

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

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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). The experiences of men, however, are critical in creating a full perspective of fertility. 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). Additionally, at a time when gay families are becoming increasingly visible, the fertility desires of gay men and lesbians are particularly interesting theoretically, as homosexual individuals face considerable barriers to achieving parenthood—especially gay men, who cannot procreate within a gay relationship. Therefore, examining the differences between men's desires or preferences (ideals) for children and their intentions (which take into account the constraints one faces) is also useful for making sense of the obstacles men may face in reaching their fertility ideals.

Previous research has found that fertility intentions are important predictors of fertility behaviors (Schoen et al. 1999). Although there is a prolific body of research on women's fertility intentions and the factors involved in forming their intentions (e.g., Hayford 2009; Hayford and Morgan 2008; Morgan 1996; Schoen et al. 2009; and others below), there is little research on fertility preferences among men (Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996; Greene and Biddlecom 2000), and in particular, gay men. Research suggests that factors influencing fertility desires and intentions may be gender-specific, such that men and women may come to form preferences for children in different ways. For example, research shows that education has a negative effect on women's fertility intentions (women with high levels of education are less likely to want children than those with low levels of education) (Musick et al. 2009). However, the effect of education on fertility intentions is not the same for men (Morgan and Rackin 2010) and may, in fact, have a positive effect on men's fertility desires (Johnson and Lean 1985; Koropecykj-Cox and Pendell 2007; Weeden et al. 2006). Considering the effect of sexual identity, most available research on fertility intentions among gay men and lesbians consists of small, qualitative studies that typically convey the stories of those who have already become parents (Carrington 1999; Lewin 2009; Mallon 2004; Mezey 2008a; Sullivan 2004), or focus primarily on

middle-class white individuals who may not experience their sexual identities in the same way as those from lower class statuses and other racial/ethnic groups (Allen and Demo 1995; Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007; Mezey 2008b; Rabun and Oswald 2009).

In the current research, I address the following overarching questions:

1. *How do men's fertility preferences and intentions vary across class and race 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)?*

Examining these issues is important because it will provide a better understanding of the factors that influence desires for children and how those desires may or may not align among men and women within race and class groups. Due to the lack of research available, having a baseline knowledge of men's fertility desires and intentions is useful for exploring whether or not men are then able to reach their fertility goals. Too, a comparison of men's and women's intentions will reveal whether factors shaping fertility intentions are gender-specific and if men and women within class and race groups have similar fertility intentions. This is useful for making sense of how individuals negotiate fertility intentions when forming relationships. In general, the family formation desires of gay men and lesbians are underexplored. Furthermore, because gay men cannot procreate within gay relationships, their desires to have children play a significant role in determining whether they will undertake the efforts to become a parent or have another child. Because what little information is known about gay men's fertility intentions typically comes from qualitative studies, quantitative approaches are vital to providing a more thorough perspective of whether these men want to have children and to better understand the barriers they face in doing so. Finally, the empirical piece of this analysis will add to our understanding of how to best measure sexuality and how sexual identity might influence fertility desires and family processes.

Data and Methods

To address the proposed research questions, I use data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) Cycles 6 (2002) and 7 (2006-2008). The NSFG is administered by the National Center for Health Statistics and includes a nationally representative sample of men and women ages 15 to 44 years old. The two data sets combined include over 11,000 men and 15,000 women. Combining these two waves of data substantially increases the sample sizes of gay men and lesbians available for analysis. Respondents participated in in-person interviews as well as computer-assisted surveys to collect sensitive information, including sexual identity and behavior. The NSFG implemented a complex

sampling design, oversampling black and Hispanic individuals and teenagers of all races. 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 analyze fertility desires, I use as the dependent variable 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. Therefore, I utilize logistic regression to investigate the factors that play a role in men’s and women’s preferences to have a/another child or not. To examine men’s and women’s 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. Therefore, I will use ordinal logistic regression to investigate men’s and women’s fertility intentions.

The key predictor variables are measures of race, class and sexuality. Race is constructed as Hispanic, non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, and non-Hispanic other. I will measure class by looking at the effects of income (measured in income categories) and completed education (measured in completed levels of schooling). The NSFG includes three measures of sexuality: 1) sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, something else); 2) sexual attraction (attracted only to females, mostly to females, equally females and males, mostly to males, or only to males); and 3) sexual behavior (whether or not the respondent has engaged in any same-sex behavior in his/her lifetime or in the past year). Because there is no consensus on how to accurately measure sexuality in research, I will examine the effects of these three measures of sexuality. This is important because previous studies alternately use 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 desires and intentions. Using one measure in place of the other could potentially result in vastly different results. For example, using a measure of sexual behavior (i.e., men who have had sex with men) 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 a measure of sexual orientation may not capture men who engage in same-sex behavior and plan to have only same-sex relationships in the future, but identify as heterosexual due to social stigma. Finally, I will include in my models additional control variables that have been found to have an impact on fertility preferences and intentions, including age, religiosity, mother’s education, and whether or not the respondent already has children.

Preliminary Findings

Considering the variation of men's fertility preferences across race and class groups, preliminary findings using the NSFG 2002 data suggest that education has a positive effect on men's desire for children when controlling for age. Race also plays a role in that black and Hispanic men are more likely to want children than are white men, and the effects of race vary by education and age. Initial findings show that class and race also play a role in women's fertility desires, but the effect is different from that for men. The final paper will include further analyses of these relationships using combined data from Cycles 6 (2002) and 7 (2006-2008), and will also consider men's and women's fertility intentions.

Considering the effects of sexual orientation, preliminary results indicate that men's preferences for children do, in fact, vary quite significantly across sexual orientation groups. For example, men who identify as homosexual are much less likely to express a desire to have a child or another child as compared with those who identify as heterosexual. Findings on women suggest variation as well across groups of sexual orientation. The final paper will also examine whether findings are consistent when using various measures of sexuality—sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and sexual behavior. This is important because initial analyses of 2002 NSFG data suggest that measures of sexual identity do not always overlap. For example, there are men who indicate a sexual attraction mostly or only to men, and women who are attracted mostly or only to women, who identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual. This suggests that people understand their sexual identities in various ways, which may play a role in how they think about fertility intentions and family formation processes. Therefore, I will test the robustness of my conclusions on fertility preferences and intentions by assessing the consistency of the results using each of the measures of sexuality.

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