goal was to investigate how childlessness was experienced and understood by women for whom childbearing was a 'live' issue at different points in their reproductive years. A key area of concern was whether women described their childlessness as chosen and if so, whether that description was a good 'fit' with everyday understandings of choice. A grounded theoretical approach was used to identify common issues and themes arising from the data, which was organized and managed with the aid of the qualitative research software package QSR NUD*IST 4.⁸

While the applicability of my findings are limited in the same way as are all studies with small, self-selected samples, my data may be able to shed some light on the relative contributions of gender inequity and declining partnering rates to childlessness, and thus on the dispute

between McDonald and Birell about the cause of Australia's sustained low fertility.

My central finding was that, while some women in my sample were Childless by Choice, others were Childless by Circumstance.⁹ The latter group were described as either 'Thwarted Mothers' or 'Waiters and Watchers' on the basis of their baseline orientation to motherhood: namely, the place, durability and stability of motherhood in their imagined futures and identities.¹⁰

There were two groups of women that the qualitative psychological research literature on the childless would suggest were 'independents': those whose parenting desires and plans were long-held, highly valued and largely resistant to outside influence.¹¹ These were the women who were Childless by Choice and the Thwarted Mothers. That is, women in the category Childless by Choice were firm in their commitment to avoiding motherhood and acted in pursuit of this goal (by, for instance, refusing to choose partners who wanted kids and leaving those who decided that they did), while Thwarted Mothers were also invested in their long-held plans to have children and resisted revising their plans even in the face of numerous and significant obstacles. It is the third group of women, the Waiters and Watchers, who are likely to be of greatest interest to demographers because their ambivalent and undecided orientation towards motherhood makes them extremely responsive to social circumstances surrounding parenthood. In other words, they are maternal 'dependents', attentive and responsive to parenting conditions as they find them during their fertile years.

The data relating to Circumstantially Childless women suggest that both gender-based inequity and reluctant or recalcitrant men are the primary circum-

stances constraining the freedom of women who would either very much like to have children or would probably be inclined to do so, all things being equal.¹² My findings suggest that these differing constraints on women's freedom to choose motherhood have different impacts on different women. For women with a Thwarted Mother orientation, an absence of men in their lives or the unwillingness of their Mr Right (or if they are older their Mr Approximate) to become fathers seems to be the singular most important constraint on their freedom to mother. In contrast, for women Waiting and Watching, a stable relationship with Mr Right serves only as a necessary though not a sufficient condition for them to pursue motherhood. In addition, they insist their Mr Right not only express a keenness to father but also a willingness to shoulder a fair (or even majority) share of the costs and sacrifices necessary to bring up baby before they'll give motherhood serious consideration.

However, while the primary prerequisite for Thwarted Mothers to go forward with their childbearing plans is the achievement of a partnership with Mr (wants to have children) Right or (as their fertile years wane) Mr (wants to have children) Approximate, their strong independent maternal orientation means that, if such a man fails to materialise by the time their fertility is in decline, some will decide to pursue motherhood on their own. That is, while these women are primarily focused on obtaining a stable partnership and, especially as they age, will deem an increasingly broad range of men (with a wide range of views about gender equity) to be acceptable, some will ultimately proceed with their plans to mother without any man at all. In contrast, the ambivalent and undecided orientation of women Waiting and Watching to

motherhood means that their expectations of the men with whom they partner in gender-equity terms are far higher than the Thwarted Mothers. But unlike the Thwarted Mothers, men are a necessary condition for them to consider proceeding any further with their vague plans to mother. In other words, a stable partnership for these women is just the start of what they need to have children. Without such a partnership, it is highly unlikely further consideration of children will be given.

WOMEN CHILDLESS BY CIRCUMSTANCE: THWARTED MOTHERS AND WOMEN WAITING AND WATCHING

Following Gerson¹³ and based on answers they gave in interviews and questionnaires regarding the place, durability and stability motherhood played in their imagined future and identity, I sorted the sample of women into two basic orientations towards motherhood: Childless by Choice and Childless by Circumstance. The latter group were then further categorized into Thwarted Mothers and Waiters and Watchers. It may be helpful to think of a woman's baseline as the attitude and intentions a woman has towards and regarding motherhood at the start of her fertile years. This orientation will shape the impact that various circumstantial pushes and pulls will have on her attitudes and intentions, and the ultimate decision about parenting she makes. In the following discussion, I will focus only on the findings related to women Childless by Circumstance, not those who were Childless by Choice. In particular, I will highlight the differences between the two subcategories of Circumstantially Childless women: the (independent) Thwarted Mothers and the (dependent)

Waiters and Watchers, as they pertain to the McDonald/Birrell dispute.

Thwarted Mothers

Thwarted Mothers have a strong and internally-sourced commitment to motherhood that was usually formed early in life. Their imagined future, and consequently their identity, is deeply and significantly entwined with becoming a mother. Consequently, their desire to have kids rarely wavers, regardless of the desire of partners (if they have them) to parent, or to share the work and sacrifice entailed. These women attempt to screen prospective partners regarding their willingness to father. If they are young enough when they discover their partner procrastinating or wavering in his commitment to fatherhood, or simply realise he is a Mr Approximate rather than Mr Right (putting them at risk of relationship unhappiness or instability), they will leave him to search for someone else. This is 31 year old Mary, who chose to leave her husband Troy when his indecision about fatherhood undermined her confidence that he would ever agree to go ahead:

I would have loved to have had a child when I was 25 or 26. I talked about it with my husband...and he said, 'Why don't we keep working, we'll just pay off [the house] first?' [But] I felt, 'I'm old enough now [to have a child]'. Then we got to the point where [he said], 'You only have one more year and then you get long service leave. Why would you throw that away?' Troy was never really as keen to have children as I was...and all that time I'd been led to believe that he was...We started to argue all the time... [During one argument] he said to me, 'There is no way I'd ever have children with a person like you'...I thought I could never trust that he would ever have them now...It really scared me.

Tina intends to be a stay-at-home mother, but withdrew from her marriage with long-time love Daniel when she began to doubt his capacity to grow up enough to accept even the most basic parenting responsibilities and to provide her with some of life's luxuries:

I was ready [to have children] after we'd been married for one [year]. I would have been roughly 25...but I didn't push the issue...[because] Daniel just didn't have the patience for children. He just so wasn't ready...I need a husband who has the capacity to earn relatively well, so that I can actually organise a nanny...[and] go to gym...and not worry about the \$4.00 that I'm spending on [crèche]....I'm not prepared to say, 'Now I'm going to have children...I've got to give up all my activities, we can never go out to dinner for the next fourteen years.' I want to be both, a parent, and a human being. I want to be able to get a nanny [and say], 'Please look after the children for the next week, my husband and I are going on holiday.' That's what I want, so I've got to find somebody who's making a little bit of a living.

The background assumption for women like Tina and Mary is that a 'good' mother is one who has children in the context of a stable relationship, and that they aspire to be this sort of mother. But like other Thwarted Mothers, gender equity considerations (the man's willingness to share the domestic and childcare responsibilities, for example) were not an essential part of their description for Mr Right. Indeed, the requirements many Thwarted Mothers had for long-term male partners were relatively low: in many instances all he needed to do was commit to her and to having children, and to follow through on both of these promises within a time frame she saw as reasonable, though in a minority of cases

women were firm that he also needed to be a good provider. However, in the latter instances, the focus on money seemed — as in Tina’s case — to be about ensuring they could give up work and remain at home with the children without sacrificing their ‘lifestyle’. For Thwarted Mothers, difficulties finding or maintaining relationships with such men were the main reason their progress to parenting was delayed or, for some women, derailed entirely. For younger Thwarted Mothers, the failure of Mr Right to materialise and commit, or for Mr Right to be able and willing (in the short to medium term) to have children posed a problem. For older Thwarted Mothers, the failure of a Mr Approximate to materialise, commit and to be able and willing to have children before their biological clocks run down constituted the major impediment.

This is not to say that paid work in particular, and gender equity matters in general, don’t matter at all to these women. Several complained bitterly about the sexism and family-unfriendliness of the workplace, and the toll it exacted on their independent earning power and/or advancement up the career ladder. Some already firmly hitched to Mr (wants to have children) Right — and so are guaranteed that they can start trying to get pregnant when they feel that age-wise, the time has come — may delay motherhood as they seek to work around such constraints. This was 31 year old Kylie’s story. She had left her first husband because he wouldn’t agree to have kids but was refusing her second husband’s desire to get pregnant straight away because of concerns about the negative impact of motherhood on her financial independence:

[When I have kids I’d like to] work from home...[because] you have your own area

of interest, your own income source...But the kids are there, like, as a part of that thing. Or you know, at some stage if they get dropped or whatnot. But not where it’s a regular thing that they’re at childcare and they can’t even talk yet...I don’t think that that’s a good thing. But I...would like to be independent and haven’t really ever been in a situation where I’ve had somebody else pay for me, or for us. It’s having to come to grips with that idea...[of motherhood as] a career...if you choose to stop work and have your husband pay for that. [But] I don’t quite feel comfortable with it. Only because I’ve never actually turned around to somebody and said, ‘Here, I need some money. Can you pay for bla de bla?’ So maybe when it comes that I have kids I’ll decide that I don’t want to work. I don’t know.

However, the data suggest that at the end of the day, Thwarted Mothers like Kylie will implement their decision to have kids regardless of whether or not they manage to get an arrangement in place that they perceive will resolve the problems they anticipate in balancing work and family. These women’s commitment to mothering is strong enough, in other words, that when maternal and gender equity values clash, maternal ones will — eventually — prevail.

What about when Mr Right doesn’t want children and the Thwarted Mother is closer to the end of her reproductive time-line? My data suggest that, while such women put up a fight, most will decide to stay: not just because they place a high value on their relationship but also because they judge themselves too old to be sure of securing an alternative partner willing to have children before their biological clock chimes midnight. This is 39 year old Kelly, whose passion for her partner Ivan eventually led her to jettison

her longstanding plans to mother:

I actually structured all of my work so that I could work from home if I needed to...I could just pick up the kid, put it in the car, drive off, deliver. You know, it could mainly be at home...[but] Ivan...didn't really ever show much interest...So, the subject would come up every now and again...[And I'd think] 'Oh well, another year, it'll be OK'...But then suddenly go, 'Oh, gosh, well I suppose if I'm going to do it I'd better start thinking about it again.' ...[But] He'd be sort of like, 'I don't know if I really want to do it.'...So I think I got through to about 33 and then, just all of a sudden, I'd see a woman with a baby. And I'd find myself wanting to cry. Or I'd see something, like an ad on telly...and tears would come...[But] One of the things that makes me now is the relationship I have with Ivan. It's very precious...I said to [a childless friend], 'Did it ever bother you that you and your husband didn't have children?' And she said... 'I will tell you something that has helped me enormously in my resolution about this. ...He was my lover, my best friend, my husband and my child. There was nothing that I could add to this relationship that would make it any more perfect than it was'. And I thought, 'She's right'...[and] that's how I feel about Ivan.

Thirty-five year old Sharon also loves paternity-averse Michael, but attributes at least part of her reluctance to leave him to her strong aversion to single motherhood and the social difficulty, given her age, of finding someone else at this point with whom to have kids:

I can't really imagine wanting to have kids enough to bring up a child on my own. I mean, I think that'd be really hard on the child and on me...[So] if [my boyfriend becomes] absolutely convinced he doesn't want to have kids, do I go and find someone else?...I don't really relish

the idea of going out there trying to find a partner to have kids with. That's a bit of an ordinary scene...[But] I...just can't quite imagine what I would do...if I didn't have kids.

If Mr (wants to have children) Right, or as time runs out, Mr (wants to have children) Approximate is never found, most Thwarted Mothers will eventually and regretfully say 'no' to motherhood. At age 35 Darcy still hopes to meet the right man, but if she doesn't is certain she would not pursue children alone:

The relationship that I have just come out of [was] the...first person that I would consider having as the father of my children...I said to him, 'OK, we need to have a look at this. I want to know are we committed to one another here because I want to start looking at a family. Are we going to do this or are we not? Because if we are not, we shouldn't be together...' He bottled up. And basically we ended up splitting...I don't have a problem with [being childless] at this point...One of my closest friends...[says] that she is financially secure and she wants a child, and that she would actually have a child without the male participating...[But] I want the input from the father.

Q: So much so that [if you go close to the wire] and still haven't found the right guy you would forgo the chance to become a mother?

I would. I think I would forgo that.

However, my data also suggest that it is from amongst the Thwarted Mothers that the determined women willing to go it alone with an anonymous donor sperm come. One example is 37 year old Shaney who, having failed at her attempts to keep her relationship with her very Mr Approximate off the rocks or to find another Mr (wants to have kids) Approximate through a dating agency, reluctantly began travelling to an

interstate¹⁴ fertility clinic to be artificially inseminated:

I figured that 35 or 36 was the latest I'd be wanting to have a child...[so] had in mind to make an arrangement....Say, [with] a business man that was a bit of a workaholic, would love to have kids, but didn't have time for it and didn't have time for a wife either.

Q: You told the dating agency this?

Yes, and they suggested not hitting the men with it straight away...It's not easy...to meet a man that you can create a partnership with. They're just not around. Tried lots of things...it just [didn't] seem to happen... When I [went to the clinic]...I felt, 'What a shame I'm having to do it this way. But it's the only avenue I have to have a child at this point in time.

Thus for Thwarted Mothers it is largely absent, ill-paid or reluctant (paternity-delaying or paternity-refusing) men, not gender inequity in social institutions, that appear to be the main impediment to their childbearing plans. However, while the right man is the main thing Thwarted Mothers require to decide to implement their plans to have children, their strong and independent commitment to motherhood means that, even with no man by their side, a small number will attempt to pursue motherhood on their own.

Waiters and Watchers

On the opposite side of the spectrum of maternal longing lie women ambivalent and undecided about parenting: the women Waiting and Watching. For these women, neither maternity nor childlessness are a fixed part of their imagined future and identity and, consistent with this, their job description for Mr Right make no mention of the man's capacity or willingness to father. In contrast to the maternally independent Thwarted Mothers, the vague parenting plans of women

Waiting and Watching are highly influenced by the views of their partners, the experiences of their friends, and social chat and policies around parenting. If they marry a man who doesn't want children, they may experience some degree of grief about missing out on parenthood, but will ultimately go along. As Sandy explains, this is not so much because they feel they have no other options, but because motherhood doesn't mean so much to them that they can't give it up:

I've never had a strong maternal drive...I'm not the person who melts with delight at the sight of a pram. Like for some women, it's everything. [For me,] it's not such an overwhelming need that I'd just say, 'Bugger it, I'll just [have a baby by] myself'. And I would do that if I felt the need, because I've always made my own way. But I don't feel that need.

As the moniker I've given them suggests, these women are by nature worriers and planners. When it comes to motherhood, their commitment to going forward is not so strong as to incline them (as it does some Thwarted Mothers) to leap first and look later. Instead, they question their mothering sisters and friends on matters of concern regarding childbearing both large and small, with some even drawing up careful parenting 'pros and cons' lists. Women Waiting and Watching express considerable worries about domestic and workplace gender equity issues or, in common parlance, how motherhood might increase their domestic load and (relatedly) their capacity to stay and achieve in paid work. As well, they are concerned about the impact of children on their quality of life. This is ambivalent and undecided Martine. She has had clear and ambitious plans for career achievement since she was a child, but has always wondered how these could be successfully paired with what she sees as

the inevitably oppressive institutions of marriage and motherhood:

The people I grew up with who got married and had children...[remind me] of my Mum and Dad...the house in the suburbs and...they behave like them in some ways...That's my expectation of it actually. That the woman ends up bearing the brunt of the physical and the emotional work and whether she does it because he foists it on her or whether she does it because she pulls it away from him — it just happens and there's no escape from it.

Jacinta's describes herself as 'neither here nor there' about motherhood, but her partner is keen to have kids. However, now 33, she continues to delay parenthood for fear of what it will do to her personality, her relationship with Ron and her financial independence:

Personality:

I worry about...losing touch with the big wide world out there...I worry about losing perspective...and becoming a dumpy mum...There's a lady up the street who is a dumpy mum...She never reads a paper, she never sees a film. You can never talk to her about anything other than her kids.

Relationship:

Ron and I have such a fantastic relationship, and I don't want a baby to come in and spoil what we've got...If we want to take off on a weekend, if we want to sleep in until eleven o'clock, we can do that. I hear people say that having a baby changes that. And I'[d be] nervous about how it might upset the dynamics [between us]...Because we've only got each other to be concerned about and to care about, and I've wondered how another little body might affect that.

Financial independence:

I'd like to keep working...Not because I love work so much but because...money's an issue for me and I'd like to still know

that I can earn...

However, when we spoke, Jacinta was close to deciding she would have a baby. Critical to her decision was her husband Ron's willingness to do most of the childcare, and her belief that — as a former childcare worker — he would be good at the job:

I'm happy to have a child because of Ronald because I know that he'll be fantastic and he'll be really supportive and it will be a really nice thing to do together. If it weren't for him, then probably not. You know, if I was this age and single, I would probably think, 'No'. I don't feel like a really maternal urge to get pregnant and have a baby...There are two other women who I work with who have both had two children each. They have taken maternity leave and have come back. The company is really good like that and I just figure that's what I'd do [because] I'd like to keep working...I've always been the one that has held down a steady job...So we've even tossed around the idea of me going back to work, and him spending more time at home looking after the baby...He's a fantastic carer. He's actually worked in childcare centres before, over the years, so he's really great with kids.

Like Thwarted Mothers, women Waiting and Watching assume that in the normal course of events the burdens and sacrifices of parenthood will fall disproportionately to them. However, these women's ambivalent and undecided orientation towards motherhood seems to enable them to focus more directly on the losses motherhood will entail, and to be willing to delay or refuse childbearing to avoid them. When the then first secretary of the Office of the Status of Women, Pru Goward, noted that if you force women to choose between a job and a dirty nappy, many will prefer the job,¹⁵ my data suggest

that the women to whom she was referring were those Waiting and Watching.

What this seems to show is that gender equity considerations are critical to the childbearing decisions of women Waiting and Watching and that, above and beyond having a stable relationship with Mr (wants to have children) Right, these women also need an agreement from this man that he will be willing to shoulder at least some of the responsibilities and make some of the sacrifices, parenting entails before she will seriously consider motherhood.

MARRIAGE, GENDER EQUITY AND MEN

The data suggest that both Birrell's and McDonald's explanations for the cause of Australia's below-replacement fertility have merit, but that each explanation applies predominantly to a particular sub-group of childless women. In particular, Birrell appears to be right when he hypothesises that women want and believe they should pursue motherhood in the context of stable relationship, and that the absence of such a relationship — for some Thwarted Mothers and all women Waiting and Watching — constrains their freedom to choose motherhood. However, he may need to expand his conception of women who are willing to parent alone to include women with education and adequate incomes who struggle to find a man willing to make even the most minimal commitment to a romantic partnership and to fatherhood. Thus while all the women in my sample strongly preferred motherhood in the context of a stable partnered relationship, a small group of Thwarted Mothers are among those women who, in the absence of a suitable partnership, will go forward with their parenting plans, anyway.

As well, marriage may be necessary but it is far from being a sufficient condition for Waiting and Watching women to seriously contemplate children.¹⁶ The data suggest that marriages (or stable partnerships) aren't always the basis for resolving the problem of childlessness but, depending on the sort of man involved, may be part of the problem. A man strongly averse to paternity can derail even a woman with a longstanding and significant commitment to motherhood if the woman judges him to be really Right, or feels herself too old to take the risk of losing her Mr (doesn't want children) Right in order to locate a Mr (wants to have children) Right or even Approximate before time runs out.

McDonald's gender equity explanation for below-replacement fertility finds considerable support in the testimony of women Waiting and Watching. Their experience bears out his claim that inequity in domestic and other social institutions leads women who are ambivalent and undecided about motherhood to delay or defer children. However, it seems to have far less explanatory power in the stories of childlessness told by Thwarted Mothers. But, despite this, stories like Kylie's do suggest that gender equity concerns may lead some partnered Thwarted Mothers to delay childbearing and consequently, increase their risk of age-related infertility, leaving them with either no children at all or fewer children than they might have had otherwise.

However, it is possible that gender inequity explains a larger proportion of Circumstantial Childlessness and fertility decline than is suggested by the current data. This would be the case if some men's reluctance to partner or, once partnered, to have children (a significant factor in the childlessness of many of the women in my sample) is the result of worries there

men have about gender equity. That is, if some men are delaying partnering, or once partnered, fatherhood, because they want or believe they should undertake a fair share of the parenting responsibilities and sacrifices, but are either unwilling or believe they are or will be unable to do so, then it would be mistaken to measure the contribution gender inequity makes to below — replacement birth rates only by reference to its negative impacts on women. Instead, gender equity concerns could be seen to indirectly constrain women's freedom to mother by reducing the likelihood that they will partner at all, or partner with a man willing to have kids. Were this to be the case, it would demonstrate the interrelationship between gender equity and marriage explanations for below-replacement fertility.

Unfortunately, my data do not address directly to this question. I neither spoke directly to men, nor quizzed women extensively about their understanding of the reasons the men in their lives gave for refusing to commit to stable partnerships or to have kids once in them. We know from the first wave of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey data, that Australian men

are increasingly reluctant to parent (and more reluctant than women),¹⁷ and from a study by the Netherlands Family Council that men's reluctance has a decisive impact on the nature and timing of decisions couples make about children.¹⁸ Indeed, both Gerson's work, and that of Baber and Dryer, suggest that for one quarter of childless couples, the man's opposition to childbearing was decisive.¹⁹ Thus, while my data and that of others suggests that men's desires regarding children can impact on actual fertility outcomes, it does not give us insight into the reason for men's increasing reluctance to father and therefore whether or not gender equity concerns figure prominently or at all in this reluctance.

Research into this question is an important priority in the future. The tantalising possibility is that, if a proportion of male reluctance to partner and father is due to gender inequity in social institutions, it will only be through seeing both explanations for sustained low fertility as interrelated and interactive that an adequately complex and nuanced account — and properly targeted social redress — can be achieved.

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- ³ B. Birrell, V. Rapson and C. Hourigan, *Men + Women Apart: Partnering in Australia*, The Australian Family Association and Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, Melbourne, 2004, pp. viii-ix
- ⁴ *ibid.*, p. ix
- ⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 45-46
- ⁶ While study was initially expected to comprise only Australian women, I seized the opportunity to interview a small number of American women when an unexpected chance to visit the United States arose during the data collection phase. However, there were insufficient numbers of these women to draw any conclusions about national differences.
- ⁷ Forty per cent of the sample were either school-leavers, had a secondary or high school or a diploma, certificate and/or trade degree as their highest qualification while the remainder of the sample had undergraduate (34 per cent) or post-graduate qualifications (26 per cent). Just over half the sample described themselves as agnostic or atheist, with the remainder identifying themselves with a formal religious grouping, though only 37 per cent described religion as important or very important. For more details about the sample, See L. Cannold, *Who's Crying Now? Chosen childlessness, circumstantial childlessness and the irrationality*

of motherhood. *A study of the fertility decisions of Australian and North American women*, Department of Learning and Educational Development, PhD, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2000, <http://adt1.lib.unimelb.edu.au/adt-root/public/adt-VU2001.0024/index.html>

- ⁸ For more details about the conduct of the study please see *ibid*.
- ⁹ Psychological researchers typically divide their 'voluntarily' childless samples into only two groups: the 'early articulators' and the 'postponers.' However, one of the central contentions of my research is that these categories are problematic. Firstly, they fail to capture the social rather than individual nature of many women's fertility delays. Secondly, they assume rather than demonstrate that choice is an accurate description of the manner in which all research participants came to be childless, often in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. For instance, research done by: C. M. Morrell, *Unwomanly Conduct: The challenges of intentional childlessness*, New York, Routledge, 1994; M. S. Ireland, *Reconceiving Women: Separating motherhood from female identity*, New York, London, The Guilford Press, 1993; M. Faux, *Childless By Choice: Choosing childlessness in the eighties*, New York, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984; J.E. Veevers, *Childless by Choice*, Canada, Butterworth, 1980, among women classified as 'postponers' are those whose partners refuse to have a child, women whose biological clocks ran out before they were able to re-partner after a failed marriage, women whose need to work or career ambitions conflict with the often unequal realities of motherhood and women who are infertile (!). Thus, my categories of 'Childless by Choice' and 'Childless by Circumstance' and the subcategories of 'Waiters & Watchers' and 'Thwarted Mother', are attempts to supercede the 'early articulator' and 'postponer' categories with ones that are both more empirically accurate and less encumbered by unsupported assumptions about the degree of choice women exercise in their decisions to remain childless. For more about my concerns about the 'early articulator' and 'postponer' categories, see Cannold, *op. cit.*, chapter 3.
- ¹⁰ In fact, my initial analysis divided the Childless by Circumstance into three baseline orientations. In addition to the Thwarted Mothers and Waiters and Watchers, I had a small group of women Childless by Relationship. However, upon reflection, I believe this category was not an orientation, but rather an outcome for women whose (relatively weak) baseline orientations of Thwarted Mother had interacted with circumstance and resulted in their winding up childless because of their Mr (or Ms)Right's strong opposition to having children. (In my sample these were two lesbian women and one bisexual women hence Ms Right)
- ¹¹ See for instance Veevers, *op. cit.*, 1980 and E. Campbell, *The Childless Marriage: An Exploratory Study of Couples who do not want Children*, London, New York, Tavistock, 1985.
- ¹² My reasons for arguing that women whom I have described as ambivalent and undecided would probably have children if all things were equal include my awareness of lingering social discrimination against the childless and lessening but ongoing pronatalist social pressure as well as the high percentage of women in their early twenties (92 per cent in one Australian study) who express a desire to mother in the future, suggesting that most women intend to mother despite widely varying commitment levels to this goal. See for example L. Lisle, *Without Child: Challenging the Stigma of Childlessness*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1996; D. Wicks and G. Mishra, 'Young Australian Women and their Aspirations for Work, Education and Relationships', in E. Carson, E. Jamrozik and T. Winefield, (Eds), *Unemployment, Economic Promise and Political Will*, Brisbane, Australian Academic Press, 1998.
- ¹³ Gerson has been at the forefront of feminist attempts to design studies, as well as to collect and analyse data, in ways that both capture and respect women's perception of their lives as the product of their choices and recognise the shared patterns of meaning that arise from their reproductive behaviour. (See K. Gerson, *Hard Choices: How women decide about work, career, and motherhood*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1985; K. Gerson, *No Man's Land: Men's changing commitments to family and work*, New York, Basic Books, 1993.
- ¹⁴ The interviews took place in Victoria where, at the time of interview, state law prohibited single women from access donor sperm. This meant that women like Shaney had either to fly to Sydney or travel there or to Albury-Wodonga (on the border of New South Wales and Victoria) for insemination.
- ¹⁵ P. Goward, 'Women in the Post-Industrial Society', *The Sydney Papers*, The Sydney Institute, vol. 10, 1998, pp. 97-106
- ¹⁶ Birrell et al., 2004, *op. cit.*, p. ix
- ¹⁷ D. Charnock and K. Fisher, 'Partnering and Fertility Patterns: Analysis of the The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, Wave 1', HILDA Conference, Melbourne University, 2003
- ¹⁸ Netherlands Family Council, *Partner Interaction: Partner interaction, Demography and Equal Opportunities as Future Labour Supply Factors*, Netherlands Family Council, The Hague, Brussels, 2000
- ¹⁹ K. Baber and A. Dreyer, 'Delayed Childbearing: Men's Thinking about the Fertility Decision', R. Lewis and R. Salt, (Eds), *Men in Families*, Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi, Sage, 1996; K. Gerson, *op. cit.*, 1993