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PASSING THROUGH DINK – A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW COUPLES IN THE UNITED STATES MAKE THE DECISION TO HAVE CHILDREN

by

ALLYSON HENDRYX KORB

Under the Direction of Jennifer Patico

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how Dual Income No Kids (DINK) couples within the United States approach family planning. The study is based on ethnographic work I carried out over the course of 2011, including a nationwide survey and in-depth interviews I conducted in Atlanta, Georgia, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Denver Colorado. Specifically, I was interested in investigating why these couples were "delaying" having children based on the national average. While current literature points to changes in education, healthcare, and societal values as being the catalyst for the DINK movement, I wanted to understand Americans' childbearing decisions on a more personal level. Through this project I looked at how both the social goals (parent and peer role models) and personal pressures (prioritization of education, career and marital partnership) influence an individual's decision about whether and when to have children. As such, I also explore themes of identity, life narrative, and choice in regards to family planning. Whereas the popular stereotype of DINK suggests that these couples are uninterested in family or "family values", my research shows that many couples actually choose to be DINK for a time because they are actively pursuing and preparing for parenthood.

INDEX WORDS: Childbearing, Children, Choice, Dual Income No Kids, DINK, Family planning

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by

ALLYSON HENDRYX KORB

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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by

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May 2012

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the "parents" of Mojo, Clancy, Ivy, Teddy, Granite, Sasha, Pebble, Kiri, Isis, Cloud, Sadie, Duncan, Patch, Bella and Ollie, as well as to the 100 other DINKs across the country who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing your stories. I hope that each of you finds the happiness from life that you are striving for—with or without children!

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[1] Facebook is a social networking service and website launched in February 2004.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……..…….....….……..…v

LIST OF FIGURES…….…...……..……..….……viii

CHAPTER 1: THE DELAYING OF PARENTHOOD.….……...….……..1

1.1 Introduction……..…..…..……1

1.2 Contextualizing……...……..…….……..3

1.3 Anthropological Approaches to Contemporary Reproduction and Kinship...….…….…….…….…..…….6

1.4 Methods…….…….....…….……17

1.5 Project Timeline…….…….……..…….24

1.6 Ethical Considerations..…….…….……..…….24

1.7 Researcher As DINK..……..…….…….……..…….25

1.8 Thesis Structure……..……..…….…….……..…….26

CHAPTER 2: PORTRAIT OF A DINK……...…….……28

2.1 Introduction……...….…….……..…….28

2.2 Survey - Participant Demographics..……...……...…….29

2.3 Interviews – Participant Demographics..……..……...……....……33

2.4 Conclusion….……...……...…….……...45

CHAPTER 3: REFLECTING ON ROLE MODELS ……...……..48

3.1 Introduction……...……..……...48

3.2 Parents Creating Parents……..……..…….....50

3.3 Peer Influence……...…….……..……...61

3.4 Conclusion…….…….....69

CHAPTER 4: FULFILLING SELF…….....…..…….……..71

4.1 Introduction……...……..……..……71

4.2 Can't Buy Me Love…….……...……73

4.3 Crafting a Career…….…….……...…..75

4.4 Putting Partner First…….…….……...82

4.5 Serving Self..….…….…….……..…….…...….……88

4.6 Conclusion…...……..….…….……..…….…...….……90

CHAPTER 5: THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAITING …….....……92

5.1 Introduction.……..……92

5.2 Fertility Issues…….……...……93

5.3 New Reproductive Technologies……...……..……..98

5.4 Adoption.……...…….……..…...….100

5.5 Thesis Conclusion…….….……..…...….102

CHAPTER 6: EPILOGUE: PASSING THROUGH DINK…….....…..107

6.1 Ready or Not……...…….…..……...107

6.2 Mindy and Joe's Transition…….……...…..……..107

6.3 Janet and Michael's Transition...…….……..……109

6.4 A Few Surprises…….…….....110

6.5 A Personal Reflection…….……...…….....112

REFERENCES……...……..…….....114

APPENDIX……...……..121

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Breakdown of the ages of the 100 survey respondents.

Figure 2 - Breakdown of the education of the 100 survey respondents.

Figure 3 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "My Parents have always supported my decision-making."

Figure 4- Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "My parents put a lot of pressure on me to have children."

Figure 5 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "I feel left out not having children yet."

Figure 6 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "Having children seems to have negatively influenced some of my friends' marriages."

Figure 7 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "I feel empowered to make choices in my life."

Figure 8 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "I know the direction I want my life to take and work towards it every day."

Figure 9 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "I am worried to have a child right now because of the current economic situation."

Figure 10 – Percentage breakdown on the Likert scale for "The recession has affected my partner and my decision to have children right now."

Figure 11 – Percentage agreement for survey items focused on "the partnership."

CHAPTER ONE: THE DELAYING OF PARENTHOOD

1.1 Introduction

Gazing out under my straw brimmed hat, the world is full of blue. An intense cerulean sky dives downward and seamlessly merges into an unbelievingly turquoise ocean. I close my eyes, relaxing and hear the rhythmic sound of the waves gentling caressing the shell-strewn beach on which I was laying. Further off I could hear the *put, put, put* of a boat engine moving across the water; by the sound of it, it is one of the smaller wooden vessels the locals use for fishing. Hearing the crunch of sand nearby, I open my eyes and smile when I see my husband, pink from hours in the sun, headed towards me with two mango shakes in hand. He passes the bright yellow drink to me with a smile and then settles down on his lounger and begins reading from his Kindle. I take a sip, glance at him, and am filled with a feeling of complete contentment.

The remote Gili Islands (a redundant phrase as Gili actually means "island" in Indonesian) were the last stop of a three-month tour[2] through Asia for my husband and me. We had arrived at this beach paradise half way around the world from our home in Atlanta, Georgia after years of dreaming, planning, and saving. We had both put a lot of time and energy into our educations and careers and with the culmination of his residency in Neurology we felt that we would have no better time to spend a dedicated period of time together doing what we both love—traveling. Especially because we knew that at some point we would like to have children making it more difficult to do it unencumbered.

We did not see this trip as frivolous or selfish. Instead, we viewed it as a way to grow as both individuals and as a couple. Anyone who has traveled extensively understands that it requires patience and perseverance. They also know it can open your eyes to varying

[2] We also visited Bali, China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

possibilities for living, helping you to gain perspective in your own life. Sitting there on the beach next to my husband I reflected on the past three months and everything we had experienced together. Our patience had surely been tested on the trip, from lack of hotel rooms to pushy taxi drivers, but we, as a couple, had risen above the stress and had persevered. We had learned an incredible amount in the short three months we had been traveling together—he needs to keep his sugar levels up to avoid crankiness and I need a decent night's sleep for the same reason. The lessons we learned from travel helped us feel even more confident in making our future together. In addition, the trip allowed us dedicated fun time for just the two of us. We were able to do, see, experience anything we wanted at any time. This brought a new intimacy to our relationship and provided memories we will cherish for a lifetime. I was happy with our choice to delay other aspects of our life—education, careers, children—in order to go on this adventure. We had made the right decision for us. I laid back, pulled my hat over my eyes and went to sleep happy.

There is a term that is used to describe people like my husband and me —DINK. It is an acronym for Double/Dual Income No Kids, which Merriam-Webster defines as "a couple with two incomes and no children; or also, a member of this couple" (Merriam-Webster 2011). Although the term came into existence alongside the expression "yuppie" in the 1980s, its solidification into the English language came about in 2002. In his book *Death of the West*, Pat Buchanan discusses the population decline in Western countries, pinning this downward trend on the self-involved and money-obsessed lifestyle of the people who were Dual Income No Kids. He believes that the DINK movement, rather than upholding normal wholesome family values, is perpetuating the decline of western civilization. He goes so far as to say the lifestyle of one German DINK couple "may prove more fateful for the German

people than the Third Reich" (Buchanan 2002:15). Despite his controversial statements, Buchanan is correct on one account— the acceptance of DINK as a new life choice represents the upheaval of long-held American values in regards to marriage, family, and parenting.

1.2 Contextualizing DINKS

"Never before in recorded history—not in the Great Depression, not in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and not in ancient times—has fertility been so low for whole societies as it is now in the industrialized world" (Davis 1986:48). Two decades after Davis made this statement, fertility rates have continued to drop and currently reside at 2.47 births per woman, the lowest they have ever been (World Bank 2012). In the middle to late 1950's, the median age for first birth was 19 for women, while today it is 25 in the United States (Livingston and D'Vera 2010). In fact, this median age would be even higher, more like 29 years old, if teen birth rates in the United States were more similar to other developed countries like Japan or Switzerland (Jayson 2009). The major influencers of this demographic shift are older women. While in 1990 there were more births to teenagers than to women ages 35 and older, by 2008 this was reversed, with 14 percent of births to women over 35 and only 10 percent to teenagers (Livingston and D'Vera 2010). Additionally, the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics has documented that between 1980 and 2004, the number of women giving birth at age 30 has doubled, at age 35, tripled, and after age 40 has almost quadrupled (Newman 2008). Clearly, it is becoming much more common to birth children as an older mother.

Alternatively, more women than ever are forgoing having children altogether. Currently, "nearly one-in-five American women end her childbearing years without having borne a child, compared with one-in-ten in the 1970s" (Cohn and Livingston 2010:1). This trend of childlessness has risen across all socio-economic differentiators, with the exception of women with advanced degrees. For this highly educated group, there has been a small decrease in the number choosing not to have children. Whether a couple's ultimate choice is to be DINK for the short, mid, or long term, what cannot be denied is that while they were "once considered a fleeting and transitional stage of early adult life, these early child-free years have now become a life stage in their own right" (Whithead 2008:7).

Looking at the statistics and figures, there is no denying that the way we perform marriage and parenthood in this country is changing. What remains to be established, however, is why these shifts are occurring. At the core of this ideological transformation is the fact that many Americans no longer believe children are an essential element for a successful marriage. "As recently as 1990, a clear majority—65 percent—of the public said that children are very important to a successful marriage, but by 2007, less than half of the respondents agreed with the statement" (Whithead 2008:7). Similarly, children are no longer seen as a necessary step to becoming a family. In one study, 88 percent of people surveyed considered a childless married couple to be a family (Pew Research Center Staff 2010). In today's society having children is no longer mandatory; rather, it is seen as an individual's choice.

In addition to this broad cultural shift, there are other socio-economic reasons contributing to couples waiting to have children, or forgoing children entirely. Most recently, the recession and the financial instability caused by it have seemed to deter some couples

from having children. In 2008, a demographic study was conducted in 25 states looking at key economic indicators, including changes in per capita earnings, housing costs and share of the working-age population employed across states. This data was then evaluated against the state birth rates, and it demonstrated that there was a correlation between the economy and people's decision on whether to have a child or not (Livingston and D'Vera 2010). This correlation was substantiated in a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2009 and showed 14 percent of Americans ages 18-34 and eight percent of those ages 35-44 said they postponed having a child because of the recession (Wang 2009).

Improvements in healthcare have also provided more flexibility for couples as they decide their next steps in life. Birth prevention techniques, like the birth control pills, the IUD and even the morning after pill have had immediate repercussions on the birth rate overall (Jayson 2009). Alternatively, medical treatments such as in vitro fertilization, donor eggs and sperm and substitute carriers have all lengthened the feasible time to conceive and produce viable offspring (Graham 2009). These medical advancements have allowed women, as individuals and with their partners, to plan more efficiently the type of family that best suits them. Alas, this sometimes backfires for the couple that postpones childbearing, thinking they can use medical technologies, only to be unsuccessful. In addition to direct medical interventions, living longer lives has opened up new pathways for couples. Increased longevity makes delaying having children a more feasible option, as people feel comforted by the expectation of being around to provide for their children, even if at an older age (Jayson 2009).

Education also plays a part in this social shift. In a study of states' education levels, it was found that in "states with high shares of college-educated adults, men and women marry

at older ages, indicating that highly educated individuals marry and thus, have children later in life" (Cohn 2009). For women, over the past three decades their aggressive consumption of educational opportunities have made them, for the first time ever, the majority of both college graduates and those who have some college education but not a degree (Cohn and Fry 2010). Similarly, women have increasingly been taking advantage of new professional opportunities, with women making up almost half of the workforce in the United States in 2009 (Cohn and Fry 2010). These alternative options to the traditional role of wife/mother are something that women are taking advantage of in large numbers and have certainly affected their decision (both positively and negatively) to marry and have children. In *Ready: Why Women are Embracing the New Later Motherhood,* Elizabeth Gregory studied why women choose to have kids later in life and confirmed that many of the older mothers have delayed having children so they could earn their degree and establish a firm foundation in their profession (Gregory 2007).

As presented in this section, there is a great deal of scholarship that describes the possible reasons—a national cultural shift, the equalization of educational opportunities, the modernization of healthcare—that are affecting couples' willingness to postpone childbearing. While these studies and statistics are very informative, they do not give us a very present sense of what the decision-making process is like for individuals and couples. What is missing from this conversation is a more intimate look into how these couples think about and navigate this decision. My research will investigate these outstanding questions in current research.

1.3 Anthropological Approaches to Contemporary Reproduction and Kinship

Over the past three decades the composition of the American family has been changing. In the 1950s the one-two punch of post-war government propaganda and media coverage effectively portrayed and produced the heteronormative image of the middle-class family in the United States (Hayden and Hallstein 2010). Recently, this idealized form has given way to other types of flexible kinship patterns created by modern circumstances. Existing as "subterranean family forms" (Furstenberg 1992) for centuries, these newly recognized family constructs include: single-parent households, blended families (with stepparents and stepchildren), adoptive/intentional families and Dual Income No Kids couples (Parkin 2004). Addressing shifting notions of what qualifies as a family, anthropologists no longer presume that Americans construct their kinship solely on biological terms. As such, recent anthropological literature has challenged the Euroamerican notions of kinship that were rooted in the institution of marriage and its relational nuclear family construct: husband/father, wife/mother, and children (Schneider 1980 [1968]). In today's anthropology, biology is relevant not as the universal factor of kinship construction, but as one of the many important factors behind human construction and behavior (Parkin 2004:336). This shift prompted anthropological and social-science research to consider the complexities of kin—who counts as kin in today's world, how this label is applied, and how macro and micro forces play their part in the process.

All in the Family

For example, in her research with the Langkawi in Malaysia, Janet Carsten contests the Western concept of bio-kinship as delineating who is a family member and who is not.

Instead, she believes family members can best be identified through "relatedness" (Carsten 1994), a process-driven term that links family members to each other through their actions, rather than blood. Through her study, she discovers that in the Malay world "it is through living and consuming together that people become complete persons – that is kin" (Carsten, 1994:310). This expansion of an individual's kin network to include non-blood lines stretches the traditional American understanding of how a family is made and the members that make it up, but is useful in analyzing contemporary U.S. families.

For example, relatedness is especially relevant to kin construction within the practice of adoption. For couples—homosexual or heterosexual—who cannot have children, adoption provides a viable opportunity to create a family of their choosing. In her ethnography on gay and lesbian couples, *Families We Choose*, Kath Weston (1997) argues that through adoption homosexual couples create a distinct and valid form of family (separate from the traditional model) based on choice and love, rather than biogenetic material. Choosing children through adoption is not without its cultural and social complications. In "Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption," Anagnost (2000) discusses the identity issues that arise for children and parents when participating in adoption that crosses borders of geography, class, race/ethnicity and culture. For adoptive children there is a need to find a balance between their new (most likely white middle-class) family and their genetic and cultural heritage in order to be their authentic self. However, parents must re-situate themselves in a world where people can easily misrecognize their role as parent due to the apparent racial differences between them and their children.

Modern medical technologies, also known as New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs), are also revolutionizing the family structure across the globe for those who can

afford it. NRTs such as surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization (IVF) and combinations thereof, are creating new roles and relationships that would not exist without them. Case in point, during in vitro fertilization, three different types of "mothers" can be identified: a legal mother, a genetic mother, and a birth mother. In this situation, it becomes difficult to distinguish who the real mother is; is it the biological mother, as historically defined, or is it the woman who has chosen the child to be conceived, carried and birthed so she can raise him or her into adulthood? In this sense, NRTs call into question the supposedly "inviolable chain of events linking marriage, sex, conception, pregnancy, gestation, parenthood, and childbearing" (Ragoné 1994:87). At the same time NRTs are pioneering a path into new social frontiers, they also enable couples to reinforce traditional blood-as-family constructs. For instance in surrogacy, although participants use their agency to create a child through medical means, the ultimate goal is to achieve as close to the traditional American family construct as possible, with at least one of the parent's blood being represented in their offspring.

In the end, although the methods of achieving relatedness are transforming, the rigorous emphasis on the family and on the biogenetic basis of American kinship has not entirely disappeared (Ginsberg and Rapp 1991; Ragoné 2004). In short, anthropological literature has highlighted the emergence of new reproductive options, but also the continuing relevance of biogenetic relatedness and the centrality of having children to the achievement of adulthood. In Chapter Five, I will look more closely at how couples view these technologies as an option for their own childbearing planning.

Marriage and Parenting's Shifting Norms

As an integral part of American kinship, marriage as conceived in the past has been changing as well. Economic, cultural, political and social forces have led to the deinstitutionalization of the American marriage—"or the weakening of the social norms that define people's behavior" (Cherlin 2004:848). Additionally, for many Americans there was an assumption that marriage invariably included children (LaRossa 1977:108); a step that was required to achieve the next step in middle-class adulthood. Thus, "for most couples, the normative expectation that they will have children was so entrenched that it was part of their taken-for granted world" (Daly, 1988:40). Now with no archetypal life script to follow, Americans with the freedom and financial means are inventing new interpretations of marriage and family. Over the past fifty years there have been a number of significant shifts that have been fostering this change.

The first shift has been a rise in individualism, caused by the easing of social control by the formal institutions of power. This change has allowed for partnerships that are formed on the basis of emotional connection and personal fulfillment, rather than on a stress for long-term commitment and procreation (Cherlin 2004, 2009; Giddens 1991; Hirsh 2003; Popenoe 2009; Wilcox and Nock 2006; Whitehead 1998). Examples of these new unions include the emergence of same-sex, DINK, and cohabitating couples. Slowly, these fringe choices are gaining more social acceptance and thus moving to become re-institutionalized into society (Cherlin 2004); although for some groups this is occurring more quickly than for others. In the case of cohabitating couples, social recognition has been prompt, with changes in legal codes providing more rights for these non-traditional couples across the United States. Conversely, same-sex marriage is a highly disputed issue which depending on the

social context—is sometimes accepted, sometimes tolerated, and sometimes aggressively denied. As such it has further to go before earning validation as an acceptable lifestyle by the majority of the people in the United States.

Another socio-economic shift affecting marriage and family occurred because of a surplus demand in the job market caused by an economic boom following the World Wars. This labor deficit necessitated that women join their husbands in the workplace; for some it was a financial must and for others it provided them some pocket money to spend on the growing amount of consumer goods available in modern society (Hayden and Hallstein 2010). This change in turn created a rise in equality between men and women, with the latter gaining broader access to once male-dominated opportunities in education and the workforce. The effect on marriage was to create flexible roles for husband and wife, in contrast to the traditional roles of woman-as-homemaker and man-as-breadwinner. In this new model of family, it is more likely that both working partners are committed to making both home and work life successful. (Bianchi 2006; Casper and Bianchi 2005; Popenoe 2009). Congruously, this shift also had implications for motherhood. In the 1950s middle to upper class women were expected to be mothers first and foremost; anything else was inconsequential in comparison (Rosen 2000). As these more relatively privileged women took advantage of educational and professional opportunities in lieu of settling down, they challenged the conventional role of mother. In both marriage and parenthood, it is important to note that the roles traditionally assigned to men and women are not "becoming unbounded by gender; rather, they are becoming bounded in new ways, by new ideals of masculinity and femininity" (Hirsh 2003:9).

Lastly, a secular shift has occurred (Bellah et al. 1985, Fowers 2000, Popenoe 2009, Thornton 2001) transforming both marriage and family. Historically, American marriages were built on a solid foundation of Christian love; partners were committed to fulfilling their vows sworn under the institution of marriage—for better, for worse—even at the cost of their own happiness (Bellah et al. 1985). As many members of American society become less religious, their marriages "on the one hand, are less committed and more contingent and, paradoxically, on the other hand, have to carry a greater emotional load, insofar as people seem to endow their marriages with greater ultimate significance now that they accord less significance to religion" (Wilcox and Dew 2010: 688). Emotionally based marriages then require both partners to continuously meet the needs of their partner to keep the relationship successful, instead of relying on performing the roles of husband/father and wife/mother that are promoted by the church (Cherlin 2004).

Understanding the trends that have led Americans to the current choices they are making, the next question is—where is marriage heading in the United States? Structural pressures still affect marriage decisions, but with the freedom of choice now afforded to both individuals and couples in middle-class America, there is little chance there will be a return of the institutionalized nuclear family structure dominant from the 1950s to the 1970s. Marriage as a formal institution will not likely disappear, but evolve into a "companionate relationship" (Hirsh and Wardlow 2006; Simmons 1979; Skolnik 1991), a "marriage ideal in which emotional closeness is understood to be both one of the primary measures of success in marriage and a central practice through which the relationship is constituted and reinforced (Hirsh and Wardlow 2006:4). In addition, the formality of a public commitment builds an "enforceable trust" (Cherlin 2000, 2004; Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993), which leads to a

more secure and binding commitment between partners. Cherlin further argues this formalization of trust and commitment guarantees that the institution of marriage will continue to hold a socially accepted and prestigious place in our society, despite fewer people engaging in it.

Other late modern theorists (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002; Giddens 1991, 1992) believe as structural pressures lose power over identity creation, one's intimate relationships become critical to the forming of self. Marriage then will evolve from a social institution based on the procreation of children into a non-sanctioned partnership based on each individual's needs being met. Given different names by theorists, the "pure relationship" (Giddens 1991, 1992), or "super-relationship" (Whitehead and Popenoe 2001, Wilcox and Drew 2010) is differentiated because it is not institutionalized through social, legal or religious principles, but "free-floating" (Cherlin 2004) and driven by self-actualization and emotional connection between partners. Commitment to the relationship balances precariously on each individual's willingness to continuously fill the needs of their partners since they are no longer beholden to religious and social pressures. Therefore pure relationships are "continually at risk of breaking up because they are held together entirely by the voluntary commitment of each partner" (Cherlin 2004:858). Further, if in cohabitation people begin to find the deeper trust and commitment traditionally found in marriage, this may be the demise of the institution of marriage in the United States and other Euroamerican societies. While childbearing and social expectations about it obviously continue, Giddens (1992) and others suggest that modern ideals for married life are centered on the "relationship" and companionate ideal, rather than prescribed kin roles. I will look at this more closely in later chapters.

Structure Versus Choice in Modern Society?

In analyzing the effects of shifting trends on changing kin structures represented by marriage and family, it becomes apparent there is a push/pull between structural forces and self-choices. Macro forces work both overtly (economic changes, media coverage, state policies) and subtly (customs, traditions) to govern the behavior of individuals within every culture. Faier explains, "…human action does not simply reflect the autonomous will of an individual subject, but is always situated within social, cultural, and political-economic structures of power" (Faier 2009: 40). Taking it a step further, Nancy Scheper-Hughes argues that not only is behavior changed, but "emotion is also shaped by the political and economic context, as well as by culture" (1992:341). This does not mean people are living an entirely prescribed life; rather, they have an internal resourcefulness that they can claim to change the course of their lives. Giddens expounds on this, "systems of control can never work perfectly because those being controlled have both agency and understanding, and thus can always find ways to evade or resist" (1979:145). This is not just true for people living in America, but for humanity as a whole. Ortner adds "every culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency, its own modes of enacting the process of reflecting on the self and the world and of acting simultaneously within and upon what it finds there" (2006:57). For the poor, disenfranchised, and oppressed, there are limits to what they can achieve due to the cultural, economic, social, and political constraints. For this reason, Foster argues "agency cannot be adequately rendered by the term "choice" if there is no accompanying recognition of alternative forms of action" (2010:150). Even so, Giddens (1984) would argue even the subjugated, en masse, have the power to confront and change

oppressive structures thereby creating new cultural norms. This human action, or agency, then creates a cyclical feedback process of change (Giddens 1984).

Many scholars believe these shifting forces can be linked to the socio-economic approach of neoliberalism, or as Bourdieu (1998) puts it, "the absolute reign in flexibility." Freeman goes on to say that "few if any spheres of life appear exempt from the neoliberal demands for flexibility, from the structures of economic markets to the nuances of individuals' subjectivities as citizens, producers, consumers, migrants, tourists, members of families, and so on" (2007:253). Owing to the complexity of the modern world and the endless choices inherent in it, the search for self-identity, what Giddens (1991) calls the "reflexive project of self" and du Guy (1996) calls the "entrepreneur of self," is more relevant than ever. Unlike traditional societies with more formalized structure for life rituals, many people living in the United States (and increasingly in other parts of the world) are confronted with countless options for the type of life that is attainable (Giddens 1991). As such, an individual's agency—for men or women, straight or gay—becomes imperative to make decisions about marriage, family and the workings of every day life. In regards to socio-economically empowered couples, Hirsh et al. (2009) argue the shift in western societies toward a more companionate marriage ideal is a result of the actions of self-conscious and strategic actors. For gay couples, their "subjective agency is implicit in the very labels they use to describe their kinship: 'families we choose' " (Hirsh 2003:109). Likewise, as women gain access across multiple cultural and social factors they are afforded more choices.

For women in the United States "the ability to make decisions about reproduction has been a defining and empowering factor (Hayden and Hallstein 2010: xvi), but one that is

complicated due to the choices that could/should be made and the consequences of each, e.g. age-related infertility issues (Bute, et al. 2010). In today's world people must balance their personal goals with society's expectations; for each couple, community, culture, and country these goals will manifest differently. Even so, through these different personal motivations emerge commonalities or broader trends, as we see in the case of more people waiting to have children after marriage. So while their reasons may be different, many people all over the United States ultimately end up at the same place: DINK.

Defining DINK as a New Kinship System

American kinship has had a rebirth due to changing cultural, economic, political and social factors. As such there has been an explosion in social science and anthropological research focusing not only the gender/race/class implications, but also on the new types of family constructs including: lesbians and gay families (Hayden 1995; Lewin 1993; Weston 1995, 1997) adoptive families (Modell 1994) and surrogate motherhood (Ragone 1994). Missing from this conversation are studies on Double Income No Kids couples who are also, for now, choosing an alternative lifestyle, even if for the short-term. The fact that these married couples are delaying, if not forgoing having children, defies Engel's famous assumption, "the determining factor in history is…the production and reproduction of immediate life…or the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species" (Engels 1972:26). This problematizes the expected and accepted Euroamerican practice of love, then marriage, then…children? It also incites a whole series of macro-level questions targeting the generalized, hegemonic models of what is normative in the United States, such as: How is the current economic recession affecting couples in the United

States? Is it no longer expected in American society to have children? At the micro level, how do specific American couples ultimately make the choice to have children or not? What types of pressures influence their choices? Why are these couples buying into the institution of marriage, but not necessarily its byproduct, children? Turning a critical eye onto the DINK phenomenon will help build theories about the choices these couples are making and provide insight into questions still left unanswered on topics of identity, marriage and family.

1.4 Methods

In order to address the above questions, this research project focused on the social and cultural phenomenon known as Double Income No Kids (DINK), specifically investigating how DINK couples in the United States negotiated the decision of having children. In order to assess how this choice was made, the research was structured to describe the historical context of the DINK trend, as well as capture participants' stories in their own words. The twofold approach considered two key research questions: 1) How do structural forces, including economic, social and cultural elements, influence individual beliefs and behavior in regards to the choice to have children? and equally, 2) How do the issues of self-creation and personal identity shape a person's life narrative? By focusing on both the macro and micro forces at play on people in contemporary American society, I unpacked the "cultural contexts, patterns of social behaviors, sequences of events, and cultural norms or beliefs" (Bernard 1998: 697) that guide and govern the DINK movement. In Chapters Three and Four, I discuss the data I collected focusing on both macro factors and individualized narratives, and find that both are influential in the decision for having children. Ultimately, however, the responses led to an emphasis more on the latter.

The research participant criteria for this project were developed purposefully and based on current economic and health indicators in order to ensure the most representative data set possible. Accordingly, a DINK in this study is defined as a person who: is married; does not have children; is between the ages of 25-50; is self-identified with any race/ethnicity; is a United States citizen, is college educated; and has a career or is studying for a higher degree. The age range was determined based on the current average mean, 25 years old, for having children in the United States (Jayson 2009). Delineating participants within this age range indicates they are already falling behind the national norm for first-time birth, thus statistically delayed. What this "delay" means to them or whether they even perceive it as "delay" is, of course, a question that I investigated in the context of the interviews. Additionally, all racial groups were accepted, as the average age at first birth increased for all racial and ethnic groups between 1990 and 2006 (Mathews 2009). Similarly, the education level and career status markers were derived because almost half of college-educated women and higher income women were childless (Chandra 2005). These two statistics suggest that this trend is growing across both race/ethnicity and class boundaries, although it is important to note there are nuances within each group. Lastly, I selected the criterion "married" because marriage represents a culturally and socially sanctioned ritual. Although a couple can be Dual Income No Kids and not technically married, I thought it would be interesting to investigate DINKs who bought into one social norm—marriage, but currently had not bought into the next normative life step—children. Which begs the question, why?

The research methodology for this project draws on a range of social-science data collection techniques, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to gain

both a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the topic. As part of this exploration I wanted to better understand each individual's family history, peer network, educational path and career choices in order to concretize DINK. Additionally, it was necessary to investigate what the couple's lives looked like day to day—how they spent their time, what they enjoyed doing together, how they balanced work and personal life—in order to create the story for how these couples acted out their lives. This holistic approach provided the data necessary to understand the various factors that influenced their decision on whether to opt in or out of having children.

As a foundational step, I analyzed recent demographic shifts in marriage, birth, family, and work statistics within the United States. By conducting a detailed review of existing statistical reports produced by agencies like the Center for Disease Control, the Pew Research Center, and the National Health Organization I uncovered the facts and figures behind shifting national trends. From this data, I was able to explore the linkages between structural forces, such as the current economic recession, and current trends in Americans' behavior, focusing specifically on the categories of age, education, race/ethnicity, et cetera that relate to being DINK.

Once the social context for the DINK phenomenon was established, I initiated interventions aimed at gathering personal data from members across the population. First, I launched a nation-wide survey[3] using the expertise I had developed over three years conducting corporate culture surveys as a consultant with a global consulting firm. Leveraging this knowledge, I developed a survey on surveymonkey[4], an online and protected survey host. This confidential survey targeted one hundred DINK participants across the

[3] See the Appendix for a sample of the DINK Survey.
[4] SurveyMonkey is a private American company that enables users to create their own Web-based surveys.

United States. As members are not a bounded group, I relied on my own family, friend, school and work networks via online resources such as Facebook and email to search for possible candidates for research. In addition, I requested my networks to send out the project appeal to their own social networks. This created a snowball effect, which quickly allowed me to hit the targeted goal. Within the survey, I designed a feature where the candidates were able to self-select to continue participate in the more in-depth interview phase of the project if they so desired. I secured three interviews in this way.

Requiring approximately 30 minutes to complete, the DINK survey included Likert scale questions (Bernard 2006:328), two open-ended questions and one free-list (Bernard 2006:709). In the first section of the survey, individuals selected from the options of "strongly agree", "agree", "neutral", "disagree", and "strongly disagree" in response to 58 questions. These questions were pre-coded to capture individuals' personal thoughts and feelings across what I determined to be the eleven key influencers on the choice to procreate based on a pilot study conducted in the spring of 2010. These included: kinship, partnership, peer group, mores, economics, gender, religion, technology, identity, agency, and life narrative. The first eight categories linked to structural forces and the last three provide data on the self. The open-ended questions and free-list item were designed to elicit specific reasons from the participants for why they have not had children yet: Q1) "Please list the reason(s) you and your partner have not had children." Q2) "Out of the reasons you listed above, which do you think is the key reason for not having children and explain why?" Q3) "What do you perceive as some of the trade-offs for having children? Please explain your answers." These focused free form comment areas were important to include as they provided the depth of interview questions, but captured a much larger audience than I could

manage through just interviews alone. In addition to content-specific questions, the survey was designed to request that participants provide key demographic data such as age, education level, gender, length of marriage, location, living environment (urban, rural, suburban), and salary range. These indicators allowed me to assess how participants skewed across the various demographic indicators and to establish how Double Income No Kids is perceived and experienced in a variety of milieus. I will talk more specifically about how the sample skewed and confounded the data in Chapter Two.

As a methodological tool, the survey was beneficial for a number of reasons. As dual-earner and childless couples are not restricted to any time, place, or identity the survey provided access to a group that is not necessarily easy to identify or locate. In fact, I reached the 100 individuals I had targeted to study within one week of launching the survey. Similarly, due to the fluidity and accessibility of the survey, I was able to gather information on DINKs across the United States, including 25 different states. This allowed for better insights into why the average age of first-time mothers increased for all states and the District of Columbia between 1970 and 2006 (Mathews 2009). Another important benefit of using a survey was it provided consistent comparative data across the participant population. As participants are all receiving the questions in the same way, there is no interviewer bias to influence their responses. Furthermore, as the nature of the topic might be sensitive to some couples that have had childbearing issues, the format provided a safe way for them to share their innermost thoughts and feelings about their experience. Lastly, the survey was a useful tool for highlighting areas I needed to focus more detailed investigation on during the in-depth interviews portion of the research. It was useful for shaping my interview questions,

giving me a heads-up about things that needed exploration, and some indication of how generalized the interview findings might be.

Like any methodology, the survey had some drawbacks. Although reaching a broad audience, it did not provide a statistically valid sample. Even so, the information collected has provided data on the very real experiences of people, which will contribute to our overall understanding of the phenomenon. Also, since the survey was anonymous, I could not clarify questions people may have had about its content, which could lead to a misinterpretation of the data. Similarly, I could not follow up with questions that I had for any one particular participant's comments.

The next phase of the project, the ethnographic research phase, included semi-structured interviews (O'Reilly 2005:116). I conducted interviews with ten DINK couples, or twenty individual DINKs. The interviews were based on a convenience sample across three states where I have deep personal connections: Colorado, Georgia, and Florida. Analogous to the approach I took with the survey, I leveraged my personal networks to identify research informants who fit my participant criteria mentioned previously. Again, the interview data is not a representative sample, but interviewing couples across four geographic zones in the United States provides a wider perspective of the American DINK lifestyle. I will come back to how this data is skewed again in Chapter Two.

After securing an interview participant couple, the first step of the interview process was a Participant Fact Sheet, which they filled out and returned prior to our meeting. This form gathered basic demographic information on the couple including their names, dates of birth, date of marriage, contact information, work experience, education experience, etc. This enabled me to guide the conversation to more focused topics quickly, thus maximizing our

time together, while not missing an key demographic information. Interview questions were crafted to collect data about each participant's past, present and future. Gathering information about the participants' life history, through questions like: "What type of family life did you have as a child?" and "What type of relationship did your parents have?" provided a basis for understanding how their current attitudes and choices were shaped over time and how they developed their core beliefs. Focusing on the present, questions centering on education and career choices, such as: "Was gaining your degree important to you?" and "Do you spend a lot of time at work?" provided insights into the participant's current priorities. Additional present-focused questions covered topics of personal relationships and leisure time: "Do the friends you spend the most time with already have children?" and "What do you and your spouse like to do for fun?" Information from these questions shed light on how they constructed their current lifestyle choices. Finally, I designed a series of questions that shifted the participant's gaze to the future. Discussing personal goals and desired life paths afforded insights into how each person viewed him/herself in relationship to their spouse, family and society. Moreover, it clarified their conceptualization and actualization of personal choice. It is important to note, that although I had an interview schedule, I only used the questions as a guide so as to allow for the conversation to flow naturally as it would between friends. In this way, I hoped to build rapport between the participants and myself so they open up about the intimate details of their lives.

The interview sessions were scheduled to be between one to two hours each and were audio recorded. Most ended up being about two hours and a few, especially talkative couples, pushed three hours. As part of the interview process, I had the participants choose the time and location for the interview so as to make it more convenient and comfortable for them.

Using semi-structured interviews also served an instrumental purpose. Through the interview process, I tested the findings gleaned from the survey to see if they resonated with the participants or not—a way of cross checking the data. Additionally, as the interviews were only semi-structured, I had the ability to discover new lines of questioning as the participants discussed their lives in their own terms. Finally, as much as the survey provided a breadth of data, the interviews provided specificity to build a more nuanced argument. This type of rich detail generated a human quality to the quantitative data I collected from the survey.

1.5 Project Timeline

My research began in February 2011 and continued through November 2011 and was divided into three core phases. Phase I (March 2011 to July 2011) included the creation of a detailed project plan, set up and launch of the online survey, creation the interview structure and participant identification for the survey. By early summer 2011, I began initial analysis on the survey, which was critical to guiding the research agenda for the next phase of the project. In phase II (October 2011-December 2011), I began the ethnographic phase of the project. I took the semester off from classes to travel to both Colorado and Florida in order to collect interview data. In late December I wrapped up data analysis on the ethnographic phase of the project and compared it to the survey findings. During phase III (January to April 2012) I compiled my findings and completed my thesis.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

Due to the personal nature of the topics scheduled to be discussed during the research process, there was the potential that the participants may have become distressed, especially

in relation to fertility challenges some couples have in trying to have children. As such, before conducting both the survey and the interviews, I provided participants with detailed information about the project and warned them of potentially sensitive issues. For additional protection, study participants were required to provide consent to study at the beginning of each stage of research. For the survey, project information and the consent form were included in the opening page of the survey. Details included: purpose of the research, how the data was used, and access to any of their own collected information. It was also noted that they have the authority to strike information from the record at any point in the research process. In order to access the actual questions, each participant had to select "yes " to consent to participate before moving on. In the second phase of research the consent form included the same information as mentioned above. I read it over with them before proceeding with the discussion. This form will was kept in a locked file cabinet in my home.

Similarly, in order to further protect the research participants and their families all identifying information including names, place, business, etc. were changed to pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. In the first phase of research, the confidential online survey host, surveymonkey, protected participants' information. No names, emails, or other identifying information was requested. All data gathered and analyzed from this phase was stored on my password-protected computer and was not shared with third parties. In the interview phase of the project, participants contacted me directly via email in order to participate. As in the previous phase, all data I collected through interviews was immediately converted manually to an electronic file that was stored on my personal computer and a flash drive, which was protected by a password. After transcribing, I deleted the audio recording of the interview. Additionally, all interviewee names, as well as associated identifying locations, etc. were

changed to pseudonyms as soon as the interviews were transcribed in order to protect the participants from being recognized. The key to the pseudonyms was also stored in a locked file cabinet.

1.7 Researcher and DINK

As with any anthropological endeavor it is important to situate oneself in the process of investigation. I am a white, educated woman having earned my bachelor's degree from the University of Florida in 2002. Since then I have had three successful jobs in the Peace Corps (voluntary), with a Georgia nonprofit, and the last with a global consulting firm—all which helped me understand what I did and did not want from a career. My husband and I, despite me being a graduate student, sit comfortably in the middle class. Lastly, and especially pertinent to my role in this research, I am a DINK.

Having personal insight into why my husband and I have made a conscious decision to delay having children, I can very much empathize with the participants in this proposed research. On the one hand, being fully immersed in the subject matter was a boon to facilitating research, as being 'in the know' helps me easily identify the fears, concerns, or goals of my fellow DINKs. Additionally, as mentioned before, having a similar background also helped to quickly build rapport with the participants so that they opened up on issues they might not have otherwise because they do not fear being judged. Conversely, my lack of objective distance may have caused issues in identifying the peculiarities in DINK behavior that may have appeared normal to me. As such, I attempted to balance my personal role with my professional role by identifying my own biases. I had to pay close attention to how my own opinions, values and experiences influenced the interpretation of the results. Having

reflexivity helped me stay as objective as possible while finalizing and reporting out the analysis. Finally, I needed to be careful in relying on one source of data, which I could have easily misinterpreted due to my own prejudices; thus the two tiered survey and interview methodological approach. This way I produced a more complete picture of being DINK.

1.8 Thesis Structure

Chapter Two introduces the research participants in both the survey and interview setting. It includes a description of the basic demographic statistics of the couples including race, location, and age. In this Chapter, I also question whether DINK can be classified as an identity alone, or if it is also a rite of passage for more and more Americans. Chapter Three presents how the participants are influenced by those around them. Included in this are a general discussion of how couples make decisions on childrearing, and a reflection on parenting role models. Chapter Four addresses self-fulfillment and the personal factors delaying the couple from having children—how couples plan, prepare, and time childbearing. This includes the project of finishing self: earning an education—building specific knowledge and critical skills; crafting a career—establishing a career that is emotionally satisfying and financially secure; and building a strong partnership (having fun, working on communication skills). Chapter Five includes a look into the possible consequences of waiting and an overview of my final conclusions. Chapter Six is an Epilogue, specifically looking at the research participants who are currently passing through DINK, how it is currently affecting their lives, and their hopes for the future.

CHAPTER TWO: PORTRAIT OF A DINK

"In this day and age I shouldn't have to defend my lifestyle choices. If I want to wait to have children or not have them at all I shouldn't have to feel like I'm disappointing anyone."
DINK Survey Participant

2.1 Introduction

On the path to unpacking what it means to be Double Income No Kids, one hundred twenty DINKs have opened their homes and minds to me. They have shared their intimate thoughts and feelings about their life from childhood through to present; have discussed their education and career paths; have reflected on the importance of their partnerships; and paid special consideration to the prospects of children and parenthood. The people with whom I worked come from different family backgrounds, live in different parts of the United States, have different career and life goals, and so have come to DINK for different reasons. I will present these reasons in much greater detail in later chapters. For now, I would like to situate Dual Income No Kids as a category of people.

As such, the goal of this chapter is to provide a brief description of the socioeconomic and professional backgrounds of the individuals I surveyed and the couples I interviewed in order to provide a picture of who is DINK. I acknowledge that these descriptions by no means provide a statistical representation of everyone who is Double Income No Kids in the United States. They are not meant to be. Instead, by providing this type of information, I hope to highlight how diverse this grouping of people actually is. As we shall see, my findings challenge the long-held stereotypes that many Americans still hold about what it means to be DINK.

2.2 Survey - Participant Demographics

Through just one click of a button on Facebook, I was able to launch my research survey to my personal network of hundreds of people. Word of my research spread outward from there from computer to computer through an invisible web of social networks. This online snowballing approach broadened the pool of participants into a more diverse group of people than I would have been able to recruit on my own, admittedly there is still a skew to my own affiliations which I mentioned previously. Of those surveyed, approximately 50 percent were between the ages of 25-29; about 38 percent were 30-34; only seven percent were 35-40; and just fewer than four percent were between the ages of 40-50 (see *Figure 1*).

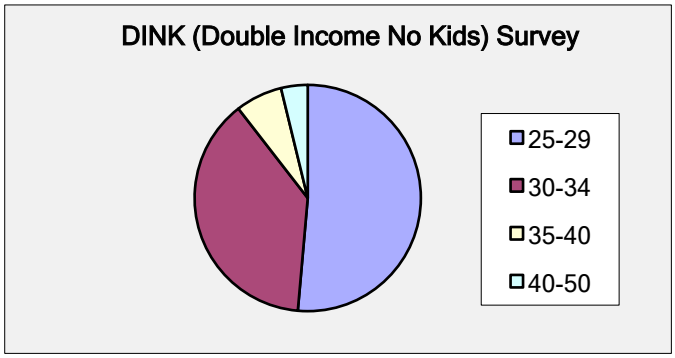

Figure 1

This skew towards younger DINKs could have been influenced by the use of Facebook as a recruiting tool, but is more likely indicative of the fact that most Americans choose to be only short-term DINKs. One survey participant speaks to this sentiment: "I definitely see the attraction of having children and that is something I want one day. I just feel like my husband and I are too young and unprepared." The sentiment of this participant captures what the majority of the DINKs in the research project assume—one day, they would try to start a family.

The geographical span of this survey reached across all four designated regions of the United States: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Survey participants responded from 25 different states and 55 different cities, with the majority of these individuals living in either a city or suburban environment. Only two participants claimed to live in a rural setting. This statistical leaning towards city living could be caused by outreach bias, but is more likely due to the fact that according to the United States Census Bureau's most recent findings, 82.6% of all Americans live in metropolitan, or city, environments. In other words, the general population of the United States, like the survey, is skewed towards urban and suburban populations. Additionally, rather than renting, over 70 percent of the individuals surveyed owned their own house, despite living in a more costly city environment. This would suggest that they have a higher socioeconomic status in that they can afford to own property, something I will discuss in a moment.

Education is critical to this group of individuals. Although part of the research criteria required that the DINKs have a minimum of their Bachelor's degree (current statistical data demonstrates that college-educated adults marry at older ages), introducing some bias, many of their academic pursuits did not end there. Over 39 percent of the survey participants earned their Master's degree. An additional 14 percent achieved their doctorate or professional degrees. One participant commented, "Everyone has their own priorities and makes their own choices (about children) according to those priorities. Up until this point, I have valued my education." This individual was not alone in this prioritization, at least in temporal terms, of education before children.

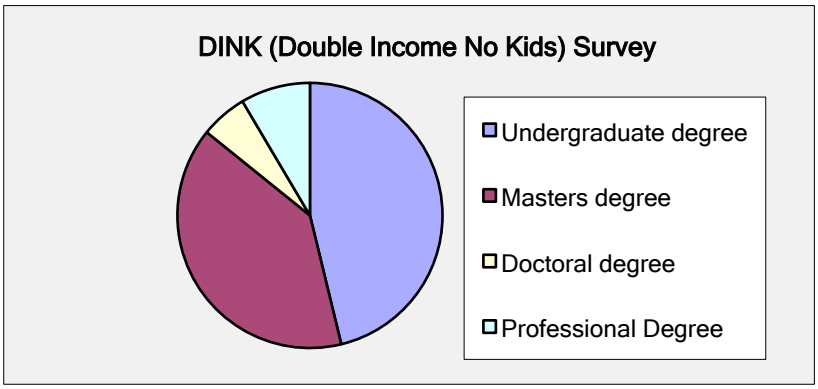

Figure 2

Education often leads to a successful and thriving career for many DINKs. As a possible correlate, the majority of the individuals surveyed were financially secure. Over 62 percent of the individuals surveyed made over $50,000 a year. The next highest group made between $26,000 and $50,000 a year, leaning more heavily to the latter. Additionally, there were a few individuals who were currently in graduate school with limited income.

Most of the participants had only been married for a handful of years at the time of survey. While about 43 percent had been married between zero to two years (a relatively short period of time to try to have children), another 47 percent had been married from three to five years—giving them a longer amount of time to start considering the possibility of children. Only three percent had been married for over ten years. These percentages most likely correlate with the age of the participants surveyed and might suggest that by the time these couples are older, they will actually have kids, or at least might hope to.

This implies that it might be harder to research older DINKs because there actually are not as many of them as the existing stereotypes would lead one to assume or because using the general inclusion criteria of "Double Income No Kids," one will catch many individuals who only very temporarily fit into this category.. A quote from a survey participant explains, "We really wanted to spend the first years of marriage as a couple,

learning more about each other and spending quality time together. We didn't want to rush into having a baby which would take up all of our free time." It appears that the older individuals become the more likely that they will forgo being DINK. I discuss the specific reasons for this in greater depth in later chapters.

Another interesting feature of the survey data was that without premeditated design, the survey responses were heavily skewed to the female perspective. Women represented almost 84 percent of the respondents. This could again be due to the built-in bias of my personal network, but it could also be connected to the findings from a Pew Research Center survey which found that "women tend to treat information gathering online as a more textured and interactive process – one that includes gathering and exchanging information through support groups and personal exchanges" (Fallows: 2005). So it may be that women felt more comfortable in sharing the intimate details of their life virtually, while their male counterparts did not. Or even possibly that people interpreted the topic –childbearing – as a "woman's" issue and so the men did not feel compelled to participate. Even though slanted towards women, many participants provided details from both their own and their spouse's perspective in the comment portion of the survey. This provided a somewhat more balanced understanding of the situation.

Lastly, because of using a convenience sample, I was unable to target any specific ethnicity or race. As such, I did not include an ethnicity metric in the survey. Although I believe that it would be interesting to see if DINK was experienced differently across ethnic boundaries, this was not the main purpose of my research. Rather, I was more interested in investigating how general outlooks appeared to influence decisions about the timing of childbearing.

2.3 Interviews – Participant Demographics

Designed as a more in-depth view than the information gathered from the survey, I met with ten married couples, 20 individuals, to discuss their lives as Double Income No Kids. These conversations provided a more intimate glance at the choices these couples were making and why. The interviewees' ages ranged from 26 to 42 years old with the majority of the participants lumped in the thirties. The specific breakdown was as follows: six individuals were in their twenties; twelve individuals were in their thirties, and two individuals were in their forties.

The couples were spread across three targeted geographic areas: Colorado, Florida and Georgia. As mentioned previously, these areas were selected due to my personal connections in each of these places. Two couples lived in some suburban cities nearby to Boca Raton, Florida. Four couples lived in metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. The last four couples lived in Denver, Colorado. The majority of the interviewees were transplants, with only four out of the twenty participants born where they currently live. Like the survey participants, home ownership is the norm. Only one couple did not own their own home.

In terms of education, five participants currently have their Master's or PhD, while four individuals hope to return to school at some point to continue their education. As required by the selection criteria—"dual income"—all the participants currently have a job, even those who were in school. As far as marriage, the most recent wedding for these couples occurred the fall of 2011, only a few months before the interview. On the other end of the spectrum, another couple had been married for ten years. Despite the range in length of marriage, every couple had been in their relationship for at least four years, demonstrating a longer-term commitment. Again, due to the convenience sample, the participants were not

selected to represent a cross-section of race or ethnicity, but rather reflected my own social networks and those of my acquaintances. As such, the majority of the interviewees were white, but there were also two participants of Asian ancestry, and one Hispanic.

The couples' basic statistics of education and income do not alone provide a complete picture of DINKness. Looking only at those figures, one might assume that because there are some basic similarities, everything else must be the same too. In fact, many people, like Patrick Buchanan, believe that these dual income couples are "yuppies", focused on high salaried careers and consumerism. The research I will present reveals otherwise. In fact, despite falling into the DINK category, the research participants represent a diverse group of people with diverging interests, motivations, and lifestyles. And while concerns for career and education are often quite important to them, as we shall see in coming chapters, I will be presenting a subtler picture of their narratives and what motivates them, in ways that give a very different spin to the DINK stereotype.

Kyle and Madison – The Untraditional Traditionalists

I met with Kyle, 27, and Madison, 26, after work one evening, running fifteen minutes late due to Denver's rush hour traffic. Kyle and his German Sheppard-mix Bella kindly met me outside so I would not get lost trying to find the cozy apartment he rents with his wife Madison. The young couple had just moved to the Denver after living and working in the Colorado Mountains for four years. Wanting to escape the loneliness of the mountains, they decided to make the transition when she was able to secure a 7th grade Language Arts position at a Denver area school. For now, he has committed to staying on as a manager at Vail Resorts, despite the brutal two-hour drive to and from the mountains daily.

Both Kyle and Madison grew up in the Midwest, the products of conservative, Mennonite families, with Madison's family being considerably more strict than Kyle's. Both their families, hers more than his, were surprised when the young couple decided to pack up their belongings and move out to Colorado where they had no family. This ran into direct opposition to what a normal Mennonite couple would do. In our conversation, Madison explained, "the typical Mennonite way is for people to stick around and start having babies at 20. I have friends my age who are on their third and I am only 26." Kyle added, "I look at people who are our age and have three kids and I think they aren't normal. Maybe I have a skewed reality?"

They both saw the accepted and expected behavior in their community as being ill-suited for themselves and what they wanted from life. To avoid this type of lifestyle, they abandoned the Midwest to strike out on their own and experience something new and different, just the two of them. For Madison the move was a symbolic gesture— a signal of independence for an over-bearing mother. By moving further away she physically and mentally escaped the pressures to move from marriage to motherhood in quick succession. Conversely, the decision was not an escape as much as an opportunity for Kyle ; "Colorado was adventurous and completely different. It was kind of like, let's try it out." The change of location and lifestyle did not mean this couple had entirely given up on traditional Mennonite values. They still maintained close relationships with their families through telephone calls and Skype[5] dates. Additionally, it was still important to both of them to go to church weekly even though it was not Mennonite. In the end they chose the Mennonite values that worked for them, while ignoring the others.

[5] Skype is a software application that allows users to make voice/video calls over the Internet.

After asking how he would describe their current life situation, Kyle begrudgingly admitted to being a DINK. Not quite comfortable with that categorization, he made sure to distinguish their lifestyle from some yuppie stereotype. He shared, "We are both traditional and conservative minded… we aren't some new, modern couple, just living the life! We are just a traditional couple that hasn't had kids yet, but one day we will…" I found it interesting that he described their lives and values as traditional, when only a few moments before, he claimed to have a "skewed reality" in comparison to other Mennonites. Intrigued, I asked him if he was the traditional stereotype they both described about their childhood community. He laughed, "Oh no, definitely not!" This conservative couple chose to balance their family values with other life goals, pushing the boundaries of the traditional Mennonite life narrative further out to better suit their personal needs.

Although they are not self-admittedly the most conservative couple by Mennonite standards, they are pretty traditionally minded if you juxtapose them with the corporate ladder climbing, power couple model that has long classified being DINK—they still go to church and they still value a nuclear family. For this reason, they are very much the "untraditional traditionalists" of the group. Kyle and Madison's story is only one of the ways that DINK is being reinvented and performed in the United States. In the remaining section of this chapter I acquaint you with the short biographies of the rest of the couples I interviewed. I will discuss their lives more specifically and in further detail in future chapters.

Betty and Steve – The Baby Optimists

Despite going to the high school down the street from where Betty and Steve lived, it took me awhile to find their home. After being kindly guided in the right direction over the phone by Betty, I arrived at the door of their two-story townhouse in south Florida. Betty ushered me over to their living room and pointed to a large comfy chair for me to sit down in. After a few pleasantries among the three of us, I started asking them about their lives, starting with their childhoods. I learned that Betty was a self-professed homebody. She was really close with her family and the only time she spent away from them in her 31 years was a short stint away earning her education degree at the University of Florida. She admitted that the first year away from family was hard on her because she missed her family.

I learned that Steve, 40, only moved down to south Florida in order to finish his education while working as a manager at a large warehouse store. He knew he could continue on the management track and become very successful with his employer after he graduated, but after a lot of personal reflection, he decided against it. After weighing salary against career satisfaction, Steve made a bold move and decided follow his dream to become a teacher. He was hired by a local affluent middle school where he met Betty who was also a teacher.

Although they had a rough start in the beginning—his initial impression was that she was snobby and hers was that he was annoying—they eventually decided to date and continued doing so for a few years. They have now been married for three years and spend a lot of time doing activities they enjoy together, including watching movies and traveling. Children were always a consideration for their marriage, especially because she had come

from such a close family environment. I learned that they had been trying for a few years and were still hopeful that they would conceive soon.

Bonnie and Mason – The Maybe Babies

Change was coursing through the lives of Bonnie, 34 and Mason, 37 when I met them for an interview at their home. They had just recently been married after dating for four years. Only a short time after, they left urban city living behind for a new home in the suburbs of Denver. I could see signs of unrest everywhere in their home: boxes waiting to be unpacked, walls ready to be painted, and moving supplies strewn about. We actually had the interview in the only room in their house that was officially complete at that point. On top of the move, they both had recently changed their jobs: her for career satisfaction and him, to secure financial stability for the family. Rather than feeling uneasy with all of this change, the couple shared that it made them feel more settled in their lives, like things were finally falling into place. This did not mean that they were going to jump head first into having children. After I asked if they were trying to conceive a child, Mason commented noncommittally that, "We aren't not trying. We are going to have fun, this room that room, but you know, whatever happens." Bonnie added, "It is the Maybe Baby syndrome." For now, they enjoyed spending most of their free time with each other, or with their friends going out to restaurants, concerts and snow skiing.

Cathy and Harrison – The First Careers

The newlyweds of the group, Cathy, 26 and Harrison, 29 had been married only a few months, but together for a total of seven years. Both originally from other states, they owned

a townhouse in an up-and-coming neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia where they invited me for the interview. After cooking me a delicious and appropriately named Japanese meal, translated to "mother and child", we sat down on their couch to discuss their stories.

Cathy was currently in the process of earning her masters in anthropology while working as a graduate teaching assistant. She had been delayed a semester in large part due to the fact that her mother had unexpectedly died right as she was finishing her thesis. It was a trying time, but she said that she was working through it with Harrison's love and support. He was working for IT at a local company, a position he admitted was not his ideal. In the perfect world he would be able to merge his quantitative skills with his love of the Japanese language culture. Until this was possible, they spent a lot of time with the Japanese community in Atlanta going to different events and playing on the Japanese softball league.

Growing their family was a long-term goal for both of them, but at present there were other goals that they prioritized first. For her, beginning her PhD program and establishing herself as a professor were important. She did feel it might be possible to have a child during that process, but she was not really sure when. She wanted to have more direction before even attempting to try for children. For Harrison, securing a job where he would be able to use his second language, Japanese, was an important goal. It could possibly mean that they would need to move to Japan, which could be problematic with a child.

Janet and Michael – The Ultimate Waiters

Janet 38, and Michael 42 were the oldest couple I interviewed. They met while he taught at a University in Kentucky while he was a professor and she was working in another department. They moved to New York when he transitioned out of academia and lived there

for a number of years. After reassessing his job situation once again, they decided for him to take another opportunity in Atlanta and have been there ever since. He works as a risk management consultant and she as a technology consultant.

They have been married for ten years and together for thirteen, the majority of which they were quite content to be childless. Interested in the delay, I asked them to talk more about why they had decided to wait so long. At first, they both did not want to seem to pin it to anything specifically. For a long time, Janet shared that she never really had the urge. Michael added, "I mean if we were magically young forever we probably would have never done it." The shift in their thinking came when a major life event occurred that caused them to reevaluate their decision to have children. At the time of interview she was a radiant three months pregnant.

Mindy and Joe – The I Will do What I Wants

Mindy, 30 met me at the door of the home she rented in south Florida with her husband Joe, 33 wearing sweatpants and a comfy college shirt. I learned that this casual look was due to the fact that both she and her husband worked from home as small business entrepreneurs. This theory was given further proof, when he came out of the back room wearing a gym shirt and shorts. The rest of the interview was relaxed as well. At one point, Joe jumped up and started making some pasta for dinner and another, Mindy caught up on some eyebrow tweezing.

Despite the distractions, I did learn that they met at work, where she teases that he was madly in love with her from the start. They eventually started going out when she was 23 and had an on and off again courtship as they tried to figure out what they really wanted. They were married four years ago. Although they are both career-minded hard workers, she

is a self-described workaholic and focused on her career for the first part of their relationship. She explained, "He was a good salesperson. I was crazy and really competitive. I wanted to beat every person and would do anything to make that happen." As they got older and in Joe's words, "checked some things off the list," the couple began to reprioritize their goals in life. They finally decided to start trying and were successful pretty quickly. She was three months pregnant at the time of the interview.

It is important to note that I decided to include Mindy and Joe and Janet and Michael, the other pregnant couple in the research because they had not had their children yet, so for all intents and purposes, were still DINKs. Additionally, I believe as they are a step further towards having children, they have additional insights that they other couples do not.

Sarah and Larry—The Explorers

Fate pushed Sarah, 39 and Larry, 36 together when he decided to take a traveling physical therapist assignment in Baltimore where Sarah lived. After meeting through mutual friends, their relationship quickly grew. She had been working as an occupational therapist specialized in swallowing at a local hospital, and despite really enjoying her job, they decided to switch things up a bit. They decided to do some national travel assignments together as they both enjoyed seeing and experiencing new places. They shared that working closely together could at times could be stressful, but overall they really enjoyed the chance to see the country together.

On their travels they decided to get married and so moved back to Baltimore for a short period to facilitate wedding planning. Once married, Sarah refocused on her career and found a great job opportunity in Colorado and so they decided to move again. There, he also

was able to find a job, but recognized that it was not where he wanted to be for the long term. They had recently moved into a new two-story custom home in a suburb of Denver, Colorado where I met them for the interview. Feeling more settled in their home and their lives, they are starting to try to have children.

Theresa and Mark—The Builders

On the younger side of the interviewees, Theresa, 26 and Mark, 29 lived in an adorable house in a more developed in-town neighborhood of Atlanta where I met them for the interview. He grew up in an affluent arranged community not too far from Atlanta and was raised by a pretty conservative and strict Christian family. Conversely, she was brought up by "hippy" missionary parents, who shuffled her siblings and her across the world and back before finally rooting down in at Atlanta. She works as a social media director for a local university and he does finance at a local company.

During our conversation I learned that they had been married since 2008 and had dated for two and a half years before that. Opening up, Mark shared that he felt they were pretty young when they made the decision to marry and because of it he had initial hesitations. In the end, he figured that he knew he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her, so it did not really matter when they started down that path. Theresa, on the other hand, was convinced from the start that this was the man with whom she wanted to spend the rest of her life. In her mind, she felt she would never find someone as perfect for her as Mark and so wanted to firm up the commitment quickly. They both felt that children were in their future, but for now they are concentrating on building a firmer partnership with one another. They see a solid marital relationship as a necessary foundation for a strong family.

Valerie and Louey—The Preparers

Friends for a few decades, Valerie, 31 and Louey, 33 have known each other since they were children and have been in and out of each other's lives over the years on friendly terms. It was not until after college that Louey and Valerie moved out of the friendship zone and officially started dating. They were married in 2008. She currently works at a local university coordinating special events, but really yearns to find a job that fits her skills and interests. This might necessitate her going back to school. He has been working in logistics for an Atlanta-based global company since graduating. Since his start, he has built his knowledge and expertise and has become very successful at moving through the ranks.

During the interview, they shared that family is very important to them. She grew up in a very close family unit with no other siblings. She described her parents as being involved, but not doting. She felt like they effortlessly balanced their role of husband and wife with their role of parents. Louey also felt like he was raised in great family environment, but his parents' style differed: his mother took on the primary role of child-raiser and his dad, the role of breadwinner. Additionally, they did not really focus on their own romantic relationship. Thinking about their own children, Valerie and Louey had just taken a first step in expanding their family, by adopting a golden retriever named Tucker. They felt that by buying their first home, a lovely brick house in a suburb of Atlanta, children were probably not far off in the future.

Wendy and James—The Feeling Settled

In their mid-thirties, Wendy and James live in a beautiful house in Denver, Colorado, where he was born and raised. I learned during our conversation that they were lucky to have

ever met. By chance, they met up in the mountains while they were both taking lessons on how to snowboard and were forced into the same group. Years later, when he decided to propose he brought her to the top of the mountain and proposed in the middle of a snowstorm.

Growing a relationship was a challenge for them at first as their careers forced them to live in separate cities. As the relationship became more serious, James moved back to Colorado where he struggled to find work. He tried to find any job he could to help pay the bills and to gain the respect he needed from Wendy's father so he could marry her. He eventually went back to school and focused on computer science as it fit his interests, while also making him marketable.

She earned her degree in occupational therapy and has been working in that field ever since graduating. She enjoys her career, but is unsure if she will continue to pursue it if they start to have children. She shared that she had mixed feelings about it: on the one hand, she would want to be home to take care of her only children, especially when they were young; on the other hand, she couldn't imagine that being her only social and intellectual outlet day to day. Even so, now that education and career goals have been accomplished, they are beginning to talk about having children.

2.4 Conclusion

Is there any one picture that adequately captures the DINK persona? Can we say for sure the type of person who could be labeled DINK? In short: no. Clearly, after learning only a little bit of the personal information about the participants in this chapter their diversity shines through; these are unique individuals who all happen to be DINK. The individuals and

couples I researched had grown up in a variety of settings, in a number of different states, in conservative and liberal households. Some were driven to climb the career ladder, others focused on giving back to the community. For some, staying at home, snuggling, and watching television made them happy, but others yearned for jungle-trek in the Yucatan. One thing is for sure: being DINK does not automatically typecast you as the money-grubbing power couple from the movies of the 1980s. In the end, there is no typical way of performing Dual Income No Kids.

The term is problematic for other reasons. Namely, the couples I researched, although fitting the criteria, do not necessarily embrace the term with open arms. After asking each of the couples directly whether they identified with being DINK, many participants had an uneasy relationship with, or acceptance of the term. They acknowledged that they fit the category in theory, but they did not connect strongly with the label. Through my discussions with them it became clear that they were not choosing consciously to be a DINK, like a person would claim to be a feminist. In fact, many had not even heard the term before reading the research materials that I produced, and realized that in fact they met the criteria.

Instead, these couple were making choices based on the activities and goals that helped them live what they seemed to present as a more authentic or satisfying life. Some are aware of really "waiting", depending on their ages and orientations, and others feel like they are just waiting for the "right" time that has not come yet, and has not come for their peers of the same age either. Still others plan to forgo having children entirely. For most, having children was a goal, but one that they felt they could delay until achieving some of the others on their life list were accomplished. In their minds, it was not one or the other; they could achieve both.

So it is not to say that these individuals are so unique that they have no commonalties, as I observed before, but they, as a group, express less of an aversion to having kids so much as their efforts to get other things done first are the priority. As I discuss further in the next chapters, we need to look at DINK not in terms of why do not they want to have kids? But rather – why are they timing it this way? They do not share one explanation for this, but their shared focus on "finishing other things first" is striking, as I discuss in greater depth in the next two chapters. In the end, what we are really looking at, then, is not "why they wait" but why the childbearing age for many married, double-income couples has settled into this "later" pattern.

Because of this realization, I would actually argue that for most people Dual Income No Kids is not an identity at all, but a period of time that is organically created by the couple themselves, a phase that is gaining more and more acceptance by Americans and developing countries around the world. This mirrors the argument that Whithead and Popenoe put forth, "the childless years post marriage are becoming a life stage in their own right" (2008:7). I take this argument a step further and propose that this newly established life phase is not designed to delay having children for "selfish" reasons as Moynihan might put it, but is understood as providing the couple with time to prepare adequately for children. I will discuss this concept, one actually accepted and perpetuated by the couples themselves, in greater detail in Chapter Four.

To reiterate, the real question is not "Who is DINK?", but "Why is DINK?"—why specifically do so many of these people feel the need to insert DINK in between marriage and children, rather than have children right away, or earlier, like the majority of people in the United States? We could assume that broad social changes as seen in the social statistics I

presented in Chapter One, like more women in the workplace or financial pressures from the recession, are influencing this phase. In part, structural forces do play a role. We must also understand how people's personal prerogatives create DINK. Socioeconomics might predict to some extent and professional engagements are part of the picture, but we cannot really understand DINK just in terms of demographics. We need to look at their personal stories and how they describe their decisions. After all, "making a decision about parenthood is not just making a decision about the objective aspects of timing and arrangements: it also involves facing a series of intensely personal issues having to do with our own past and future" (Cohen: 1985:7). The values and choices they make as they negotiate a life course that seems "right" to them provide the real picture of what it means to being DINK.

In the next two chapters I will introduce the main themes that research participants mentioned as influencing their family planning. These concern their values, priorities, and the way they frame childbearing based on the role models in their lives, as well as their more personal motivations for being Dual Income No Kids. In doing so I hope to flesh out what it means to be DINK in America.

Chapter 3: Reflecting on Role Models

"I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."
Robert Frost

3.1 Introduction

At the core of being Dual Income No Kids is personal choice. Certainly every person's life is filled with myriad choices that can lead him or her down one path or another, with each new decision creating new scenarios to be considered and acted upon. Giddens (1991:5) believes that this complexity of choice, which is part of life in "modern" society, forces people to engage the "reflexive project of self" or the search for one's true identity. So how are choices weighed out in the mind of these DINKs? How do couples move forward on one path versus another? Giddens (1991) argues that as people live their lives they must assess the variety of lifestyle choices available, consider the risks of each option, and then choose. While cultural, economic, social, and political restrictions tie the hands of the poor and bar real choice (Foster 2010:150), for two educated, salaried, and childless adults, opportunities can seem to stretch forward endlessly.

On the one hand, choice is liberating; these couples have the resources, in time and money, to truly follow their dreams. On the other hand, having competing options can create emotional stress as individuals try to define just who they are. In the past people made decisions that were linked closely to socio-cultural expectations of moving through specific rites of passage; however, in contemporary American society, individuals are forced to

choose from many different *right* options (Giddens 1991). This is especially challenging, as many modern options have no historical equivalent to use as a guide.

As I argued in the previous chapter, DINKs are motivated to make choices they feel are right for them and their spouse, even if it means resisting the status quo. They follow their own chosen path, venturing down the road less traveled if it progresses them to their goals. But, like all human beings they are socialized from birth and so do not make these choices in a vacuum. As Faier (2009:40) argues and I mentioned in Chapter One, "human action does not simply reflect the autonomous will of an individual subject, but is always situated within social, cultural, and political-economic structures of power." Sometimes the pressure is overt, seemingly forcing a course of action. Other times the influence is so subtle the person does not even realize it is there. In the end, it is not as though these couples make unique, individual choices and then other people interfere; rather, their goals are actually formulated in conversation with the influences from others. The question is how aware are people of being shaped by what they see others do? Do they consciously follow others' examples or avoid what they see as the "wrong" choices others have made?

As I mentioned in Chapter One, I designed my research materials, both survey and interviews, to gauge both structural and self-pressures (Giddens 1990, 1991, 1992) so I could more completely understand the reasons that were most influential to shaping the participants' decisions to having children. As such, I phrase some of the Likert scale questions in terms of "others'" ideas on the "right way to do things" (or the influences the survey respondents experience as "outside" pressures). An example of this from the survey is, "I feel having children is expected within our society." Other questions I configured in terms of one's "own" motivations, to understand how explicit attempts at self-satisfaction

played a part in this decision (although I acknowledge that these are still shaped by social influences). An example of this is, "I feel earning my degree was very important." Formatting the survey this way helped me to get a first glimpse of how research participants were thinking about the issues of parenthood and childbearing that I could then research further during the interviews. With only 120 participants, these findings do not comprise all of the reasons an individual or couple might wait to have children, but do provide some real evidence for the broader social shifts in the United States.

To be sure, the data told a complex story as to why individuals and couples delay having children. Some point to emotional scars left from their childhood; others describe a quest for self-improvement, and still others talked about prioritizing their marital relationship before children. In this chapter I present how family, friends, and society at large have influenced the DINKs' life narratives, in their own estimation. In the next chapter, I look more closely at the personal motivations for child delay and interrogate whether the DINK stereotype of "selfishness" is an adequate way to understand couples' decisions not (yet) to have kids.

3.2 Parents Creating Parents

With an understanding of basic psychology, I expected that the relationship between the DINKs and their parents would be a key influencer of whether and when a couple would have children. My understanding of how this influence can work has been shaped by my experience with my own family. At present, it is not uncommon for our parents to put blatant pressure on us by continuously asking when we are going having children or talking about how their friend's children are providing them with grandchildren. My mother actually went

so far to hide tiny baby figurines around our house, like they might work as some kind of Midwestern voodoo. What our parents may not realize is that their influence on our decision to have children actually extends much further back to our childhoods. Our parents themselves are the models for how we think of family. Since my husband and I both come from relatively happy upbringings, we both intrinsically see the value and importance of family. Ironically, this inadvertent influence actually affects our feelings about family more than any aggressive pressure does.

With this insight in mind, I asked the survey respondents to rate and describe their relationships with their parents on a number of levels, gathering both facts, such as the composition of their natal families, and their feelings about how they grew up. Based on the survey data, I discovered that the majority of respondents grew up in a nuclear family, with both their mother and father. Education was important to these first-generation parents; participants claimed they were actively encouraged to do well in school and go to study at the university level.

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
My parents have always supported my decision-making.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	35.4%
Agree	51.3%
Neutral	7.1%
Disagree	6.2%
Strongly Disagree	0.0%

Figure 3

Despite this academic pressure, the survey respondents confirmed that their parents still supported autonomous decision-making as seen in *Figure 3*. Allowing their DINK

children the space to make their own decisions seems to be important to this day, with less than 20 percent of the respondents declaring that their parents put pressure on them to have children (see *Figure 4).*

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
My parents put a lot of pressure on me to have children.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	6.2%
Agree	13.3%
Neutral	18.6%
Disagree	43.4%
Strongly Disagree	18.6%

Figure 4

Diving deeper into the data, I uncovered another layer of understanding. When the respondents were prompted to express their feelings about their parents in the comment section, many acknowledged that they do sometimes feel mild pressure from family, but they choose to ignore it. One respondent commented, "The only person who I need to talk to about having kids is my husband. No matter how many family members ask and want a baby in our family, it is not their decision." Another respondent said, "At this point I'm 36, no one is going to pressure me, maybe my wife, but we make decisions together. My parents have input but ultimately, I do as I please, not in a selfish way, but as an individual that has thought out pros and cons and makes decisions based on my own needs."

Comments like these reflected how most survey respondents felt. No matter the amount of prompting and encouraging from their parents and other loved ones to have children, the choice was not theirs. The ultimate decision on whether and when to have children lay with the couple. The only person who seemed to have any influence on the

decision was the other's spouse, speaking to the importance of the relationship between husband and wife, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four.

I found it interesting that in the survey, most likely because of the way it is constructed, the participants only mentioned the more aggressive type of pressure that their parents had on them. During the interviews, however, the participants had the opportunity to open up about their lives on a deeper level. Conversation after conversation, the interviewees discussed their parents' role in influencing their decision to have children. It quickly became apparent their parents did play an integral, albeit inconspicuous role, in how participants saw their own life narrative.

Like the survey respondents, the interviewees said they ignored any direct cajoling from their parents to have children. Unlike the survey respondents, many interviewees also describe being subtly influenced by the type of parenting that was modeled for them as children. Every individual presented himself or herself as acting in reaction to the example that was set by their parents. While I did ask about their childhoods, I did not ask specifically about how their parents modeled behavior—the interviewees themselves provided the narratives. For some DINKs, their own child-parent relationship was a positive experience, for others, it was the representation for who not to be. The following interviewee stories illustrate the intricacies of the child-parent relationship and how it informed their decisions about child bearing.

Janet and Michael

After work one day, I met Janet and Michael at a relaxed neighborhood joint that was near both of our in-town Atlanta homes. The oldest (at 38 and 42) of the interviewees, they had waited, statistically speaking, a long time to have children. Michael was the first to contribute his story, starting with his childhood history. In a somber tone, he described a pretty challenging childhood.

> **Michael:** Realistically I think I can say I came from a broken family. My growing up was more difficult because my father had a history of mental illness and so was unavailable. He spent time in mental hospitals. When I was young my parents split up, when I was nine or ten. They were separated for a couple of years and got back together when I was, I don't know, 13, 14, 15. Um, at that point, both of my sisters had gone off to college and my dad actually got cancer and pretty quickly thereafter died. It was more than difficult…With my dad and his situation, it was very hard for my mother dealing with three kids on her own. She got us through that period and got us through school and it was like, that's it, I am done. In some ways I can't comprehend what my mom put up with, imagine taking your kids to the hospital to visit their father after electroshock therapy... (looking away) all I can say is I am thankful she helped me get through that time and I can't really ask for anything more.

Watching him as he relayed his story, I could still see the pain etched in his face. Clearly, he did not grow up in a charmed childhood; it was a struggle for each of his family members. As for parent role models, his mentally ill father was not equipped to demonstrate what a "good" father should be. And unfortunately, his mother, overburdened with her responsibilities of taking care of her children and disadvantaged husband, was emotionally unavailable. She performed her duties practically speaking, but was unable to be there for her children on a deeper level – at least, as Michael now remembers her.

Later in the conversation, when I asked them about why they had waited, they were at first hesitant to name any specific reasons for not trying having children right away. Almost

as an afterthought, like he was just putting it together himself in his own mind, Michael brought up his relationship with his parents. He shared, "I think for a long time we were stridently against having kids. I mean for me, my family background is so lousy that the thought of…I mean I don't really know how to be a father, and that was something that gave me great stress. So, it was something I wasn't comfortable doing."

It is obvious that the emotional stress from Michael's childhood followed him to adulthood and shaped what he thought about being a parent. For Michael, his relationship with his parents caused him to doubt his own capacity for being a parent, thus made him question whether he should have kids or not. Another participant was also affected by an absentee father, but in a different way.

Bonnie and Mason

I met Bonnie and Mason at their "work-in process" home in a suburb of Denver. After quick introductions, we moved downstairs, followed by their elderly Jack Russell Terrier, to the only currently finished room in their house. While Bonnie contentedly ate the pasta Bolognese that Mason prepared, he told me about his childhood surrounded by Latina women. Mason grew up in South Florida and was raised by a very busy, but affectionate single mother.

> **Mason**: "My parents were divorced when I was young…when I was five. It was funny because five women raised me: my mom, my grandma, my aunt, my great grandma at the time, and my cousin. So, it's kind of funny because I really get along with women, even now. I get along with all of Bonnie's girlfriends and can talk with them about girl things like Twilight or whatever.

Being raised by a clan of women was overall a positive experience for Mason. He describes feeling loved and supported and reflects back on his childhood as being fun. Growing up

surrounded by the women also had its perks. He gained some useful life skills like conversing with the opposite sex and cooking a delicious dinners—skills that Bonnie chimed in to say she really appreciated.

Mason did feel like there was something missing, however. During our conversation, he alluded to the fact that there was a definite void in his childhood where a father should have been. When I asked him specifically if he felt like he missed out on having a father figure in his life, he replied, "Uh, yeah. I would say so. It was more like an uncle dad situation. He wasn't really in the picture. He was like a buddy, not a parent." Growing up without a father was tough for Mason and although his mother loved and nurtured him, there were certain father-son activities he felt he had missed out on.

Later, when we got onto the topic of having children, Mason brought up his father again. This relationship, or lack thereof, was something that had really left an impression on him and had affected the way he thought about his own family.

> **Mason:** If we are going to do have children I want to do it sooner than later because I want to enjoy the kid when I am not super old. Like I said my dad wasn't around when I was young so I really want to be. I got gypped…I owe more to my children if I have them.
> **Allyson:** So it's not a fear keeping you from having children, but more like a motivation?
> **Mason:** Yeah, like if we're going to do it, than let's do it now. Whatever the kid is, if it is a boy then we are going to go fish, and learn how to be handy. If it's a girl than we can play teacups or whatever. I missed out on some things and if I have a kid, they will not miss out. They will get to do it all and I will be there to do it with them.

In sharing this, Mason was not upset or angry with his father, at least outwardly. It appeared that he accepted his upbringing for what it was, but wanted something different for his own children if he had any. So unlike Michael, fear of failure in fatherhood was not what was keeping Mason from moving forward. Instead, his father's lack of involvement was more of

a motivating force. If he were to have children, he was determined to provide them with a better childhood experience. He felt that by being an active participant in their lives, he could make up for what was lacking in his own childhood.

It was not only the "less than perfect" parents who made an impression on the research participants. In my interviews I also learned that like my and my husband's childhoods, parents could also be seen as a positive force in the interviewees' lives. Some individuals felt like they grew up in great family environments after which they would want to model their own families one day. This attachment to parenting style or family dynamic actually led to conflict for one couple.

Valerie and Louey

Chatting over red wine and a delicious vegetable take-home pizza, I learned that Valerie and Louey came from self-described, wonderful families. They both viewed their childhood fondly, mostly because of their supportive and loving parents. Valerie commented, "They were loving families, but were different in how they showed their love." Indeed, both felt loving parents raised them, but they also acknowledged the way they were raised was very different.

> **Valerie:** I am an only child. My parents were both home by like 5pm and so came to all my different things growing up. That has definitely played into the dynamics of the family we have now.
>
> **Louey:** My dad worked for this large company and so he did a lot of airline trips and was all over the place. My life growing up was more my mom… once she had kids, she stayed at home. My dad's job afforded us the opportunity to travel and see a lot of place internationally. But, you know…he was…on the weekends he was always playing golf or tennis, he was out…

Togetherness was a core value of Valerie's family. Her parents were extremely involved and interested in her life and her pursuits. She shared that it was a lighthearted and pleasurable environment, with lots of inside jokes and fun activities that were done all together. Louey's parents approached parenting in a compartmentalized fashion: his father was the breadwinner, and his mother the everyday manager of the children and household activities. They also had fun together, but were more regimented in their family structure. This difference affected Valerie and Louey's relationship at the start.

> **Valerie:** That's something we noticed when we first got married when we went to the grocery store. His family would be like, "let's see the list, you get this, I'll get this"—you know, divide and conqueror. That was really different for me when we were first together. My expectations were really high for what our family would be like after we got married.
>
> **Louey:** When we were first married I had a really demanding job and worked lots of long hours with lots of stress. She was like, "why aren't you home, its seven o'clock?!" It was the hardest job I have had in the last ten years. And I come from a background where my dad worked all the time, and she came from a family where her family was at everything she did. For me it wasn't anything different, for her it was totally different.

Both Valerie and Louey had been socialized to think of parenting and family in a specific way because of their own background. She believed that family was important and thus, should be prioritized over working long hours. He also believed that family was important, but did not see this at odds with his focus on his career. This mismatch of expectations created real challenges for Valerie and Louey. Over time as they began to understand the other's expectations, they were able to discuss their needs and create a new, co-created set of expectations for when they become parents themselves.

Not all parental influencers have to do with the actual parenting style per se. One interviewee, Theresa, was especially affected by her mother-as-individual. While their

adorable teddy-bear of a dog snuggled on my lap, Theresa discussed how playing the traditional role of mother affected her mother's happiness.

> **Theresa:** Technically speaking, we were missionaries, but I don't like that word because of all the connotations it carries with it. We lived a lot of places. My family was really like my home because we moved so much. We are really close. When I was young we moved to Spain where my dad was getting his doctorate. He would go back to Chicago for weeks at a time and would leave my mom with three kids, one of them being a newborn. My mom felt abandoned and upset that he got to do what he wanted to do and she was not able to get her PhD.

While overall Theresa felt like her family was a close knit growing up, she recognized, even at an early age, that being the primary caretaker for three young children was very stressful on her mother. Theresa recalled dark periods when her mother would exist in a state of depression because she was unable to pursue her other goals in life. This sacrifice of identity is something that has stuck with both of them to this day.

> **Theresa:** My mom is so scared for us. I think she doesn't want me to go through what she did. I think she gives me advice based on what she sees and has experienced. I think having kids and forgoing her education and career was very stressful to her and her marriage.

As Theresa wrestles with her competing interests of family and career, she cannot help but be influenced by her mother. After all, as Theresa commented, "I really see myself in her" and because of that does not want to repeat history. Theresa views her mother's experience as a cautionary tale. She sees that children can bring a lot of joy and happiness like she experienced in later childhood, but they can also be a source of anxiety when they conflict with other goals. Having gotten married young, she and her husband have decided to wait to have children so they can focus on their education and careers. She believes by dedicating time to achieving these other goals first, she can avoid the strain that her mother experienced. Then when they decide to have children, they will be emotionally prepared.

In my interview with Wendy and James, I learned that he too was influenced by the decisions his parents made while he was growing up. While Wendy ate her dinner on the couch next to him, James shared how his parents' careers disrupted his childhood.

> **James:** My mom decided to go to law school with four kids. It was pretty crazy. She got a job after graduating and couldn't stand it. She had been fired earlier from United Airlines because at the time flight attendants had to be single and she had gotten married to my dad. Due to a lawsuit, my mom was reoffered her flight attendant job and she took it without hesitation. She didn't have a lot of seniority and so she was gone all the time traveling on domestic routes. I could imagine it would be tough to have your spouse be gone all the time, especially with four kids. My mom loves what she does and still does it to this day. In some ways when you have a job like that you aren't a family oriented person. Her job was more important than her family.

His mother's choice to engage in a career where she was gone all the time caused a lot of stress for his father and the rest of the family. Reflecting back on the decisions his mom made, James felt that her choice of career over family was a selfish one. His father, on the other hand, took a job that made him miserable in order to provide for his family, even at the cost of being separated.

> **James:** When I was a freshman in high school my dad was going to be out of job. So he took a job in Oklahoma to provide for the family. I don't think he ever really liked his jobs and I think he wasn't a happy person because of it. I ended up basically living by myself at our house during the end of high school. I know this environment has affected the rest of my life.

With his parents, James observed two different parent models and both have influenced him. His mother chose career over family and was happy with the decision, even though the kids suffered for it. His father went out of the way, literally, to support his family, but was miserable because of it and again, the children suffered for it. For James, neither parent model is satisfactory. For his future family, he hopes to find a balance with career and children, something I will discuss further in Chapter Four.

Parents were not the only people in the DINKs' lives that influenced the timing for having children. According to my research findings, the other main group that seemed to play a part in their decision to have children was their peers.

3.3 Peer Influence

On the survey, and to a lesser extent in the interviews, I decided to ask a series of questions about how peers influenced the participants' childbearing timing because I had learned that peers often influence their childless friends during my pilot study on the subject. One of the questions I stated, "I feel left out not having children yet" (see *Figure 5*). I had asked this question to gauge if participants might feel like they were falling behind their peers in this presumable next life step. At first glance, the respondents' peer group seemed to have little influence on their choice to have children. Looking at the survey data, the majority of people did not "feel left" out because their friends had children. This could be because more than half of the individuals surveyed said they spent the majority of their free time socializing with other childless couples.

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
I feel left out not having children yet.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	2.7%
Agree	13.5%
Neutral	18.0%
Disagree	36.0%
Strongly Disagree	29.7%

Figure 5

Additionally, when I asked how the respondents perceived the relationships of their friends who were married and had children (see *Figure 6*), raw data showed that only 25 percent of respondents agreed that children have negatively influenced their friends' partnerships. I asked this question to understand if in confirming, this might be a reason the couples I surveyed were not having children of their own—as they were trying to protect their relationship from the same fate.

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
Having children seems to have negatively influenced some of my friends' marriages.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	3.6%
Agree	21.4%
Neutral	27.7%
Disagree	42.9%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%

Figure 6

Taking both of these statistics at face value one might assume that the respondents' peers had minimal influence, and what there was seemed to be viewed in a more positive light. A new story emerged from the comment section of the survey on the topic of peers, however.

> "My friends who have children just generally "seem" unhappy but it is probably due to fatigue. My brother also flat out told me that having a child is very hard on a marriage." *Anonymous Survey Respondent*

> "A close friend of mine has several children and it seems like she is often angry or upset with her husband about things involving the children." *Anonymous Survey Respondent*

> "Many of my friends have struggled with the shift in priorities once children come into the picture. This has led to infidelities, resentments, and other negative behaviors." *Anonymous Survey Respondent*

Converse to the majority in the raw data, when asked to reflect on their peers in their own words a number of respondents did believe that having children was negatively impacting their friends' marriages. There were almost 50 comments in the commentary citing various issues including a lack of sleep, an imbalance in parenting expectations, and a shift in emotional focus from partner to child that had challenged the happiness of their peers' relationships. Many DINKs see this new tension between husband and wife as a warning flag for having children.

After seeing her friends' struggle after having children, one respondent reflected on how she and her husband have chosen a different path.

> "I see my friends having children as soon as they are married instead of waiting a few years. I feel those years of waiting are an opportunity to spend more time with my husband, and to get our life stable before introducing children into the mix. I have seen couples who use children as a tool to fix their problems (which usually doesn't work) and/or forget to set aside "mommy and daddy time," which is extremely important." *Survey Respondent*

This respondent saw the challenges of having children in her friends' lives and made a conscious decision to work in some space in between marriage and children in attempt to avoid the pitfalls of her peers. It is not that she is against having children altogether, but she would rather spend some quality time with her husband first. Her story is representative of many DINKs, including some of the ones I interviewed.

Friends with Children

I sat down with Mindy and Joe one evening at their kitchen table at the home they rented in South Florida. When we started discussing their peer group per my interview

schedule, Mindy became exceptionally excited in describing her best friend's transformation after children.

> **Mindy:** My best friend had a kid right after she got married, four years ago. As soon as she had that kid it was like, game fucking over. They moved west, and nobody ever saw them again. For a good two years we didn't see them. It was like, I don't want to be like that. I think if we had had kids right away we would have done that too.

Mindy's best friend converted from someone she understood as being young and hip to a boring mommy who lived in the 'burbs. Post child, her friend became totally unavailable, both physically and emotionally, which was a personal affront to her. Mindy felt that her friend had succumbed to the pressure of those around her to settle down to what was the "appropriate" life style for a mother.

> **Mindy:** I think now that we are older, we don't really care what other people want us to do. You can get pushed into what other people want you to do or how other people do things. So waiting even a couple years makes a difference. But now that we are older, I feel like fuck you, I will do what I want.

Mindy believed that by waiting to have children for a period of time after getting married, she and her husband set themselves up for success. This DINK phase helped them to identify the things that were really important to them so that way when they did have children it would be on their own terms. Valerie and Louey also were hesitant to have children after watching their friends' experiences.

> **Valerie:** Right now a lot of my friends have a lot of young kids and you see their life being different than our life. Three years ago we would go out and be out until two am and now we don't have a large group of friends that can do that because they do have children.

When I met them, Valerie and Louey's social life was in the middle of turmoil because so many of their friends had begun having children. Where they had once gone out to late dinners and drinks with their friends for entertainment, Louey commented that more

and more, they spent time with their parents for dinner because they could continue to socialize in a way they enjoyed. When they did spend time with their friends, Valerie and Louey often saw the challenges that these new parents faced in changing the dynamic of their family.

> **Valerie:** You see how people don't spend time together, they are not intimate with one another. They are tired with so many other things going on. I don't want to have our relationship suffer because we brought someone else into, but it seems like that is what happens to so many people.

The experiences of her friends' transition to parenthood have Valerie concerned. She cherishes her relationship with her husband and is hesitant to do anything, including having children, that may affect it negatively. As she watches her friends struggle to balance marriage with parenthood, she wonders if it has to be that way. Still, she wants something different for her life.

> **Valerie:** We feel like our little family, the three of us (including the dog), are what we want it to be and what we hope for. Certainly children would complete it, but I have never been a woman, like my other girlfriends, who wanted to get married and have kids right away. Louey and I wanted to have time…

Building a time buffer before having children was a choice that Louey and Valerie made to allow themselves time to mature and develop as a couple, as well as to enjoy each other without additional stress. When I asked Betty and Steve about their peers having children, they had no trouble bringing up an example of what they saw as "what not to do"; Steve's sister was the perfect example in their minds.

> **Allyson:** Have you noticed a difference in your friends with kids?
> **Betty:** Oh definitely. His sister has changed so much with a kid. They don't go anywhere.
> **Steve:** They are like hermits!
> **Allyson:** What do you think about that?

> **Betty:** It drives me crazy. They claim everything is so hard. Like even going to Target. I mean please.

After having children, Steve and Betty claim that Steve's sister changed into a new person. In one way it was to protect the child from the outside world. In another way it was to protect her own sanity from having to manage a small child out in public. This reclusive mentality did not work for Betty or Steve.

> **Steve:** If we ever have kids, we will not be that kind of people. We will pack that kid up and bring them with us. I mean my sister won't leave the house or anything.
> **Betty:** Our kids will go wherever we go.
> **Steve:** I mean we like to travel. So obviously you will have limitations, but I am not going to do nothing for the next five years.

Betty and Steve were appalled at how drastically children changed his sister's life. They saw her actions as unnecessary and extreme and were very much opposed to raising their future children the same way. They also noted how his sister's isolated lifestyle had directly affected her marriage.

> **Allyson:** Have you noticed any of your friends' relationships changing?
> **Steve:** Uh, yeah. Because my sister is kind of crazy, if my brother-in-law killed her I would probably testify for him. (laughing) He gets frustrated with her because he likes to go out and do stuff, but she doesn't since having the kid. My niece is going to be two and they are just going on their first trip. It's like they are a prisoner in their own house. My sister won't let them do anything and it is affecting their marriage.

Observing the negative effects that children had on Steve's sister did not deter them from wanting to have children entirely, but made them consider the consequences. Both Steve and Betty are determined not to let raising children entirely change lifestyle they currently enjoy. They aimed to strike a balance between their own desires and the needs of their future children so everyone in the family is happy.

Some of the couples I interviewed did not currently spend time with people who had children. Living without relatives in Colorado, Bonnie and Mason spend the majority of their free time with their large group of friends. For Bonnie and Mason spending time with childless couples was not because they were avoiding interacting with people with children, but that their friends, like them, in the words of Mason, "had not reached that stage yet".

> **Allyson:** Do you spend a lot of time with friends?
> **Bonnie:** Yes. A lot of time! We are so lucky. We have a great group of friends, our family really, and we see them all the time.
> **Mason:** They are a great core group of about ten. All couples, except for two singles. Every week we show up with all these people out on the town.
> **Allyson:** Do any of them have kids?
> **Mason:** None. The dynamics are great because we are all at the same stage.

Bonnie recognized that things were probably going to change really soon for their friends. She commented, "All of the girls have baby fever and have already started trying". Wondering if that included them, I asked if they, like their friends, had started trying. Bonnie quickly chimed in that, "No. I don't have the baby fever." Mason added that because they have been married for a while, that if they were in a rush, they would have already started trying. At this point he felt like, "whatever happens, happens", but they weren't overly worried about it.

When I asked what they thought about their friends' having children, Mason acknowledged that it would be a different dynamic, but "…we will still make time for each other. We'll raise each other's kids. They will always be in our lives, it is just a new phase." While they felt no urge to have children right away, they were happy to support their friends' decisions to start a family. In many ways, Mason and Bonnie's friends had become their

surrogate family, helping out in areas that a blood family member would normally be called upon.

Theresa also chose to spend the majority of her time with childless couples, and primarily with young singles. In our conversation, she shared that in some ways she felt that she tried to hang out with other young singles in order to hold on to her own youth.

> **Theresa:** My cousin goes to a local university and I go out with his friends after work when they are done with school. It feeds into me wanting to feel young and have fun. But, it's starting to become apparent that I am not college age. I feel that way when I go out with these university kids. I am not their age anymore.
> **Allyson:** How would you describe the space/age that you are in now?
> **Theresa:** I would probably describe it as young professional. As cliché and used as it is. I don't feel like we are normal for our age- we got married young. We don't know anyone else who is married.

Theresa, it appears, feels a bit caught in the middle. On the one hand, being only 26 years old she feels young and carefree, similar to the college students with whom she has been spending time. On the other hand, she is a married woman, and feels to some extent that this state demands some kind of shift in personal priorities. The challenge is that she has no other friends who are in a similar situation to model her behavior after. For now, this personal limbo means that children are not a priority in her life.

My conversation with Janet and Michael about how a close friend of theirs influenced their decision to have children is illuminating, if rather unique among my interviews. As I mentioned previously, Janet and Michael really had no interest in having children, in large part due to Michael's own childhood and his parent role models. As they were three months pregnant when I talked to them, I was very curious to uncover what it was that changed their minds about starting a family. At this point Janet opened up and somberly shared a very personal story about one of her close friends.

> **Janet:** The deciding factor was over the summer my friend Cameron who I went to college with passed. It was very unexpected, he was not sick, and it devastated me and our friends. When that happened we were like, we are not getting any younger, stuff can happen, and so let's just do this. Don't misunderstand me, I didn't get out the ovary chart or anything, but there was a definite shift.
> **Michael:** I think that happening made us much more comfortable with the idea of having children. For both of us, it was the first person on our age to die.
> **Allyson:** Is it that you recognized your own mortality?
> **Janet:** No. It was just that we are not going to take time and this opportunity for granted.

In discussing the devastating loss of her close friend, it was apparent how greatly it affected both Janet and Michael. This transformative moment caused them to reflect and revaluate their lives and what they really wanted. They realized that there were no guarantees in life; if they wanted to have children, there was no sense in waiting.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described how DINKs discover and denounce parenting role models, such as parents and peers, in their own lives. Through the survey and interview data, it became clear that the role of parents is truly a complex interaction of both overt and subtle pressures. Adult children look to the past as a guide to shape their own parenthood path. For some this is a positive exercise; for others it turns them off from the idea of being parents. Parents often put overt pressure on their adult children to start procreating. For the most part, the individuals and couples who contributed to my study said they were unswayed by these pleas, choosing to wait for their own personal reasons.

Peers too, play their part in influencing a couple's decision to have children or not. While my hypothesis was that they would exert pressure to have babies by positive example, inspiring competition, they ended up being relevant more in terms of negative role models. In my research, their influence seemed to be most often viewed as the anti-role model for the childless couples. This is due in large part to childless couples observing the challenges their friends had after bringing children into the relationship. Sometimes these challenges were perceived as an individual's loss of identity and sometimes it had more to do the breaking of the romantic connection between husband and wife. All seemed to portray that having children was dangerous to the marriage. Regardless, the takeaway for many couples was what not to do if they decided to have children. In sum, the peer models seemed to provide a compelling reason for the couples to wait – to have fun or nurture the relationship – first before having children.

The data and the stories in this chapter demonstrate how the couples are approaching the choice of children very carefully, using their own past experiences and friends' current experiences to collect information about what having kids will mean to their life and how they need to approach it. While they are trying to do things their own way, they do not do it in a void. They take cues from the people around them and the way that they do this is what makes them wait. In the next chapter we will look more closely at how an individual's (or couple's) interests in education, career, and the marriage shape the timing of children for the couple.

CHAPTER 4: FULFILLING SELF

> "I am very independent and do not feel the need to follow anyone else's standard. I want to be a wife and mother and have a career, I do not worry about what anyone else wants me to be."
> *DINK Survey Respondent*

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, I explored the external pressures the research participants felt were most influential to their childbearing planning, their parents and peers. In this chapter I explore how the individuals and couples I interviewed saw themselves as being internally motivated to delay childbearing after marriage. After all, like Mindy adamantly expressed during her interview, most participants see themselves ultimately as doing what they want.

First looking at the survey data, 94 percent of survey respondents agreed to "feeling free to decide my own life path, despite what my family, friends, or society expects." One respondent explained, "I am not living my life to please others or gain their acceptance. If someone does not agree with my life choices, quite frankly I do not care." Similarly, over 95 percent of respondents agreed that they feel "free to choose who I want to be", and almost all respondents said they feel empowered to make choices in their life as seen in *Figure 7*. Not only do the participants feel like they have the option of living a self-directed life, but the majority also feel like they are actively striving to achieve that image as seen in *Figure 8*. One DINK commented, "I decide my own path and I pursue it on a daily basis. I go after what I want." While we do not know the details about these individuals' lives, the fact that they agreed strongly to these questions reflects the kind of sensibility Giddens (1990, 1991) discussed – the idea that people have choice and are doing a "good" job if they are making their "own" choices.

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
I feel empowered to make choices in my life.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	50.0%
Agree	47.2%
Neutral	1.9%
Disagree	0.9%
Strongly Disagree	0.0%

Figure 7

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
I know the direction I want my life to take and work towards it every day.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	32.4%
Agree	54.6%
Neutral	10.2%
Disagree	2.8%
Strongly Disagree	0.0%

Figure 8

So what exactly is it that the participants want—what direction do they want their lives to take? Right now, the majority of survey respondents want not to have children. The question is why? The chief reason that emerged for their reluctance to produce offspring at this stage in life is because they lack a feeling of personal readiness à la Giddens (1991), they have not completed their reflexive projects of self. One survey respondent commented, "I still have things to check off my bucket list and I'll be too old when my kids leave the house, so I'd like to check them off now while I'm still young". She was not the only one to feel this way; over 98 percent of survey respondents claimed that they are "not prepared to have children yet". The key word in the previous sentence is the word "yet". For although they do not want to have children at this time as I mentioned before, most see it as a long-term objective. In the meantime, they are focused on activities of self-improvement. Looking

across the group two major themes emerged from the data illuminating why these couples are just not ready to have children. I will present these below, but first, I would like to debunk one commonly held assumption: that money drives decision-making when growing the family.

4.2 Can't Buy Me Love

When looking at the changing demographic trends in marriage and parenthood as noted in Chapter One, I noticed that they coincided with the downturn of the United States economy. As such, in the survey I made sure to ask a series of questions focusing on this potential influence and what I found was surprising. The respondents, over 85 percent, did in fact believe that having children would "affect the type of lifestyle my partner and I enjoy" which I would have assumed to be the case, knowing that the social evidence support this. But when I asked more specifically about money, the story was not so straightforward.

Looking at the raw data, the downturn in the economy seemed to have little effect on the timing of having children for the majority of the respondents (see *Figures 9* and *10*). Similarly, when asked to confirm if "Money is the main reason my partner and I have not had children yet," only 26 percent agreed that it was, making it one of the least ranked items on the entire survey. When asked to list the reasons for not having children yet in the comment section of the survey, financial preparedness was the most common issue that participants listed, but it was almost always addressed with secondary importance to their decision-making. One respondent commented, "While money isn't a significant factor, if we were ready to have kids, we would prefer to be a little more financially prepared." Another respondent shared, "You are never financially prepared to have a child really. No time is

perfect. Eventually I will have to go for it!" Unquestionably, money was an important consideration in childbearing timing, but ultimately a lack of funds was not a deal breaker.

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
I am worried to have a child right now because of the current economic situation.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	6.3%
Agree	9.0%
Neutral	12.6%
Disagree	45.9%
Strongly Disagree	26.1%

Figure 9

Dual Income No Kids Survey 2011	
The recession has affected my partner and my decision to have children right now.	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Strongly Agree	3.6%
Agree	6.3%
Neutral	8.1%
Disagree	48.6%
Strongly Disagree	33.3%

Figure 10

This laissez-faire attitude towards money was common among the couples I interviewed as well. Cathy from Atlanta shared, "We know from talking to people you are never ready financially, so it isn't a big deal." It was not that the research participants did not see the importance of being financially ready for children, and it was that they did not view it as the key determinant for when to have children. Instead there were more personal drivers that created the Dual Income No Kids phase.

4.3 Crafting a Career

When I asked the survey respondents why they were not having children yet in the comment section, they commonly listed their careers as one of the key factors for waiting to have kids. As a first step to crafting their careers, they saw earning a quality education as paramount. Almost 100 percent of survey respondents felt that "earning my bachelor's degree was very important." For many others, as mentioned in Chapter Two, continuing their education beyond a B.A. was seen as integral to developing oneself for a future career. "I feel that I have invested a lot in my education (both formal and informal) in order to help me with career advancement," said one survey respondent.

This topic resonated with Theresa and Mark, one of the younger couples I interviewed. Focusing on their educations and careers before having children was important to them. As discussed in Chapter Three, Theresa is especially motivated to follow through with her educational goals due to the experience her mother went through at her age. When we talked about careers specifically, Mark also shared why he believes earning your education and establishing a career were important before growing the family.

> **Allyson:** Do you all want children?
> **Theresa:** I would like to.
> **Mark:** I would like to too. But, not at this stage.
> **Allyson:** When do you think it would be a good time?
> **Mark:** I think that we should have children when we are squarely set on our career track. We are in a transition period. I don't think we are ready. She wants her PhD to become a professor and we don't know where we are going to be working…
> **Theresa:** I completely agree and couldn't say it any better.
> **Allyson:** So it is important to meet your personal goals first?
> **Mark:** Yeah, there are a few stepping stones that we want to accomplish in our careers first. I feel like with kids it would be helpful to know the direction of your life before you have them so you can be prepared.

The words that Mark chooses – “stage”, “transition”, “ready”, “prepared” – declare a lot about how they view this stage of life. Focusing on their careers now is seen as fleeting, a transition in time—one with important payoff for both the individual and the family unit. Earning their education leads to a satisfying career; an established career leads to emotional and financial security; and with the security, comes the confidence to step into the unknown of childrearing somewhat more prepared.

In my discussions with the interviewees I learned that often, any random job that provides a paycheck would not satisfy them. Instead, most of the couples I interviewed want to develop meaningful careers that use their skill set and fill them with pride, purpose and passion. For some, their career path was a relatively smooth process, as they knew what they wanted to do from the start of their educations. For others, the professional roads explored were a little less direct. James’ story shows just how establishing the right career can be a multi-step process.

> **James:** I didn’t have any discipline and dropped out of school and moved to LA to be an actor. I started working in restaurants. I went back to school and got all my preliminary classes out of the way in Santa Monica. I had back surgery and I thought about what options I had that wouldn’t hurt my back, sitting at a desk all day. So I moved back to Colorado to pursue flight training. I was doing well until I ran out of money and couldn’t continue my flight training. So I left school again and went back to managing restaurants. That took me to Milwaukee where after a time I ended up being laid off. I came back to Colorado and decided to go back to school. So Wendy and I talked about my future and we decided computer science was a good fit for me. I worked part-time and took a ton of credit hours to get it all done quickly. Luckily, I got an internship at Lockheed doing IT type stuff. In April, they brought me back on even though I was finishing my senior year. As soon as I graduated I had a job with them. I have been there since April. I like it a lot. I mean I am building a space ship to go to Mars.

Finding the right job took a long time for James, with many false starts and detours. He was not discouraged though. His tenacity for career satisfaction was due in large part to the story he shared about his father's career unhappiness in Chapter Three. When we talked specifically about careers, he reiterated this theme in a story he shared about a colleague.

> **James:** A coworker was telling me about how he didn't care what job he had to do, as long as he got a paycheck. It makes me depressed for him that he felt such pressure to provide for his family that he didn't care what he did. I am not saying I won't say that I won't love my kids with all my heart, but for me it is a terrifying thought that I will sacrifice everything I enjoy and my personal wellbeing to make my kids happy.

Taking the time to find the right career, for James, seemed to be rooted in the idea that working for a paycheck alone was a dismal prospect. In order to feel truly content as a person, James wanted to feel like his career was personally fulfilling and so spent a considerable amount of time finding the career that could do both. Like James, Steve also focused on personal fulfillment over financial gain.

> **Steve:** I worked my way through college with SAM's Club. I got my degree in biology. I graduated and I worked at SAM's. I worked my way up to management. I had always thought about education. I went in and started subbing in schools and really enjoyed it. I knew that I could make a lot of money if I stayed in SAMs Club. I mean, I had a bunch of friends who were making over 70K a year. But, I started to get burned out so I left it for teaching. Of course you also get burnt out in education, but at least in education you feel like you are doing some good. I actually like the students and teaching. So now I teach science and am happier for it.

A high paying salary like the one SAM's Club could provide was not a top priority for Steve. Rather, he was interested in finding a career where he could use his expertise in biology, something he was genuinely interested in. He shared that despite the financial risk and time delay, he did not regret switching fields and was happier overall because of it.

Career satisfaction was equally important to the women participants, but they appeared to be more aware of the complications that a having a child might generate for career advancement. Conversing with Sarah, her enthusiasm for her job was palpable.

> **Sarah:** After four and a half years, I had my degree and was an occupational therapist. I had a job that I liked with a children's hospital and I became sort of a specialist in pediatric feeding and swallowing. The job was very challenging and fulfilling. Children would come from all over the world to get help. I learned so much. They would come to us dependent on feeding tubes and would leave us eating 90 percent by mouth. It would happen over and over again. It was so rewarding. I also had some interesting career opportunities. I taught a university class, gave presentations at national conferences around the country, and I wrote a book chapter. I also went to Romania for research.

Sarah spent many years growing the knowledge and skills necessary for her career. Through her work with children specifically, she feels immense pride and gains much personal satisfaction. She truly loves her field and feels pride contributing to it. After asking if her career meant something to her, she responded with the following:

> **Sarah:** Oh yes, you couldn't tell? Actually right now I am working on a specialty in feeding, eating, and swallowing through the American OT Association. I have a month to get it done. I always enjoying learning and improving myself. I'll read books on management to improve my skills. I want to do well and be successful in my career.

Her passion in the field drives her to keep learning and trying new things, most recently taking up an OT management position in a Denver area hospital. As she and Larry have started talking about children, she worries about how she will be able to balance life as a parent and career woman. "Neither one of us are willing to give up our career, but it's a little bit worrisome to have someone else spend 8 or 9 hours of the day raising your child." Since they do want children, balancing career and family is an issue that these short-term DINKs will need to figure out. They are not the only ones I researched with this dilemma.

In developing her personal narrative, Valerie yearns to find a role that really fits her interests and skills, while also allowing her to, in her own words, "give back", rather than "climb the career later."

> **Valerie:** I want to be successful in my career and have been. I could certainly do things that were more economical, like if we needed to have money to do things. But I would rather do things for how I feel and how I make other people feel.

Complicating matters for Valerie are her feelings about what makes a successful mother versus what makes a successful career person. She debates this out loud in the interview.

> **Valerie:** I battle with the career family. If we have children, part of me would want to stay at home to be with them, but part of me would be like oh my gosh, what am I doing that is "me"?!?

In the interview, Valerie was visibly perturbed about this issue. She is really concerned that if she decided to have children, it would be at the cost of growing her career, something she links closely with her identity. She seems to believe that one effort would negate the other—you simply cannot have a successful career and be a "good" mother. This belief is based largely on what she has seen in the other female role models in her life.

> **Valerie:** I think that my girlfriends and many mothers gain all of their importance from having kids and are like, "you just wouldn't know, you're not a mother." And maybe that is true, but you don't have to be so condescending about it. All my girlfriends say it is so much more rewarding with kids and I'll probably say that too, but I don't know…

Looking into this gendered issue further, I discovered the couples actively talk about who will be the primary caretaker for the child and have come up with unconventional ways to address the needs of both partners. Approximating a democratized relationship (Giddens and Pierson 1998), Cathy and Harrison have discussed the option of Harrison being the main caretaker for their future children, if that make sense with where she is at in her career.

> **Cathy:** I love that I have the option. I feel like if I wanted to work I could without worrying about it. I think our parents generation that there is too much pride that the man has to be the breadwinner. Harrison is not that way. It makes it so much easier knowing that he support the idea of family and career—that he would be willing to stay home if need be. I love that.

Cathy is thrilled with the idea of being able to continue her career, while at the same time starting a family. Harrison is willing to shift the family responsibilities to himself because he know that it might better accommodate her goals and make her pleased. Although this is not what they may end up doing, she feels secure in the fact that they will try to work out a solution that works best for both of them. Bonnie and Mason are looking at another alternative option for raising a potential child so they both could keep working. Not feeling comfortable having her children raised by "outsiders", the couple is considering having his mother, who is willing to move from Miami to Colorado, raise their future children. As a plus, this arrangement would allow them to both continue their careers, but they also realize this arrangement could be problematic. There is some concern with both that his mother might begin to confuse the role of grandmother with the primary caretaker role. Although not ideal, this may still be a better solution than having strangers raise their children.

For one couple, Theresa and Mark, childcare is a hot topic, as I learned in their interview. As Theresa is interested in going on to earn her PhD, she is not sure how a child would fit into the picture.

> **Theresa:** I would rather be able to establish the career I love first before I have children. I might take one or two years off from work…
> **Mark:** I think you will change your mind. I don't want to send my three year old to day care.
> **Theresa:** That is something we will have to talk about when the time comes.
> **Mark:** I don't want a day care kid.
> **Theresa:** Well…I have professors who brought their kids, so that might be an option.

Mark: That's what I am saying. You have to think outside the box.
Theresa: I can't just be home. It drove me crazy when I did that this summer.
Mark: Yeah, I would be much better as a stay at home dad.
Allyson: Is that an option?
Mark: If she made enough money to support the family. I don't want to have to live frugally.
Theresa: If you don't want your kid to be a daycare kid, then who is going to have to stay home?
Mark: I don't know why you always have to attack me.
Theresa: I am not trying to do that.
Mark: It doesn't seem like you are trying to be open. I am trying to talk openly. You are talking from your own fear.
Theresa: Yeah, that's true.
Mark: I never said you had to be a stay at home mom.
Theresa: I know. I know. He really knows me and will call me out, in a good way. I know how I love our dog and hate leaving him. God forbid it is a child, and he knows that.
Mark: If she has a child, things are going to change.
Theresa: I am sure they will, but I am also sure my drive will not change.
Mark: There is more than one way to do things.

Through the tense exchange between Mark and Theresa it is clear that balancing childcare and career is an unresolved issue from them. Mark is adamant about not wanting a "day care kid", believing he or she would not be nurtured and encouraged to the levels he expects. And while he claims he would volunteer to stay home with the child, he quickly qualifies this by saying it would only be if they would not have to live "frugally", which is not likely on an academic salary. So while he says he is trying to be open, and never said "she had to be a stay at home mom", by not presenting any other options, that is basically what he is implying. Although less flexible than the other husbands, even Mark seems to believe there will be a way for them to figure it out that suits both their needs—if they could just think outside the box.

This compromise between partners reflects what theorists like Bianchi (2006), Casper (2005) and Popenoe (2009) argue has occurred because of the gender equalization of the

American job market—that in modern marriages, it is more likely that both working partners are committed to making both home and work life successful. This idea of compromise in career dovetails with the number one reason survey respondents claimed why they delayed having children.

4.4 Putting Partner First

> "My relationship with my partner is focused on making the other happy. After work obligations have been met, all other energies can be directed towards time spent together or activities that improve my partner's life. Having children would shift that focus onto the upbringing of those children." *Survey Respondent*

Marriage historically was a contract between two families to solidify economic relations (Parkin 2004). Additionally, it was often constructed in very gendered terms, with the husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker. Although this type of marriage still exists, Giddens (1991) argues that it is quickly being replaced by an emotionally based version. In this version, the emotional connection between two partners is the driving force for creating and sustaining the marriage institution (1991:89).

Developing his theory further, Giddens argues that modern relationships are evolving from romantic love to the pure relationship, which is founded on trust, equality and commitment (1991). Whereas romantic love is still rooted in traditional cultural norms and gendered behavior, Giddens suggests that pure love, or pure relationships as he calls them, are a mutual arrangement between two equal parties that can only successfully exist as long as both members are committed to meeting the needs of the other individual (Giddens 1992:58). Looking at the raw data from the survey, it appears that there are some similarities between the couples I researched and the model for a pure relationship. Without a doubt, the

personal relationship between partners is critical. All but one of the six questions centered on the partner were ranked with over 90 percent total agreement, and two of those had 100 percent total agreement across the entire group. Although one could argue that the strength in the agreement is due to how the statements are worded, I believe the percentages reflect the importance these individuals put on their partners. Like members of a pure relationship, they have selected partners that met their needs on a very personal and intimate level (Giddens and Pierson 1998:135). (see *Figure 11*).

Survey Items Focused on Partnership	% Agreement
My partner and I actively discuss the decision of having children or not.	**94.2%**
My partner and I spend a lot of time doing things we like to do together.	**98.7%**
My relationship with my partner is based on constant give and take.	**94.3%**
My partner and I respect each other's independence.	**100.0%**
I am committed to making my partner happy in our relationship.	**100.0%**

Figure 11

Included in this is a mutual respect for each other's personal goals, even if that means delaying having children. One respondent shared, "We enjoy our independence as a couple and separately - having a child would limit that and potentially stress the relationship." This commitment to keeping the other satisfied necessitates a constant give and take between partners, as well as constant communication, especially on the topic of children. Therefore, like a pure relationship, commitment between DINKs balances precariously on each individual's ability to express their own needs (Giddens 2000). Without doing so, the other person may leave them at any time due to a change of heart (Jamieson 1999:479). Because of this vulnerability, like the modern self, the modern relationship needs to be reflexively developed over time. "All individuals can do is to be clear about their own needs and avoid

neurotic demands for such unreasonable goals as a lover will give and ask nothing in return (Bellah et al. 1985:108).

This sensitive state of the marriage makes the decision to have children that much more charged. It is no surprise then that over half of the survey respondents agreed with the item that stated, "one of my main concerns for having children is that it will change my relationship with my partner." These concerns manifest differently for each individual, but center on a few core themes. First, many survey respondents believe that having children will shift focus away from the marital relationship to the child.

> "With the focus almost exclusively on the kids, you lose sight of your marriage." *Survey Respondent*
>
> "So many people tell you that 'it changes things" and many people like to say that "after you have a kid you won't care about your husband anymore" that really puts me off to having kids, I love my husband and our life." *Survey Respondent*
>
> "I believe that having children shifts attention to a third party. It can put some strain on a couple that is used to solely focusing on each other's needs. One member of the relationship may feel like their needs are being neglected. It is something that scares me a little." *Survey Respondent*
>
> "In my observation, a child becomes the focus of the family and the married couple slowly becomes less loving and more resentful. Not always but I have seen it and am afraid of it." *Survey Respondent*

Many couples feel a deep connection with their partner and worry about what a child might do to that bond—along the lines of "three's a crowd". In a similar vein, a second key concern for childless couples was the idea of having to change how they currently spend their free time with their partner. For example, 20 (out of 100) individuals specifically mentioned travel as a reason they have not had children yet, a concern with which I personally identify. Other couples had different ways they valued their time with their partner.

> "Right now, we enjoy having the flexibility to pursue our careers, as well as the activities that encompass our lifestyle (i.e. rock climbing)." *Survey Respondent*

> "Less time for sex (and other leisure activities that we love)" *Survey Respondent*

> "We really enjoy the time we spend together--especially in activities we both like to do outside of the house, and we're aware that having children will diminish that time considerably." *Survey Respondent*

> "I currently enjoy the relationship/life we have and the types of activities that we do together (travel to more remote areas, spend time with friends, work longer hours)." *Survey Respondent*

> "My partner and I love to travel to "rough" places that are quite far away and sometimes remote. I worry that this will change when we have children." *Survey Respondent*

Additionally, many couples believe that children complicate matters to the point that they will no longer get to do the things they like to do together. As such, they see this DINK period of their life as one that allows them to dedicate quality time to building their relationship with their partner before taking that next step. One survey respondent explained, "Sometimes I feel that I want us to get all of this (going out, traveling to certain places that are not "kid-friendly) out of our systems before we have children." Again, it is not that people are planning on forgoing children entirely, but they are simply pushing back the time line to accommodate goals that are seen as not conducive to childrearing.

A last main concern in regards to the effect that having children would have on the partnership was felt explicitly by the females of the survey population. Many women worried that by having children, they would be expected to step up as the lead nurturer in the family.

> " I worry about having to shoulder most of the burden." *Survey Respondent*

> "Because he has not been around a lot of children I am not sure how he will react to a constant 24/7 need. He also tends to set his own hours

> when it comes to sleeping in/staying up late and am unsure as to how this will/will not change with children. I also worry he will know when he needs to chip in more and leave more up to me than he should." *Survey Respondent*

> "I am afraid that if we have children, that all the responsibility of raising the children would be on me, and my husband would only be there for the 'good' times. I think that it would change the dynamic of our relationship and also make me less attractive to him." *Survey Respondent*

Being used to a democratic partnership, many women were concerned about how having children may threaten that. They worry that their gender might prescribe them to being the primary caretaker for the children, at the cost of their other personal goals. This could lead to resentment and tension between the couple. For now being childless is see to equalize the roles between husband and wife.

Having found that the goal of protecting the marital partnership was essential to the couples in the survey, I made sure to look for a similar theme during the interviews as well. I guessed that the marital bond was also important to the interviewees and was curious to know if they also had concerns about how children might affect it. Unsurprisingly, across the entire group the personal connection between husband and wife was seen as vital.

In my conversations with the couples they shared examples of the things they loved to do with one another. This included the mundane, like watching television or going out to eat, to the unusual, like traveling to far off countries or taking ski lessons together. I learned that in addition to spending time with their friends, Bonnie and Mason do a lot just the two of them.

> **Mason:** We have a lot of fun together and do a lot of stuff together. We like to go out and go to concerts and shows. We spend a lot of time doing the things we love together.
> **Bonnie:** Mostly everything we enjoy together. We enjoy skiing and have been to 50 or 60 concerts. We also like watching sports.

Hearing how much they loved to spend time with one another I asked them if they had any fears for how kids would affect their relationship.

> **Bonnie:** Oh yeah!
> **Mason:** Yeah. The personal private time that you share will be gone, and the quality of communication will be tougher.

As the self-professed "maybe babies" couple, Bonnie and Mason present themselves as being quite content spending the rest of their lives together doing the things that they enjoy if they never end up conceiving. They believed that their partnership would be sufficient to provide for each other's happiness. That is not to say that if they do get pregnant, they would not give everything they had to the child, as Mason testified in Chapter Three. They were not the only couple I interviewed who saw children as challenging the partnership.

> **Allyson:** How do you think a child would change your relationship?
> **Wendy:** We would obviously have less time for each other and ourselves.
> **James:** I would worry that it would go to just plain… boring. You hear it all the time—you have kids and the spark is gone. You don't have the relationship you once had after kids…your life is only your kids.

Wendy and James are aware that having children will change the dynamic of both their personal relationship and their personal time. Still, they believe with a little forethought and planning, they can manage to maintain a healthy marital relationship while raising children—it will just take extra effort on their part to create time for everyone. Wendy explained, "I think it's important to keep the marriage strong and not always put your kids first. You have to try not to get caught up in the business of life, which is easy to do." Valerie and Louey shared a similar narrative when I asked them about how children might affect their relationship.

> **Allyson:** Do you think your relationship will change if you have children?

> **Louey:** I think you have to be cognizant of that. In your relationship and when you bring someone else into it. Its something new…something you have to adjust to.
> **Valerie:** Yeah, I mean even with our new dog, we both stayed home his first day because we were worried--and this is a dog! And at night I was like, what did we talk about today? This guy. We only talked about the dog. Our family unit is the most important, as long as we have a solid relationship, with commitment and communication then the rest of our family is going to flow from that.

Valerie and Louie recognize that introducing a new family member, even in the form of a dog, can change a marriage. Like Wendy and James, they believe with the proper preparation and continued work, a balance between their roles as parents and partners can be achieved. This resonates with the discussion in Chapter Three, where the research participants view total immersion in their kids' lives as negative. Instead, these couples are striving for something more balanced and making sure this happens is one of their goals for their own childrearing plans.

4.5 Serving Self

The focus on education, career, and partnership by the DINKs may appear from the outside to be selfish choices, and in some sense you can see these priorities as self-oriented – building one's career, establishing the relationship, and so on. Deconstructing their motivations, it becomes apparent that by striving to serve self, they are not self-serving in an everyday, derogatory sense. It is important to recognize that we do not see evidence of some kind of hedonistic individualism here, but instead a careful planning that is seeking to balance a number of obligations and priorities that are part of that development of self: the relationship, the career, the kids. Finding ways to harmonize these sometimes competing

parts of life can cause anxiety for these couples. The stories the interviewees shared exemplified this.

> **Valerie:** This is the first year where I felt like I am ready to be a mom.
> **Allyson:** What has changed?
> **Valerie:** I think us. I felt much more confident in our relationship and being together in a partnership. My dad kind of goes along with my mom and stuff and Louey actually has an opinion.
> **Louey:** From her perspective we were arguing, where I felt like we were just talking. It's not a big deal.
> **Valerie:** And I was like we're fighting…we don't do that in this family. I think working through that I feel more settled.

For both Valerie and Louey there were some unexpected challenges in the beginning of their relationship due to miscommunications and misaligned expectations. By spending time working through their different communication styles, they believed they strengthened their marriage. This has allowed them to be more comfortable with the idea of starting a family. Theresa and Mark also see a healthy dialogue between partners as an integral first step to becoming parents.

> **Theresa:** I want to develop our relationship and there are things that I would like for us to grow on and get better at. I don't want to have a tumultuous state and not know what to do and how to handle it. I don't want to be like, "not in front of the baby."
> **Mark:** I would like for our relationship to be healthier. I would like to be able to talk through our problems better. I don't feel like we do that well now. Its not that we won't have problems, I just want to know we can talk about them when they do come up.

At this point they do not feel confident enough in their communications with each other to start a family. Because of this they are actively working at this part of their marriage.

By focusing attention on other aspects of their life, the couples do not feel selfish, but feel as they are living authentic lives, namely they are being true to their own desires and life goals. Sarah and Larry explain that they had other priorities before starting to have a family and so do not feel guilty for getting married and not having children right away.

> **Allyson:** Do you feel like the choices you made were selfish?
> **Larry:** I don't really view our life as being selfish. I didn't get married until I was 35 years old…it's just life. There wasn't the opportunity before this.
> **Allyson**: It sounded like you were busy doing things you wanted to do before getting married and having kids.
> **Sarah:** Yeah, like did we have to do travel therapy? Did we have to move across the country? I mean we could have stayed in Baltimore, bought a house and settled down, but there were other things that were more important to us. I had a lot of stuff I wanted to do before I settled down.
> **Larry:** We were together a year before we got engaged, we were together a year and a half before we got married. We postponed our wedding for our Australia trip. So I mean we have spent a lot of time before we got married. It was more like we needed to get things stable.
> **Sarah:** Yeah, settling down.

In discussing "getting ready" for kids, James first says he does not feel selfish about the choices he has made, but then, begrudgingly admits that he might be selfish.

> **Allyson:** By making these choices—about your education, career, et cetera, do you feel like you were being selfish?
> **James:** I don't think of it as I need this part of my life to do these selfish things and once I am done, I will have children. Well maybe, in some ways it is kind of selfish. I like spoiling me and my wife. I think it is fun to go to tropical islands. It's just harder to do those things with kids. I think we have done a lot of things in the past two years that we are not likely to do with kids.
> **Wendy:** I feel like as we are married for longer and getting closer to being ready for kids, I feel like the last little while, we are like… we should do this and that before we have kids, taking vacations and going out to restaurants and we wouldn't be able to do that.

Even though he might feel some guilt in his choice to delay parenthood, he defends his actions by justifying that doing the things that he and Wendy enjoy will be more difficult to do post children. Serving self and partner helps them cope with the idea that eventually they will not be able to do everything they like to do in the same way they do it now. Until then, they plan to enjoy life doing the things they love, whether others perceive it as selfish or not.

4.6 Conclusion

The majority of the individuals I researched perceived Double Income No Kids as a preparatory phase that they pass through because they do want children one day. These individuals view the steps they take before having children not as detours or distractions, but as necessary steps to building a solid foundation for family. Dedicating a considerable amount of time, up to a decade in the case of my own neurologist husband, to earning their education is seen as extremely beneficial. A degree, or two, or three, is believed to provide the skills necessary to secure a job that makes them financially secure. More importantly for many DINKs, this effort is perceived as a necessary step to securing an emotionally satisfying career, for both men and women alike.

The "dual" of Dual Income No Kids is by far the most important factor pushing back the timeline for having children amongst the research participants. Like in a pure relationship, focusing on the partnership first provides a number of benefits they regard as crucial to a successful marriage. The participants feel spending alone time with the partner allows them to grow and mature the relationship through an evolved understanding of the other's expectations. Correspondingly, they believe this childless time allows for improved communication and conflict resolution due to a less stressful setting. On a different note, through engaging in personal activities they enjoy together, they believe they are balancing their personal desires against the needs of their future children. All of this, they feel, helps prepare them to withstand the stress that having children will bring.

CHAPTER 5: THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAITING

> I feel like it's expected, but also becoming more acceptable to not have children. *Survey Respondent*

5.1 Introduction

Having children is biological. And of course, it is cultural: over 80 percent of the survey couples, like the American population at large, believe that it is not only expected within our society, it is the normal course of action for married adults. This statistic is given life by the multitude of comments referring to how friends, family members, and even strangers harangue the survey respondents about when they are going to have children. One survey participant shared, “I work in healthcare and first thing my patients ask me is, do you have children? the next thing they ask is when are you going to have children?" Having children still is presumed to be the standard course of action.

But normal may be shifting. The heteronormative image of the middle-class family in the United States portrayed and produced in the 1950s is no longer dominant (Hayden and Hallstein 2010). Instead, after decades of feminist struggle for reproductive control over their bodies, by the 1980s motherhood for women was no longer perceived as mandatory, but now as a matter of choice (Hayden and Hallstein 2010:xxvi). The survey respondents agree; almost 99 percent of respondents surveyed believe that not having children is also a viable option in today’s modern world. One participant explained how she viewed the current situation.

> “It is expected now that you will wait a little later (until 30ish) to have kids, whereas the age when people had their first kid used to be much younger. While I think having children is expected, I also think it's totally acceptable nowadays to choose not to have children. It might be a surprising decision to not have kids, but I don't think it's totally taboo to remain DINKS.” *Survey Respondent*

Note that she sees a later age as an expected, not as a surprising choice. For her waiting to have kids until around 30 is now part of the norm. Still, for most, once a DINK does not mean always a DINK. As mentioned in previous chapters, the majority of the individuals with whom I spoke did not see being DINK as an identity they wanted to claim for the long-term. In fact, almost 68 percent of individuals felt like they would be missing out on a key aspect of life if they did not have children. Instead, they treated "Double Income No Kids," for many, has become a preparatory phase that they pass through on their way to having children one day.

As I discussed, this pause provides them with the emotional maturity and financial security they desire before having children. In doing so, they feel better prepared for the potential pitfalls, some imagined, some witnessed, that might throw them off track in getting what they want done. But what if the pause becomes a period? Waiting to have children can sometimes cause unintended infertility problems for couple who have prolonged their marital courtship. In response, new forms of kinship patterns have been created by both the opportunities and consequences of modernity. In what follows, I investigate how the expanding of reproductive choice for couples has impacted the ways that contemporary people create their families.

5.2 Fertility Issues

There is often a false confidence in women who wait until their thirties to have children. This can be seen in the survey results: 85 percent of respondents said that they were confident that they would be able to have children after 30 if they so chose. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The biological facts are straightforward: every woman is born

with a limited number of eggs and each year, and as she gets older, so do they. At the age of 30 a woman's chance of getting pregnant begins decreasing, and by the time she reaches her forties, the chance of conception drops by five to ten percent a year (Kalb 2001). Some women are unaware of these statistics and are surprised that when they are finally ready to reproduce, their body is not. This can be extremely frustrating for the couple that finally feels ready to expand their family. During my interviews, a few couples I interviewed opened up and shared their frustrations on not being able to conceive right away.

> **Sarah:** It's funny too when you try to conceive and you are not successful, I am kind of used to being successful at the things that I do. I didn't realize that it was going to be hard work. It's like, oh this didn't work so I guess we can have a beer. We'll try again next month honey.
>
> **Valerie:** Now that we are trying, I was kind of surprised that after the first few months it didn't happen, I was kind of like, oh this is going to be harder than I thought it was going to be and maybe we can't have kids.

Sarah and Valerie were genuinely surprised that they had not conceived after months of trying. Both strong and successful women, it was frustrating to not get pregnant month after month. In their minds, since they were doing all of the things that they needed to do to get pregnant, they could not help but feel like in some way they were failing. They discovered, painfully, that the dogged determination they used for earning their degrees and becoming successful in their careers would not work in trying to get pregnant. For the most part, it was just out of their control, which made them feel helpless. This unforeseen fertility roadblock forced both couples to acknowledge that they might not be able to conceive naturally.

Continuing the conversation, I asked both couples to reflect on what they thought it would feel like to be childless family. Sarah and Larry and Valerie and Louey, all were

hesitantly optimistic that they would be able to get past the initial pain of not conceiving in order to make the most of a life without children.

> **Sarah:** If we aren't successful I don't know if we would be totally unhappy if it didn't happen. I think that we could have a lot of fun and have extra money. There are so many options. It is something I am interested in doing and want it to happen, but if it doesn't happen I don't think it will be the end of us or the end of the world.

Sarah tried to put a positive spin on a childless outcome, but there was definite hedging in the framing of her answer. She would not be "totally unhappy", and she didn't think it would be "the end" of them, but it is obvious through her word choices that having children is important and something she wanted to accomplish. Sensing that children did seem to be important to them, I asked if they had considered some other family planning options if in the end, the could not have children naturally.

> **Allyson:** If you can't have kids, will you try IVF or other options, like adoption?
> **Sarah:** I don't know. We haven't really thought about it.
> **Larry:** We haven't really talked about it. We haven't *really* really tried so…

I was surprised by these responses. As Sarah is one of the older participants at 39, it was interesting to learn that they had not discussed what other options they might contemplate if they could not have children. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, it could be a discussion they were holding off on having until they felt it was absolutely necessary to undertake, or at least until they had done the made concerted efforts in trying to conceive. Despite her age, at this point they still felt optimistic that they would be able to have children naturally. I also asked Valerie and Louey to reflect on what life would be like without kids.

> **Louey:** Initially if you want something and can't do it it's hard, but I think we could get over it eventually. I don't think we would adopt kids

at this point in time.
Valerie: I don't know. I think we would have to wait it out to see if the urge is still there. I think we would have enough connections with people who have children, but I don't know…
Allyson: Do you think that you would use all the new medical technologies to have a child of your own?
Louey: Hmm…I don't know. We haven't really thought about it.

There was also some hesitation in both Louey's and Valerie's responses: he thinks they could get over it eventually; and she was unsure about what it would mean for their life narrative. Clearly, the thought of not actually being able to have children was something they had not dwelled on, at least out loud. Another explanation is that it was something they did not feel comfortable discussing with me. Unsurprisingly then, they too had not had any serious discussions about using medical technologies, but believed that it was a bit premature to consider adoption as a serious solution at this point. As a potential coping technique, Valerie did think there might be some hope in filling any emptiness by being involved in the lives of friends and family members who did have children, but at this point it was really hard to say if that would be enough for them or not.

Although somewhat dispirited, Sarah and Larry, and Valerie and Louey are still pretty positive about their chances of conceiving naturally because they both had only been trying for a few months. Another couple, Betty and Steve have been trying to have children for two years and are losing faith that they will be able to conceive without some kind of outside intervention.

Allyson: How long have you been trying for?
Steve: Two years…
Allyson: What lengths do you think you all will go to have children? There is so much technology out there now, like IVF and surrogacy, and so on and so on.
Betty: We have talked about it, but it really comes down to money.
Steve: Yeah, it was like between five to 10,000 dollars.
Betty: We keep hoping that it will happen. And I think if it happens it

> happens. I know I have a little while left. But I am just like, you know, you feel inept. It is a really bothersome feeling.

After two years and countless physical tests later, Betty and Steve, unlike the other couples, are having serious discussions about other options for having children. Knowing they really want to have children, they have spent considerable time weighing the pros and negatives of the various choices and as of yet, are not sold on a real solution for broadening their family.

Infertility treatments do not seem like a realistic option for them as they both only earn a teacher's salary. To put it into perspective, donor sperm costs anywhere from $300 to almost $3,000 (Spar 2006:xvi). As a more intensive production and retrieval process, a couple who needs viable eggs to produce their offspring will pay anywhere from $2,500 for an "average" woman's egg to $50,000 for an egg with what is claimed to be optimal genetic material (Spar 2006:x). These child-creating costs are amplified when incorporating the full IVF treatment, which can cost between $69,000 to $85,000 (Spar 229). After investing these large amounts of money, there is no guarantee that the procedures will work. In 2008, 18 percent of women who used ART were not able to carry the pregnancy to completion (CDC 2010). It is understandable that Betty and Steve do not see this as an option they would choose easily.

For now Betty and Steve have opted to try some alternative holistic therapies like acupuncture to try to help with conception. Betty commented, "I am trying other sorts of interventions to help my body to get back in balance," explaining why she had a row of tiny needles in her ear when she greeted me at the door for the interview. Steve also pointed out that he was encouraging her to take it easy at work, as she has the predisposition to overextend herself in school activities, causing her great stress, which they both thought could be the root of the infertility.

I found it very interesting that their focus was on "fixing" her so that they could have children, especially when after asking if Steve had any testing done, they shared he had not. At one point he had tried to get some blood work done, but due to an insurance mix up, he never got the results. At the time of our conversation, he had not followed up to see if the issue was on his end rather than hers. Betty and Steve are not alone in their reproductive barriers. Many other couples eventually are forced into looking at other options for creating the family of their dreams due to age-related infertility, otherwise known as ARI.

5.3 New Reproductive Technologies

Chief among the options that ARI couples turn to are new reproductive technologies other wise known as NRTs. These include procedures like artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization (IVF), and surrogacy. In 1978 the first child was conceived through in vitro fertilization, a process where hormones are used to induce the production of eggs and are then eternally fertilized and then implanted back in the uterus (Cruz 2009). By 2000, there were over 100,000 children born using assisted reproductive technologies (Hayden and Hallstein 2010:xxvii). Surrogacy, another option, is the process where a woman carries and delivers a child for another woman (Hayden and Hallstein 2010:xxvi). Depending on the circumstances, there are two options for couples to choose from: in traditional surrogacy, the woman carrying the actual baby is its biological mother; in gestational surrogacy, a viable embryo, either from the contracted mother, or another donor egg mother, is placed in the surrogate's uterus, who has no relationship to her (Reproductive Technology Council 2009). When asked about their feelings on modern medicine and fertility treatments, 83 percent of the research participants saw in vitro fertilization, egg donation and other medical treatments as acceptable ways to have children later in life.

This strong correlation reflects what the general population of the United States believes: having a baby through science is a viable alternative to natural conception. In fact, by 2004, over a million people utilized some form of fertility treatment, making it a three billion dollar industry (Spar 2006:3). The baby making industry is part of a sophisticated global market, which includes all the pieces any other market would have: commodities (babies), consumers (intended parents), workers (reproductive producers), bureaucracy (legal documents, doctors, etc), and owners (fertility clinics/agencies) (Krolokke et. al 2010:99). Like any other market, it is designed to meet customer demand. Couples that want to purchase a baby can shop around a global marketplace to procure the best sperm, eggs and other assisted reproductive technologies (The Economist 2006); the same goes for adopted children. Despite the upward growth in using technology to help with infertility in the United States on the whole, in my conversations with the interviewees I learned that using involved fertility treatments was not considered a real option.

> **Bonnie:** I also have a strong opinion about in vitro and all of that because of my past jobs…I have seen things go wrong with it and really don't believe in it for myself. Not that it's not good for other people. I wouldn't do it.
>
> **Betty:** My sister was like I will be your surrogate. And I was like, that is just really weird! I would feel like it would be your kid and not mine, weird.
>
> **Janet:** I told him that if we didn't or couldn't get pregnant that I didn't want to go through fertility treatments, we would just adopt, I didn't want to go through all of that other stuff. It's kind of creepy what they do, like putting eggs in you and I just can't fathom that. The family dynamic is really complicated.
>
> **James:** I know it is a tremendous strain, financially, emotionally, and mentally.

While new reproductive technologies seemed like a fine option for other people, reflecting on their own paths, these new, "Brave New World" interventions did not seem like

an adequate solution to the problem. In fact, with word choices like, “wrong”, “weird”, and “creepy”, it appears that the participants actually seemed pretty turned off by the idea. These interviewees saw NRTs as causing more stress, either financial or emotional, and also seemed to think that it would complicate their lives socially. For Betty, having her child birthed from a different womb challenged her idea of motherhood. Janet too, brought up the complexities of using fertility treatments.

Both women are right to believe that NRTs challenge the way we understand and interpret family. Case in point, in surrogacy, three different types of “mothers” may be able to be identified: an intended mother, a genetic mother, and a birth mother. In this situation, it becomes difficult to distinguish who the “real” mother is. Is it the biological mother, as historically defined, or is it the woman who has chosen the child to be conceived, carried and birthed so she can raise him or her into adulthood? In this sense, NRTs call into question the supposedly “inviolable chain of events linking marriage, sex, conception, pregnancy, gestation, parenthood, and childbearing” (Ragoné 1994:87).

5.4 Adoption

As Janet mentioned, adoption is another choice for couples that are having trouble conceiving naturally. Every year, couples and individuals in the United States adopt over 100,000 children, 15 percent of which come from abroad (Spar 2006:161). Although some couples choose adoption over their own biological children, “many others choose this avenue when “they’ve exhausted all other channels of child production” (Spar 2006:160). Unlike NRTs, adoption seemed to be viewed much more positively among the couples I interviewed.

> **James:** I think adoption is something that we would consider. Especially if we got a little Chinese baby. They would fit right in, they would look like me. (*laughing - Wendy is Asian-American and he is white)*
>
> **Allyson:** Have you guys thought about adoption?
> **Betty:** Um, I would. I have a friend who is adopting two kids from Ethiopia. I would obviously like one of my own too, but I would be open to adoption. You always run into the case of you don't know that kids history and there could be problems.
> **Steve:** You would really need to look into it very closely.

While adoption was looked upon more favorably, this path also would not be entered lightly. In our conversations, couples frequently mentioned the importance of researching the adoption agency and being really involved in the entire adoption process. In doing so, they hoped to avoid the hazards of adoption they had heard about, like adopting a sick or especially needy child without knowing it up front.

There are more reproductive options than ever before, for those with financial access to them. This is in part due to shifting economic, political, and social pressures, but it is also due to the introduction of new medical technologies. These changes have been a mixed blessing for modern people in the United States. On the one hand, the acceptance of the birth control pill allowed women to more easily access opportunities in both education and the professional world. On the other hand, for these same women, delaying childbirth to the later years of their lives has had unexpected consequences for themselves and their partners.

In this way, choice is a loaded term as it assumes a couple of things: first, that a person is actually empowered to make a decision—she or he has the cultural, social, political capital to do so; second, that once a person makes a choice, it reflects their thoughts and feelings across different periods in their life; and third, that a person understands all of the consequences of the choices that they are making. Additionally, as I mentioned in Chapter

Three, “choice” seems to imply that an isolated individual is making this choice, whereas it is actually a very social practice.

For couples that have age related infertility, they have a number of choices. First, they can choose not to have children at all. Second, they can try to engineer their own child through the marvels of modern medicine. Or, third, they can choose to adopt a child who has already been born and needs a home. This choice is not an easy one and often brings great stress to the couple. But, for couples who choose to extend the DINK phase of their life, it is one they may well have to face.

5.5 Thesis Conclusion

This research project, like many, was one that was born from personal experience. I have dated and/or have been married to my husband for over a decade, and the longer we were together, the more frequently friends, family members, and strangers would ask us when we were going to have children. This assumption that we would (read: should) be having children was a personal affront to me. I felt like other people were trying to control my life. I firmly believed that if my husband and I were going to have children, it should be because we both wanted to and were prepared for that life change, not because of the expectations of others for when our childbearing should happen. In my mind, we would have children when we were good and ready, if that is what we decided we wanted do. Until then there were just too many other goals we, as individuals and as a couple, wanted to accomplish. As this was my experience, I was curious to know how other people in the United States approached the life-altering, identity-shifting, and relationship-changing turning point of having children.

As such, I structured my original research to explore the lives and experiences of people who fell into the category Dual Income No Kids, like we did. Specifically, I was interested in why these couples were "delaying" having children based on the national average. Researching national trends in marriage and parenthood, it definitely seemed as if I was on to something. Individuals across class, race, and region were choosing to wait to get married and bear children, with some choosing to forgo both entirely. The real question was, why?

The demographic correlations in the United States such as broad socio-culture shift, healthcare improvements, and a leveled playing field in the education arena I mentioned in Chapter One have had some impact on family planning for contemporary Americans. These correlates do not, however, fully explain childbearing decisions on a more personal level—how these couples made their decisions based on their values in action. Undoubtedly, I knew the root reasons my husband and I postponed having children, but I wanted to see if anyone else empathized with our thinking or if, perhaps they had other personal motivations.

Through this project I uncovered what these couples really valued in their lives and while doing so, discovered some interesting trends. I must stress that these findings reflect the views of my research pool, one I had designed to specifically look at the stereotype of DINK (as proposed by Buchanan) as educated and career-focused people. In this sense, my sample was skewed automatically to higher educated and higher paid individuals and did not include those who may be delaying childbearing, but who are affected differently by financial strains or job concerns. In addition, since I was not attempting to create a comparison of DINK experiences across race or ethnicity, I did not I ask respondents about their racial/ethnic identification, so it is not clear to what extent the data includes

perspectives from non-white respondents. In retrospect I might have done this differently in order to capture a broader experience of being DINK—one that better demonstrates how people across socio-economic and racial boundaries negotiate the childbearing decision. Still, there is a possibility that my research data may point to broader themes that cross DINK groups. Further research will need to be done to see if this is indeed the case. In my research project, one of the trends that I found among the "DINKs" was that most participants wanted to have children… eventually. For them, DINK was not their modus operandi or an identity with which they chose to affiliate. Rather, they saw it as a stage of life, a prepatory phase to fulfill other personal goals before children. So this throws into question what DINK is—is it an identity or is it a phase? In actuality, it is both.

While the minority, there are couples that choose to be DINKs for the entirety of their marriage. I found a few examples of these in my survey, but none in my interviews. One survey respondent said, "Raising children is one path. It is not the only path. We did not make this decision lightly. But ultimately we decided that we would rather spend our time and resources doing something other than raising another human being. The desire to have a child just is not there for us." Another one shared, "Neither of us has ever had a desire to have children. I feel that a person should truly want to have a child and not just have children because it is expected by one's in-laws or society. I feel that having children should not be a decision that one is wishy-washy about." These two couples decided to forgo children entirely (or planned to do so) because the desire to procreate was not there for them—they felt that children would not bring them any additional happiness, at least to the extent they were worth all the other stresses. Other long-term DINKs come to this conclusion because of environmental reasons or medical reasons: one survey participant exclaimed, "I see having

kids as one of the worst things I can do for the environment!"; another one shared, "My mom has genetic hearing loss and her loss was exaggerated by having children. It is likely that if I got pregnant I might lose my hearing."

I would argue that these "lifers" might be more readily willing to accept the label of being DINK—living it out as a chosen identity. In fact, online you can find numerous websites catering to people who identify with being DINK including Dinklife.com, dinks-double-income-no-kids.meetup.com, and dinks.themovie.com. There are also a number of facebook pages dedicated to DINK living, suggesting that the term has some relatability for them. Still, for most, as represented in national figures or within the research project, Dual Income No Kids is experienced as a transitional part of life, one through which many types of people pass.

Another finding from my research challenges the Moynihan stereotype that would claim that people who choose this phase are consumerist, selfish individualists. In fact, my research portrays them in a different light. While it does appear that these couples use the time before childbearing to focus on work and lifestyle in many ways, at the same time (and often because of such concerns) these couples see themselves as applying this time to carefully planning for the many responsibilities that parenthood entails. It is almost as if they want to get everything right before they have children—the right house, the right career, the right relationship. Even their focus on the personal activities—like traveling or training for triathlons—can in some ways be seen as an effort to become a more balanced person pre-children. All of this reflects the way that they value, and in some ways fear, childbearing, not an avoidance of family and family-making. In many ways concern for their future offspring

are motivating this departure from the “traditional” life narrative of marriage followed quickly by children.

Lastly, in order to understand childbearing and the research couples feel it should happen, we must understand how they perceive and value marriage first. The themes of love, respect, and commitment were ubiquitous throughout my research and in many ways mirrored the pure relationship that Anthony Giddens (1992) and others have argued American society is moving towards. In this type of relationship, and in those of the research participants, individuals work hard to make their partners happy and meet their needs. When it came to having children, my research showed that the couples saw marriage and family as being interconnected. On the one hand the couples focused on building a strong relationship because it was seen as the foundation for the rest of their family—their future children directly motivated them. At the same time they looked to a future with children with trepidation. Their relationships were important to them and seeing the challenges that other couples had with childbearing and -rearing left them with feelings or anxiety or fear about how children might affect their own partnerships. For these couples partnership is important, but so are offspring. They are somewhat conflicted in wanting both, but most eventually push forward and take the leap of faith into parenthood hoping that they have prepared enough both as individuals and within their partnership to cope with the transition. In this sense, the pure marriage model actually can be understood as both linked and in conflict with decisions about childbearing in the contemporary United States.

Chapter 6: Epilogue - Passing Through DINK

6.1 Ready or Not

During my interview selection, it was revealed that two of the couples I interviewed were already pregnant, both coincidentally three months along. As they still were "officially" Dual Income No Kids, having not had their children yet, I decided to include them in the study. In doing so, I thought that they might provide additional insights on being DINK. During my conversations with them, I specifically asked them additional questions about their evolution into parents. I will share their transitions in this chapter.

6.2 Mindy and Joe's Transition

Knowing that in six short months the daily pattern of their lives was going to change, I asked Mindy and Joe what they thought of the transition, if they were worried or excited, or a mixture of both. It was remarkable how their responses changed within a few breaths, almost like they were realize how their life was changing as we spoke.

> **Mindy:** It's going to be interesting. I don't think our lives are going to change too much.
> **Allyson:** Really?
> **Mindy:** Yeah.
> **Allyson:** What do you (Joe) think?
> **Joe:** I don't think they will change too much.
> **Mindy:** They have already changed.

In a matter of a few sentences, Mindy switched from believing that things would not change in their household, to realizing they already had. When I asked how things had changed, Joe too agreed that there had been one big change in their life already.

> **Allyson:** So, how has your life changed already?
> **Mindy:** I mean, it wasn't abnormal for us to come home and have a drink.

> **Joe:** Yeah, going out doesn't happen anymore for us.
> **Mindy:** Hello?!?! Who wants to go out to a bar and not be able to get a drink!
> **Allyson:** Are you (Joe) not drinking out of solidarity?
> **Joe:** I am on the fence. I don't drink when she is around and really not really when she's not around.
> **Mindy:** Yeah, but we were big…both of our families, us included, were alcoholics. The two of us could go through a bottle of vodka in a weekend and not even feel it. We just got really used to it. I thought everyone made that change, but I was talking to my shrink….and I said I feel like shit. And she was like, "you are probably in withdrawal"…I mean I smoke and drank….she was like most people don't stop. She was like people who drink and smoke as much as you did, normally don't stop because they are addicted. I had to come off all of this shit and I was a mess.
> **Mindy:** That's the biggest change. I didn't realize how much until I couldn't drink anymore. Everything we did had alcohol involved. That's the biggest change…for the better.
> **Joe:** For sure.

At first hesitant to bring it up, Mindy eventually admitted that their social drinking was really alcoholism. Everything they did, including relaxing at home, centered on alcohol. It was not until she got pregnant that they realized the extent of their addiction because they were forced to change their ways. For them, this was the biggest change that they had to make, and they both thought it was a positive one. Looking to the future, I asked them if they thought anything else would change.

> **Joe:** I am sure things will change. We have a good family structure that will support us if we need to do something.
> **Mindy:** Yeah, both of our parents will be down there and will take care of the kids whenever we need them too. They'll be fighting over the kid. Also, I think we'll use the baby as an excuse to be antisocial. I don't think our lives will change that drastically. We will probably be more responsible. But I think you can pick and choose what you want to do with their lives. It can be what you make of it. My parents went out every Wednesday night and every Saturday night. Wednesday was for their solo activities and Saturdays were date night. We had opairs so they could do that. We'll see. We will figure it out as we go.
> **Allyson:** Anything more you would like to add?
> **Mindy:** Check back in 8 years, then we'll really know.

Even though she had just admitted that there had been a huge change in their lifestyle, Mindy quickly reverts back to saying that she did not think things would change much in their life. This belief seems to be rooted firmly in the concept she mentioned before, "I will do what I want". Using her parents as an example, she sees herself and Joe as being able to create the life that they want to live, even after children. It seems to be as simple as packing up the kids and sending them over to grandma and grandpa's so they can do what they want.

6.3 Janet and Michael's Transition

In my conversation with Janet and Michael, I also asked them about their transition to parenthood. For Janet, the choice to move ahead and try to have children was the hardest part.

> **Janet:** I clearly remember putting on the survey that women can have, and I still feel this way even despite being pregnant right now, that women can have fulfilled lives even without having children. I have always felt that way. I mean, I liked having a career. I liked to travel. I wanted to see the world. Its really funny because people, especially at his work, go on cruise ships or something. And I am like, we actually hiked in central Turkey. I think the idea that you are missing out….it's not true. I never felt, I mean, I didn't wake up one day and think, I want to have children. That never happened for me.

The choice to become a mother was not an obvious one for Janet, because she never had the urge to have children that she felt many other women seemed to have. To this day, despite being pregnant, she believes that a woman can live a very happy and satisfied life and never play the role of mother. But in the end, they did eventually decide, as mentioned in Chapter Three, to have children after a close friend of Janet's passed unexpectedly. I asked them how they thought this choice would affect their current lifestyle.

> **Janet:** I will miss the travel. We go on these really big trips and it's hard with children.

> **Allyson:** Do you think you can't travel with a kid?
> **Janet:** I am sure we could, it's how comfortable would I feel doing it. I am sure its doable, but it takes more.
> **Michael:** I am not so worried. I like to travel and I have enjoyed it. I will not have a bigger adventure than this. Nothing is more excited or new than having a child.

While Janet is sad about leaving their adventurous traveling lifestyle behind and has resigned herself to a different, more organized way of travel, Michael sees having children as the biggest adventure of his life. For him, this makes it easier to move forward with having children. I also asked them if they thought their relationship would change.

> **Janet:** I am concerned because someone has to stay home with the kid. I want to try to still do stuff together and also make time for ourselves.
> **Michael:** Part of the reason I think that our marriage has been successful for a decade is that we have had our own interests that we have followed. So this will be a change. I mean already we have spent more time together over the past four months.
> **Allyson:** So is some ways the baby might bring you closer.
> **Michael:** Yeah, without a doubt.

Unlike other couples I interviewed, Janet and Michael were the first couple to view having a child as bringing them together, rather than creating a buffer between partners. For them it was normal in their marriage to give the other partner a lot of free time and space to allow him/her to follow his/her individual interests. For instance, Janet has been working hard for years at Kendo, a type of martial arts. Since getting pregnant though, they find themselves spending a lot of time together getting ready for the baby. They see having a child together as an opportunity to develop their own relationship to a new level.

6.4 A Few Surprises

As it has been almost six months since I started my interviews with the Dual Income No Kids couples, I was curious to know if any other couples had joined the pregnancy club

with Janet and Michael and Mindy and Joe. Sure enough, after following up with the eight other couples, two more have confirmed that they too have decided to take the parenthood plunge and are currently pregnant. The newly expecting couples include Wendy and James and Bonnie and Mason, two of the Colorado couples. I was able to briefly catch up with both couples to see how they were feeling now that they were transitioning out of being DINKs. The information below captures the email responses from the couples at the end of February 2012. Wendy and James were thrilled with the news that they were pregnant.

> **Allyson:** How are you feeling now that you are pregnant?
> **Wendy:** We're excited and nervous, but feel we've been ready for a while. But still nervous about what a big change it'll be, although it'll be fantastic!
> **Allyson:** What has changed most in your life already?
> **Wendy:** Not too much. We did take a "babymoon" (although it was originally planned to just be a vacation- our friend was getting married in FL and we had already made a vacation out of it before we started trying). I'm cherishing the times we get to go to the movies and go out to nice restaurants more now. Spending more time reading about being pregnant/prepping for the baby! Lol

When speaking about how things are changing, it is interesting to note that really, what she is describing is the continuation of the DINK mentality. But now, rather than preparing for children in broad terms, like earning an education and starting a career, she is discussing activities that are more specifically tied children; that, and last rite activities like going on trips that will be more difficult to take with an infant.

> **Allyson:** Do you think this will be a big transition?
> **Wendy:** Yes and no- it'll be a big change for our day to day routines- waking up earlier, not sleeping through nights, busier in the early evenings, rearranging the house, more clutter around the house, etc, but I don't think it'll cut down much on our social lives, as we tend to be homebodies and usually get together with family/friends at our/their house anyway.

Wendy seems to be optimistic about the transition. She acknowledges that there will be minor changes in the way they live, but she believes that fundamentally it will stay the same. Really, she and James are just excited about the prospect of their future child.

> **Allyson:** Are you excited about the future?
> **Wendy and James:** YES! We're not getting any younger, I think (hope) we'll be good parents, and having a child will change who we are/our perspectives in (good) ways I could never imagine, from what I hear.
> **Allyson:** Any final thoughts about leaving DINK life behind?
> **Wendy:** I really enjoyed having the extra income, having all the time in the world to ourselves, but I'm ready to start a family.

Having taking the leap of faith that this decision will work out for the best, the couple is fully committed to their changing lifestyle. Having enjoyed life as DINKs, they are optimistic that their life with children will be equally, if not more enjoyable.

Bonnie and Mason, the maybe babies couple, are also very excited about their news. At the same time, they are a bit astonished that they got pregnant so quickly without really trying. Her quick note below sums up how they are feeling now that she is pregnant.

> **Bonnie:** Guess, what? I am pregnant! That was quick huh? One of Mason's first comments was "You know why this happened so quick right? It's because we did that DINK interview"! We are very excited. Life hasn't changed a ton yet (except that I go to bed a lot earlier), but we know it's coming. We know this will be a big transition but we feel we are as ready as we can be. Our DINK life has been great, but we are excited to begin our family.

After overcoming a bit of shock at how quickly they conceived, Bonnie and Mason, like the rest of the pregnant DINK couples, have accepted they are leaving their past lifestyle behind. But they are ready: they are ready to move forward; they are ready for change; and they are ready to start a new chapter in their life. They are not the only ones who are ready.

6.5 A Personal Reflection

One late autumn's morning, I busied myself around the house moving from box to box: filling, taping and labeling. We were in the process of trying to get our house ready to sell, but really, I was striving to stay calm through distraction. Tick tick tick. It was not working very well, as I kept looking towards the bathroom where my, and my husband's future was being decided. Tick tick tick. We were on our third month of trying to conceive a baby and both of us, self-proclaimed over-achievers, were getting a little frustrated with the lack of the desired result. Tick tick tick.

I looked over at the oven clock anxiously and saw that the allotted time was up; I was or I wasn't. I decided to give it extra time so there could be no doubt. Tick tick tick. After five more minutes of aimlessly packing, I worked up the courage to check the results. On the way to the bathroom I kept silently chanting to myself that I probably wasn't pregnant. After all, I hadn't been the two times before. With a deep breath, I hesitantly glanced down at the pregnancy test and there before me was what I had hoped to see, "Pregnant". With one small word, the life husband and I had known and loved was going to be forever changed. We were passing through DINK.

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APPENDIX

DINK Survey Questions
My parents put a lot of pressure on me to have children.
My parents have always supported my decision-making.
My parents have always made time for each other outside of their children.
I grew up in a nuclear family (mother, father, children).
People in my family would think it is strange not to have children.*
My parents stressed the importance of higher education for myself and my siblings.
I have a close family member who has waited until he/she was at least 30 to have children.
I was raised in a part of the country, where getting married and having children is expected.
My parents would be very disappointed if I did not have children.
My partner and I actively discuss the decision of having children or not.
My partner and I spend a lot of time doing things we like to do together.
My relationship with my partner is based on constant give and take.
My partner and I respect each other's independence.
I am commited to making my partner happy in our relationship.
One of my main concerns for having children is that it will change my relationship with my partner.*
Most of my friends where I live have already had children.
My partner and I spend most of our free time with friends who do not have children.
If I were to have children, I probably would not see my friends as much.
I feel left out not having children yet.
My friends have done a good job at balancing work and children.
Having children seems to have negatively influenced some of my friends' marriages.*
Children seem to decrease intimacy in my friends' relationships.
I feel having children is expected within our society.*
Having children at my age is the normal thing to do.
People constantly ask me when am I going to have a child.
I feel like it is more acceptable to wait until your 30s to have children where I live.
Money is the main reason my partner and I have not had children yet.
Having children would greatly affect the type of lifestyle my partner and I enjoy.

The recession has affected my partner and my decision to have children right now.
I am worried to have a child right now because of the current economic situation.
I feel that women have more pressure to have children than men in our society.*
Being a mother is essential to being a woman.
Education and career opportunities for women is greatly influencing their decision to have children.
It is easier to be an older father than an older mother.*
I was raised in a religious household with traditional views of marriage and family.
I currently go to religious service on a regular basis.
My religious views have affected my decision to have children.
Technology advances in medicine have reduced the pressure to have children before 30.
I am confident that I will be able to have children after 30 if I want them.
In vetero therapy, egg donation and other medical treatments are acceptable ways to have children later in life.
I feel free to choose who I want to be.*
It would not upset me not to have children.
I would rather focus on other personal goals than have children.
I know the direction I want my life to take and work towards it every day.
My personal goals have affected my decision not to have children right now.
Having children will keep me from doing the things in life I like to do.
I feel empowered to make choices in my life.
I do not feel encumbered by outside pressures in making the decision to have children.*
I feel free to decide my own life path, despite what my family, friends, or society expects.
I feel that not having children is a viable option for people in this day in age.
I feel earning my degree was very important.
I would be missing out on a key aspect of life if I didn't have children.
I feel that having a child is the next step of my life path.
I spend a lot of time at work and often bring my work home.
Having children would greatly disrupt my career path.
I am not prepared to have children yet.*
I will have children after I am able to do the other things in life I want to do.
My partner and I are a family even without having children.

* Represents a question that I requested the participants to explain their selection in a free form comment area.