CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES OF THE CHILDLESS IN A PRONATALIST SOCIETY

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert Earl Reed entitled "Challenging Stereotypes of the Childless in a Pronatalist Society." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Sociology.

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We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Department Chair

Accepted:

Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

To my wife, Cynthia Kay Shinabarger Reed, Ph.D. (Psychology), Ph.D. (Sociology) for the support and encouragement she gave that made this dissertation possible.

To the childless in the U.S...

The impetus for this study has been my own experience as a childfree individual. Several years ago, after hearing that I was not a father, an elderly man looked at me and exclaimed "You better get busy, son!" Such reactions are not typical of the ones I have encountered. Few people have made negative remarks upon learning I am voluntarily childless. I have found fulfillment in my life as a childless adult through a myriad of other roles. The results of this study indicate to me that many other childless adults in America are doing the same. Although available research indicates the existence of negative stereotypes regarding the childless, I have not felt stigmatized by my childless identity. Perhaps Kohli and Albertini's (2009) conclusion that childlessness is now "normal" is infiltrating the consciousness of people in the U.S.

However, it is quite possible that my experience is not typical. In recent years most of my time has been spent in college classrooms, either as a student or as a faculty member. Therefore, I am surrounded by others who, like me, are aware of pronatalist ideology and its potential to limit choices regarding parenthood. I have spoken with other childless adults who felt pressured by family, friends, and sometimes even coworkers and strangers, to become parents. I feel it is important that social scientists give voice to these individuals. Being a member of a negatively stereotyped group has the potential to impact self-concept and social identity in harmful ways. If we as scientists give voice to this population perhaps we can begin to change perceptions of both the involuntarily and voluntarily childless in the U.S.

ABSTRACT

ROBERT EARL REED

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES OF THE CHILDLESS

IN A PRONATALIST SOCIETY

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Childless adults in the U.S. have been stereotyped as unhappy, dissatisfied, and selfish. Some studies have examined stereotypes of the childless by looking at the relationship between parental status and happiness and life satisfaction. However, no previous studies have examined the relationship between parental status and selfishness and no existing studies have examined the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness along with the variables known to impact them. This study adds to the literature by examining these stereotypes by testing the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness along with age, sex, race, health, education, income, and marital status. Data from the 2004 GSS were utilized. The relationship between parental status, happiness, life satisfaction, selfishness and control variables was tested using descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling. Two structural equation models were analyzed; the first one tested the relationship between parental status and happiness and life satisfaction; the second tested the relationship between parental status and selfishness. The results did not provide evidence that the stereotypes of the childless are correct as they indicated that parental status did not impact happiness, life satisfaction, or selfishness.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Childlessness in the United States

In the United States the social norm is to have children and the majority of couples do not deviate from this norm. Ninety percent of married couples in the U.S. have children and most adolescents and young adults report that they plan to eventually have children (Koropeckyj-Cox, Roman, & Moras 2007). Of those adults who do not have children, some want to have children but have been unable to do so (involuntarily childless) while others choose a life without children (voluntarily childless).

While parenthood continues to be the norm in the U.S., childlessness has been increasing for more than thirty years among adult women both single and married (Abma & Martinez 2006; Wood & Newton 2006). During the period from 1976 to 2002, the percentage of childless women aged 35-39 nearly doubled (Downs 2003). In the year 2000 close to 19 percent of women in their early 40s and almost 30 percent of women in their early 30s had no children (National Center for Health Statistics 2002). Another increasing trend is delayed parenthood. The average age of first-time mothers has been increasing and a higher percentage of women over age 35 are giving birth for the first time (Martin, Hamilton, Sutton, Ventura, Menacker, & Munson 2005). Delaying parenthood can have the unintended consequence of inadvertent childlessness due to infertility later in life (Koropeckyj-Cox, Roman, & Moras 2007).

The increase in the childlessness trend has begun to change perceptions of the childless lifestyle. In an article on childlessness published in 2009, Kohli and Albertini referred to childlessness as one of a range of "'normal' arrangements of private life" (p. 1172). The percentage of U.S. women age 40 to 44 with no children was 19 in 2004 (Biddlecom and Martin 2006). The rate of childlessness in the U.S. was between 15-25 percent in 2009 (Basten 2009). As more adults remain childless the proportion of childless individuals in late adulthood is also increasing. In 2007 older adults without children represented about 20 percent of the U.S. population (Dykstra & Hagestad 2007). It is estimated that in the year 2030, 30 percent of older adults in the United States will be childless (Dykstra & Hagestad 2007).

Couples who are involuntarily childless are sometimes treated sympathetically; however, those who are voluntarily childless often receive negative reactions to their decision (Park 2005). Families may express disappointment or react with denial, assuming the couple will eventually change their minds. Friends, coworkers, and others may react with surprise or disdain. Couples who choose not to have children are sometimes perceived as selfish, unhappy and unsatisfied later in life, or as child-haters (Park 2005). Thus, many people in the U.S. stigmatize the choice not to have children.

Although the involuntarily childless are perceived sympathetically by some, those who are infertile and involuntarily childless are also stigmatized. The stigma of childlessness affects many; approximately five million women in the U.S. are infertile (Parry 2005). These women are sometimes perceived as inadequate, lacking, incomplete, sick, abnormal, and not "real women." Thus, whether involuntarily or voluntarily childless, individuals without children are likely to receive negative reactions

to their status as nonparents (Dever & Saugeres 2004, Letherby 2002, Park 2002, 2005) and to be perceived as unhappy, dissatisfied, and selfish (DeOllos & Kapinus 2002, Dever & Saugeres 2004, Koropeckyj-Cox, Romano, & Moras 2007). Although negative stereotypes of the childless abound, few studies (Margolis & Myrskylä 2011, DeOllos and Kapinus 2002, Glenn and McLanahan 1981, Burman & de Anda 1986, Callan 1986, 1987, Weiss 1993) have explored the accuracy of perceptions of the childless. The purpose of this study is to endeavor to narrow this gap by investigating the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness.

Prevalence of Childlessness in the United States

The prevalence of childlessness in the United States has varied over time. In the late 19th century the level of childlessness varied widely by region in the U.S. with levels in the West and South ranging from six to eight percent while levels approached 30 percent in some northeastern states (Morgan 1991). In the early 20th century, census data indicate an increase in childlessness during the Great Depression and a decrease in childlessness for the birth cohort from 1925-34 that produced the baby boom (Koropeckyj-Cox & Call 2007, Morgan 1991). Census data from women 45 to 49 years old in 1940 indicated a prevalence of childlessness of 16.1 percent (Grabill and Glick 1959).

From the late 20th to early 21st centuries the prevalence of childlessness has continued to change. In spite of the fact that taking on the role of parent continues to be the norm for adults in the United States, the number of those who have never become parents has been increasing. In 1985, only 11% of women in America between the ages of 40 and 44 years did not have children. By 2004, the number of childless women in this

age range had nearly doubled (Rothrauff and Cooney 2008). In 2000, close to 29% of women in their early 30s had no children and 19% of women in their early 40s were childless (National Center for Health Statistics 2002). For women in their early 20s, child-bearing has reached an all-time low (Hamilton, Martin, Ventura, Sutton, and Menacker 2005).

Many childless women in America are childless by choice. Of the 5.4 million women in the U.S. in 1994 who did not have children and did not expect to have children in the future, 5.1 million were voluntarily childless (Strobino, Grason, and Minkovitz 2002). Many other women are childless due to infertility. In 1995, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 9.3 million women in the United States were being treated for infertility and 2.1 million U.S. couples self-identified as infertile (Parry 2005). Compared to women, statistics on childless men are much rarer but in older cohorts the rates of childlessness among married men were comparable to the rates of their wives (Rowland 2007). Rates for men have been less published because historically women were perceived as responsible for fertility (Greene and Biddlecom 1997).

Structural constraints related to race and socioeconomic status may limit choices regarding marriage and parenthood for some groups in the United States. In the marriage market, men and women organize marital unions under free trade (Oropesa, Lichter, & Anderson 1994). A structural issue impacting the marriage market is the marriage squeeze, a phenomenon in which there is a gender imbalance in the ratio of available unmarried women and men (South 1991). Availability is influenced not only by the actual number of potential partners but also by the perception of whether a person is

perceived as an acceptable potential mate, a perception that is often influenced by socioeconomic status. In a study on marriage markets and marital choice, Lichter, Anderson, and Hayward (1995) found that many women, especially Black women, are willing to relinquish marriage rather than marry a man who is not economically attractive.

In recent decades, the rates of marriage among Black women have declined. The retreat from marriage among African American women had been attributed to a marriage squeeze caused by several factors including higher incarceration and mortality rates among Black men, employment dislocations due to industrial restructuring, as well as an increase in the percentage of Black men marrying women outside their race (Crowder & Tolnay 2000, Oropesa, Lichter, & Anderson 1994). The marriage squeeze is said to most constrain the marital opportunities of high-status Black women who may have few choices for suitable mates in light of hypergamy norms (females marrying "up" in socioeconomic status) (South & Lloyd 1992). While the marriage squeeze among Blacks in the U.S. may constrain choices, it does not prevent all Black women from becoming parents since norms and social networks exist that support single parenting among African Americans (South 1991).

The economy has constrained choices regarding parenthood for more than a century (Morgan 1991 & Ritchey and Stokes 1974). The last two decades have seen a dramatic decline in the fertility rate in former Eastern Block countries in Europe. Haskova (2008) conducted a study of factors influencing the decision not to become parents with data collected during face-to-face interviews with 5,510 adults in the Czech Republic in 2005. Among the most frequently reported reasons for choosing to remain childless was the economic situation. In addition, many reported concerns about employment and lack

of available housing, factors influenced by the economy (Haskova 2008). It is possible that similar economic concerns in the U.S. influence American adults today when making decisions about whether to become parents.

U.S. Gender Roles and Cultural Expectations

Unlike sex, an ascribed status and the biological aspect of being male or female, gender is a social construction and refers to an achieved status constructed through cultural and social means (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender is active; it involves behaving in ways that adhere to societal expectations regarding appropriate behavior for one's sex (West and Zimmerman 1987). In the United States, men are expected to be strong, agentic, forceful, independent, analytical, dominant, and aggressive while women are expected to be warm, sensitive, gentle, soft-spoken, caring, compassionate, and to love children (Prentice and Carranza 2002). The expectations of women involve characteristics that are considered conducive to mothering while many of the traits associated with men are conducive to succeeding in the workforce, an important ability in order to provide for a family.

Gender roles in the U.S. changed over the course of the 20th century. Women became more prevalent in the workforce and the number of stay-at-home mothers decreased. Many women now balance work and parenting responsibilities (Cinamon & Rich 2002). In spite of evidence suggesting that mothers' time spent working outside the home has not had a significant negative impact on the well-being of children; women's employment reduces fertility in the United States and other developed countries (Bianchi 2000). Some women make the choice to pursue a career in lieu of parenthood. The decision to forego parenthood when focusing on work may possibly be influenced by

concern regarding the potential for work-family conflict. Work-family conflict has been associated with physical complaints, burnout, decreased occupational and family well-being, psychological costs, and life and job dissatisfaction (Cinamon & Rich 2002). Choosing to pursue both employment and parenthood not only increases the risk for work-family conflict but may also impede career development (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick 2004). When working women become mothers they are often perceived as warm rather than competent. Compared to the childless and working fathers, employers are less likely to be interested in hiring, educating, and promoting working mothers (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick 2004).

Contemporary feminist theorists advise caution in regards to considering the results of studies focusing on negative outcomes of trying to balance work and motherhood as they see such emphasis as a backlash to feminism (Bulbeck 2010). Feminists have advocated that women, like men, can "have it all" and successfully have a career and family life. They see attempts to dissuade women who want both a career and children as society's way of forcing women back into traditional gender roles (Bulbeck 2010).

Gender roles have changed for men as well as women. During much of the 20th century, men were expected to be good providers and emphasis was placed on having a good job. During the latter part of the 20th century, expectations began to change. Today fathers, while still expected to be providers, are also expected to co-parent and take a more active role in child-rearing (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, and Lamb 2000). Yet working fathers today are not perceived in the same way as working mothers. Working women trade perceived competence for perceived warmth when becoming

mothers but working men gain perceived warmth when becoming fathers without sacrificing perceived competence (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick 2004).

While the specifics of gender roles have changed, what remains the same is the expectation that adult men and women will become parents (Blatterer 2007, Parry 2005, 2005b). Parenthood is highly valued in U.S. society; adults who become parents are believed to experience numerous rewards both personally and socially. These rewards include personal growth, emotional bonds with children, enhanced social status, a sense of leaving a legacy, and access to social capital (Koropeckyj-Cox and Pendell 2007). Failure to meet society's expectations regarding fulfilling parental roles can result in devaluation and punishment (Prentice and Carranza 2002).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Men and women in the United States experience adult development in a society that views parenthood as essential to achieving adult status (Blatterer 2007, Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003, Rothrauff and Cooney 2008). Raising children is believed to help adults become more other-focused, less selfish, and more responsible (Kemkes 2008). Failure of adults to take on the role of parent is negatively perceived. It is a prevalent belief among people in the U.S. that adults who remain childless are less happy, experience less life satisfaction, and are more selfish when compared to parents (DeOllos & Kapinus 2002, Kemkes 2008, LaMastro 2001, Letherby 2002). Although there are many negative stereotypes regarding childless adults in America, little research has been done to test the accuracy of these stereotypes.

The purpose of this study was to endeavor to narrow this gap by investigating the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. To

that end, two research questions were explored. The first was, "What is the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness?" Although societal expectations are that parents will be happier, more satisfied, and less selfish than nonparents, the relationship between all of these variables has yet to be empirically tested. There are numerous variables that can impact a person's perceived happiness, life satisfaction, and selfish behavior. Available research indicates that perceived happiness and life satisfaction are influenced by age, income, education, marital status, health, race, and sex (Argyle 1999, Gerdtham and Johannesson 2001, Haring-Hidore, Stock, Okun, and Witter 1985). The relationship between parental status and happiness and parental status and life satisfaction is not linear; rather, the variables mentioned above serve as control variables that impact the relationship between them. Previous studies have found a relationship between sex and selfishness (Eckel & Grossman 1998) and age and selfishness (List 2004). Therefore, the second question explored was "How do age, income, sex, education, marital status, health, and race interact with parental status to predict happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness?"

This study empirically tested the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. It is logical to conclude that failure to meet societal expectations in regards to gender roles could negatively impact happiness, life satisfaction, and the propensity to behave in an unselfish manner. However, it is also probable based on the social constructionist perspective, that childless adults construct other adult roles through which they derive happiness and satisfaction and through which they develop unselfish behaviors. Thus, the first hypothesis tested was that "Parental status will not be a significant predictor of happiness, selfishness, or life

satisfaction when age, income, sex, education, marital status, health, and race are controlled for." Currently available research indicates that numerous variables can impact happiness (Borooah 2006, Gerdtham & Johannesson 2001, Haller and Hadler 2006, Veenhoven 2005), life satisfaction (Laubach, Schumacher, Mundt, & Brähler 2000, Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener 2004, Mousavi, Shiani, Mohammadi, Sadjadi, Tabatabaee, and Assari 2011, Selim 2008), and selfishness (Andreoni & Vesterlund 2001, Eckel & Grossman 1998, 2008, List 2004). The second hypothesis was that "Age, income, sex, education, marital status, health, and race will impact life satisfaction." The third hypothesis "Life satisfaction will impact happiness and happiness will impact life satisfaction." was based on currently available studies indicating a possible connection between these variables (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith. 1999, Pavot and Diener 2008, Peterson, Park, & Seligman 2005).

RATIONALE

This study empirically tested the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. While some studies have compared the happiness of parents and nonparents, no previous studies have examined parental status as a predictor of happiness along with age, income, education, sex, marital status, race, and health—other variables known to impact happiness. This study extends the work of DeOllos and Kapinus (2002) and Somers (1993). Using 2004 GSS data, the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness was examined. Also, although previous studies have compared parents and nonparents on happiness, previous studies have not examined parental status as a predictor of life satisfaction or selfishness. Since numerous factors including age, income, sex,

education, marital status, health, and race have been shown to influence happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness, these were included as control variables.

This study also has important implications due to the potential harm of childless adults from stigma (Cohen & Garcia 2008). The childless have been stereotyped as weird and abnormal (Mollen 2006) and studies have found the childless are devalued compared to parents and perceived more negatively on most behavioral and personality traits (Kemkes 2008). The childless are perceived as more selfish and immature compared to parents and even the childless perceive themselves as more self-centered than adults with children (Kemkes 2008). Research on stereotype threat has found that it impacts performance in academic (Wout, Shih, Jackson, & Sellers 2009) and employment settings (Kirnan, Alfieri, Bragger, & Harris 2009) and reduces a person's memory functioning (Rydell, McConnell, Beilock 2009; Schmader & Johns 2003). Stereotype threat refers to a situation in which a target of a stereotype must contend with the threat of being judged by others through the lens of the stereotype (Wout, Shih, Jackson, & Sellers 2009). The childless may perceive a threat of being negatively stereotyped in social or employment situations due to the stereotypes that the childless are selfish and immature – characteristics desired neither by friends nor employers. Research on stereotypes has been used to develop models through which intergroup contact has reduced the impact of stereotypes on behavior (Crisp and Abrams 2008). Such research has also been used to develop guidelines for counselors working with negatively stereotyped groups (Mollen 2006). This study could contribute to such efforts and may have cultural and policy implications.

PLAN OF WORK

This chapter provides information on the prevalence of childlessness in the United States. In addition, this chapter describes U.S. gender roles and expectations. Finally, the purpose of the study is described and the study's rationale is identified.

The second chapter discusses perceptions of the childless in America. Chapter two also describes characteristics of the childless. Finally, correlates of happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness are identified.

Chapter three describes the theoretical perspective used as a framework for the study. In addition, the chapter discusses gender ideology and dominant gender discourse. Social constructionist perspective is described as it applies to the agency exercised by those who choose to remain childless.

Chapter four describes the methodology for this study. First, key terms in the study are defined. Secondly, the characteristics of the participants in the 2004 General Social Survey are identified. Thirdly, a description of the sampling technique is given followed by the procedures used for collecting the data. Next, the techniques used in this study to analyze the data are outlined. Finally, the operationalization of the variables used in the study is discussed.

Chapter five describes the results of the study. First, descriptive statistics and crosstabulations for variables in the sample used are provided. Next is a discussion of the correlation matrices and lastly, the structural equation model is described.

Chapter six starts with a summary of the results. Following is a discussion of the results in relation to the theoretical model and research questions. Next, theoretical,

policy, and cultural implications are discussed. Chapter six ends with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United States is a country that promotes pronatalist ideology through various socialization agents. From early childhood on, people in the U.S. are exposed to books, television shows, movies, and family members directly or indirectly encouraging them to have children (Änggård 2005). Those adults who do not adhere to the social norm to become parents are subject to negative reactions including stereotyping and disapproval (Kemkes 2008, Morgan and King 2001, Sanchez, Crocker, and Boike 2005). In this chapter, perceptions of the childless in America will be discussed. Negative perceptions of the childless lead to stigma and techniques to manage stigma. These techniques will also be discussed. Next, characteristics of the childless in the U.S. and existing studies comparing happiness and life satisfaction in parents and nonparents will be described. Finally, correlates of several characteristics associated with stereotypes about the childless will be identified including correlates of happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHILDLESS IN THE U.S.

According to Park (2005), people who choose to remain childless in the United States today do so in a social context that is strongly, although subtly, pronatalist. Pronatalism is an ideology that having children is conducive to the well-being of individuals, families, and society. Pronatalism is generally endorsed by religious groups and is also associated with achieving full adult status (Park, 2005). People who choose

to remain childless possess a stigmatized identity and must find ways to manage this stigma when interacting with others.

Research conducted during the past two decades has demonstrated negative attitudes toward individuals who are voluntarily childless. Lampman and Dowling-Guyer (1995) explored attitudes toward voluntary versus involuntary childlessness. The results of their study indicated that voluntarily childless couples are perceived more negatively than involuntarily childless couples or couples with children. Voluntarily childless couples were viewed as lazy, insensitive, lonely, and unhappy. Involuntary childlessness was not uniformly stigmatizing in their study (Lampman & Dowling-Guyer 1995).

In spite of the findings of Lampman and Dowling-Guyer (1995) suggesting that voluntarily childless adults are perceived more negatively than involuntarily childless individuals, other studies indicate that the involuntarily childless are also stigmatized (Letherby 2002; Parry 2005). Individuals without children are sometimes perceived as sick or abnormal, incomplete, selfish, and lacking (Calhoun and Selby 1980, Parry 2005). Childless women are confronted with assumptions that motherhood is central to femininity and that they are abnormal, immature, selfish or unfeminine for not being able to have children or for lacking a desire to have children (LaMastro 2001, Letherby and Williams 1999).

Letherby (2002) argues that voluntarily and involuntary childlessness should be thought of as a continuum rather than as dichotomous variables. Even those who at one point in their adulthood perceive themselves as involuntarily childless may later experience a shift in identity to voluntarily childless. Those who remain involuntarily childless for years and decide to remain childless rather than adopt may be stigmatized

just as much as the voluntarily childless and be perceived as selfish (Letherby 2002). Rowland (2007) also argues that an absolute distinction between involuntary and voluntary childlessness does not exist due to the constraining of choices by various circumstances.

Whether voluntarily or involuntarily, there is also a belief that people who do not have children will be lonely in late adulthood (Jamison, Franzini, & Kaplan 1979; Letherby 2002). However, Glenn and McLanahan (1981) compared parents and non-parents on life satisfaction and found no significant differences between the two groups. In spite of these findings, Letherby (2002) has found the expectation of loneliness and unhappiness in late adulthood to exist even amongst the childless themselves.

MANAGING THE STIGMA OF CHILDLESSNESS

The negative perceptions people in the U.S. have of those who remain childless leads to a stigmatization of those without children. The stigma becomes a part of what Goffman (1963) referred to as a social identity; an identity that goes beyond social status as it goes beyond the person's occupation and includes traits of the individual such as "honest" or "selfish." The childless have a stigma that Goffman (1963) labeled discreditable because it is not readily apparent (unlike a physical deformity might be) and can be hidden. One strategy for coping with a discreditable stigma is passing. An example of how a childless adult may pass as "normal" is by answering "Not yet." to the question "Do you have children?" However, such efforts may come at a cost since they can produce anxiety (Goffman 1963). Therefore, the stigmatized person must engage in information control according to Goffman (1963), deciding which persons to tell and not to tell.

The childless find various ways of managing stigma, including hiding or making excuses for their plans to remain without children (Shehan and Kammeyer 1997). The childless may also adopt an alternate worldview in order to shield themselves from the social pressure to have children (Veevers 1975). In a classic study examining the experiences of childfree women, Veevers (1975) found four defensive techniques used by childless women in order to maintain an alternate worldview.

One of these techniques, "selective perception of the consequences of parenthood," involves selectively paying attention to information that supports the person's views regarding parenthood while denying information that contradicts her view. Women engaging in this technique pay attention to and believe all of the negative comments they hear parents making about raising children but they ignore any positive comments made about parenthood (Veevers 1975). A second technique for maintaining an alternate worldview of parenting involves a differential association. The childless isolate themselves physically and psychologically from worldviews of parenting that conflict with their own. In one study, Veevers (1975) discovered that the majority of women in a sample of 81 wives who were voluntarily childless received social support from their husbands and over time lost touch with friends who became parents. In addition, these women spent time with single adults as well as with adults who were parents but shared similar attitudes in regards to parenting. For example, some of these parents acknowledged that remaining childless had been their preference but they had become pregnant by accident (Veevers 1975).

A third technique used by the women in Veevers (1975) study involved the use of trial parenting to confirm existing belief structures about parenthood. To accomplish this

women typically "borrowed" other peoples' children for an evening or weekend. It was rare for such experiments to be enjoyable experiences and therefore the women had further evidence that they would not find parenting rewarding (Veevers 1975). The fourth and final technique used by childfree women to maintain their worldview was capitalizing upon social ambivalence towards parenthood. When other people showed disapproval of their decision to remain childfree, these women reinterpreted the disapproval of parents as envy of the lifestyle the childless enjoy; a lifestyle characterized by freedom (Veevers, 1975).

Not only may the childless alter their worldview regarding parenthood to manage the stigma associated with their choice but they also use techniques to deal with the negative reactions of others. Because the choice to remain childless is an unexpected decision that is disapproved of by others, childless adults may be expected to explain their decision to family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers. Scott and Lyman (1968) state that when people are in situations in which others may disapprove of their behavior, they are likely to give "accounts." They define an account as "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry;" it is "a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior..." (Scott and Lyman 1968, p. 46). The childless may give accounts by making excuses or by justifying their behavior. Excuses are defined by Scott and Lyman (1968) as "socially approved vocabularies for mitigating or relieving responsibility when conduct is questioned" (p. 47). People may excuse their behaviors by claiming that they were unavoidable, accidental, someone else's fault, or against their own wills. Scott and Lyman (1968) define justifications as "accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but

denies the pejorative quality associated with it" (p. 47). When people use justifications they admit their behavior is wrong but they claim that the situation they were in either permitted or required the act.

The use of accounts and justifications was examined in a study of 14 voluntarily childless women and eight voluntarily childless men. In this study, Park (2002) discovered numerous techniques used by the childless to manage stigma. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were used to discuss the techniques the childless participants used to manage their stigmatized identities. The strategies used by the childless included: identity substitution, passing, claiming biological deficiency, condemning the condemners, redefining the situation, and asserting a right to self-fulfillment.

When the childless engage in the strategy of identity substitution, they either directly state or indirectly imply that they cannot have children (Park 2002). This enables them to adopt an identity as involuntarily childless; an identity they believe is less stigmatized. Passing is a strategy used to give others the impression that one day you will have children. The result of this strategy is that others perceive the childless person as "normal" and therefore the stigma of childlessness is removed (Park 2002).

When claiming biological deficiency, the childless person uses excuses for childlessness that absolve or minimize their choice. One way a childless woman might use this strategy is by claiming that she does not have a maternal instinct (Park 2002). Another strategy used by the childless to manage stigma is condemning the condemners. In this strategy childless people admit they are deviant but claim that others have committed worse acts. This strategy is sometimes used by childless individuals when others label them as selfish for not having children. The childless

person may state that numerous people have children for selfish reasons including having someone to take care of them when they get older (Park 2002).

One proactive strategy used by the childless is redefining the situation; an approach that involves asserting the social contribution of alternative choices. If childless people are asked why they do not have children they may reply by asking "Why did you decide to have children?" Such a question asks for the other person to account for normative behavior, according to Park (2002). Finally, some voluntarily childless adults will use asserting their right to self-fulfillment as a strategy for stigma management. The childless person will claim that having children is a choice and not an obligation and they have a right to do whatever makes them happy (Park 2002).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILDLESS

Historically, childlessness has been influenced by a structural component in U.S. society – the economy. In the 19th century difficult economic conditions sometimes led to delays in marriage and childrearing (Koropeckyj-Cox & Call 2007, Morgan 1991). Daughters sometimes worked for pay and provided income sorely needed by the family and therefore these daughters may have experienced pressure to continue providing family support and to delay marriage (Morgan 1991). Thus, difficult economic circumstances could increase the likelihood of childlessness (Koropeckyj-Cox & Call 2007).

Although sometimes those of lower socioeconomic status have experienced structural *constraints* that led to childlessness, for those of higher status better economic conditions have provided the *opportunity* to remain childless. Reviewing data from the 1910 census on childlessness, Morgan (1991) found that husbands' occupation was the

best predictor of childlessness among married women. From the 1910 census data a husband's occupation provided the best measure of social status. The data indicated that women whose husbands were professionals, compared to those women married to farmers, were much less likely to bear children. Morgan (1991) speculated that the greater childlessness among women of higher status was not due to involuntary causes such as disease or poor health because these women, compared to the lower-status women, had better access to health care. Morgan (1991) concluded that high-status women, many of whom were well educated, had the resources, knowledge, and skills to voluntarily avoid pregnancy.

Census data from 1967 also indicate that women in specific socioeconomic statuses are more likely to be and remain childless. Ritchey and Stokes (1974) examined census data and found that a negative relationship between income and childlessness existed in the mid-20th century. When looking at couples with employed wives, they found that projected childlessness (couples who had no children and planned never to have children) and childlessness increased as income increased. In addition to income, there was also a relationship between education and childlessness. Women with higher educational achievement were more likely to be childless compared to women with less educational achievement (Ritchey and Stokes 1974). Studies published in the late 20th century indicated that childless women compared to women with children were less traditional in their attitudes and behavior, possibly as a result of their higher educational achievement (Bram 1984, Brown & Magarick 1981). Characteristics of childless women also included working in professional occupations and in fields that traditionally were dominated by males (Bram 1984). In addition to

having less traditional attitudes and more education compared to parents, the childless were also less likely to have a religious affiliation in the late 20th century and wives in childless couples had higher occupational levels than their parental counterparts (Brown & Magarick 1981, Feldman 1981).

Research published in the 21st century shows similarities to earlier time periods as childlessness continues to be related to educational attainment of women and socioeconomic status. Those who have remained childless tend to have more education and are more likely to hold managerial and professional jobs (Cwikel, Gramotnev, & Lee 2006, Koropeckyj-Cox & Call 2007, Park 2005, Portanti & Whitworth 2009). When compared to couples with children, it is more common with childless couples for both spouses to be earning relatively high incomes and they are less likely to have traditional gender role orientations. Childless adults, who are childless by choice, when compared to parents are also less conventional, less religious, and more likely to live in urban areas (Park 2005).

Research on characteristics of the childless in countries outside the United States has revealed similarities to the childless in the U.S. Koropeckyj-Cox and Call (2007) conducted a cross-national study of the childless that included seven countries: Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Those who were childless among younger cohorts across countries tend to have higher levels of education and occupations as well as higher incomes. In older cohorts, childless elders were more likely to live alone or in an institution compared to elders with children (Koropeckyj-Cox and Call 2007). In sub-Saharan Africa, where pronatalism is more engrained in the culture, childless women are typically involuntarily

childless. This leads to a characteristic not seen in some other cultures – being in a polygamous union. If a woman experiences infertility her husband is more likely to marry additional wives compared to married women with children (Timaeus & Reynar 1998).

Studies conducted in the United Kingdom also indicate that childless women have higher levels of education and are more likely than parents to be employed in professional occupations (Baum & Cope 1980, Kiernan 1989). A recently published article using U.K. longitudinal census data found that childless women, compared to mothers, had higher educational attainment, higher participation in the labor market, were more likely to be employed in professional, managerial, and technical occupations, and had higher socioeconomic status (Portanti & Whitworth 2009).

One study comparing the childless and parents in Canada indicated that voluntarily childless couples were more highly successful educationally, occupationally, and economically compared to couples with children (Ramu 1985). Another Canadian study found that the childless were in better health and more financially secure in late adulthood compared to elderly parents (Rempel 1985). Childless women in Australia are also financially better off and have higher levels of education than mothers (Cwikel, Gramotnev, & Lee 2006). Therefore, for the most part we see similarities in the characteristics of the childless cross-nationally.

PRIOR STUDIES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL STATUS AND HAPPINESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION

While no existing empirical studies have compared parents and nonparents on selfishness, a few have compared these groups on happiness and life satisfaction (Burman & de Anda 1986, Callan 1986, 1987, Glenn and McLanahan 1981). One

stereotype of the childless is that they experience lower levels of life satisfaction especially later in life when they will lack the benefit of social bonds with adult children. Glenn and McLanahan (1981) analyzed data from the 1973 through 1978 General Social Surveys to study psychological well-being in late adulthood (individuals age 50 and over). They compared those adults with children with those who had never had children and concluded that having had a child or children had no important effects on the psychological well-being of older adults in the U.S., at least no important effects on the dimensions of well-being studied.

A number of studies have examined marital happiness and life satisfaction in childless individuals and parents, with conflicting results (Angeles 2010, Margolis & Myrskylä 2011, DeOllos and Kapinus 2002). Comparing scores on life satisfaction measures, several studies found no difference between childless couples and couples with children (Burman & de Anda 1986, Callan 1986, 1987). However, Weiss (1993) has reported that childless couples have scored higher on life satisfaction scales than couples with children in numerous studies. Somers (1993) compared childless adults and parents on life satisfaction while controlling for religious affiliation, income, and age. She found that childless couples scored significantly higher on life satisfaction even after controlling for age. However, childless couples were not significantly higher on life satisfaction after controlling for religious affiliation or income (Somers 1993). Other studies have generally found that childless couples tend to have higher marital satisfaction ratings compared with couples with children (Burman & de Anda 1986; Callan 1984, 1987; Jacobson and Heaton 1991; Krishnan 1993; Monarch 1993). Somers (1993) suggests that perhaps the reason childless couples have higher levels of marital

satisfaction is because the center of attention in their marriage is the couple rather than children; thus, the couple is not distracted from the relationship by the daily demands and frustrations of parenthood.

Angeles (2010) studied the relationship between parental status and life satisfaction and how personal characteristics, such as marital status and income, influenced the relationship. He found that in general, children were positively related to life satisfaction and the effect increased with the number of children. However, marital status impacted the relationship in that children were positively related to life satisfaction for married individuals, but children were largely and negatively correlated with life satisfaction in those adults who were single, separated, and those who were cohabiting but not married (Angeles 2010). The author also found that for the most affluent respondents, compared to those of lower income levels, children tended to lower life satisfaction. Angeles (2010) speculated that this may be due to wealthier individuals focusing more on careers and financial success.

A recently published study examined the relationship between parental status and happiness using data from 86 countries (Margolis & Myrskylä 2011). The authors found that as the number of children increased, happiness decreased. The results of the study clarify why there is incongruity between the belief that children increase happiness and the fact that many research studies have found either an insignificant or negative relationship between parenthood and happiness. Margolis and Myrskylä (2011) found that parents in their 20s and 30s were less happy than childless adults of the same cohort. The authors concluded that the lower happiness of the parents was due to underestimating the cost of children as well as poorly predicting how much children

would impact their lifestyle. However, when comparing parents and childless adults over age 40 they found that parents were happier and concluded that later in life there is a focus on more positive aspects of parenting (Margolis & Myrskylä 2011).

CORRELATES OF HAPPINESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION

Extensive research has been conducted on the correlates of happiness. Variables that have been found to be related to happiness include: age, education, income, marital status, ethnicity, employment status, religion, health, and social participation. However, it is important to note that the available studies on correlates of happiness lack consistency in regards to measurement. While researchers typically rely on self-report measures, the wording of these items varies across studies (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999). One measurement that has been used for more than three decades is the Happiness Measure (HM) (Fordyce 1988). The HM has wide appeal and has been used in numerous studies measuring happiness in various disciplines (Courneya, Mackey, Bell, Jones, Field, & Fairey 2003, Fordyce 1983 & 1988, Furr & Funder 1998, Pacchetti, Mancini, Aglieri, Fundarò, Martignoni, & Nappi 2000, Weiss, Nicolas, & Daus. 1999, Wood, Magnell, & Jewell 1990). Two self-report measures of general happiness are included in the HM. The first uses an 11-point happiness/unhappiness scale and the second includes questions about how much time the respondent has spent in happy, unhappy, and neutral moods. The scoring procedure yields scores that range from 0 (unhappy) to 100 (happy) (Fordyce 1988). The HM has also been shown to have significant validity with measures of personality characteristics that have been associated with happiness as well as with measures of mood and it has had nonsignificant correlations with measures of social desirability bias (Fordyce 1983).

Numerous other measures of happiness have been used some of which are used only with specific populations (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999). For example, Bradburn's (1969) global happiness item and the Gurin Scale (Gurin, Veroff, & Feld 1960) were developed for use with geriatric populations. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) criticized the available measures of happiness for only assessing either affective or cognitive components or for using single-item global evaluations which they argued were not conducive to testing psychometric properties. Therefore, they developed a four-item Subjective Happiness Scale of global subjective happiness which their evaluations indicated had good reliability and validity when tested in the U.S. and Russia (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999).

In spite of the availability of instruments with good reliability and validity, studies often utilize a one-item global measure of happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999). Many studies use the item found on the General Social Survey (GSS) or a variant thereof (Glenn & Weaver 1979, Gerdthan & Johannesson 2001, Phillips 1967, Hadler & Hadler 2006). The GSS item measuring happiness asks: "Taking all together, how would you say things are these days – would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" In the following paragraphs, studies identifying correlates of happiness are discussed. The majority of these studies have used the GSS item for measuring happiness or a similarly worded self-report measure.

Happiness has been found to increase with age but the effects are small (Spreitzer and Snyder 1940). Many surveys have correlated educational level with measures of happiness. In all such studies, a small positive correlation has been found, usually of about .10 (Argyle 1999, Cantril 1965). The main explanation for the effect of

education on happiness is that it affects income and occupational status, both of which are correlates of happiness (Argyle 1999). There is a positive correlation between income and happiness but the correlation is usually quite small. Haring, Stock, and Okun (1984) found an average correlation of .17 between income and happiness. Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, and Diener (1993) found the correlation between income and happiness to be curvilinear, with a much stronger relation at the lower end of the income scale.

Marital status has often been found to be one of the strongest correlates of happiness and well-being (Glenn and Weaver 1979). Veenhoven (1994) found that the married are happier than those in any of the unmarried categories. In a meta-analysis of 58 studies, Haring-Hidore, Stock, Okun, and Witter (1985) found an overall correlation of .14 between marital status and happiness.

A relationship has also been found between ethnicity and happiness, with ethnic minorities having lower levels of happiness than Whites. However, this can be attributed to their lower incomes, less education, and less skilled jobs (Argyle 1999). Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) found that the employed are more likely than the nonemployed to describe themselves as happy. In a meta-analysis conducted by Haring et al. (1984), the correlation between employment and happiness was .18.

Many studies have found that happiness is greater for those who are more religious but the effect is small (Argyle 1999). In a meta-analysis of 28 studies conducted by Witter, Okun, Stock, and Haring (1984), the effect of religion on happiness was positive, of modest strength, and strongest for church attendance. However, there is some indication that religion may affect happiness through its effects on good health

(Argyle 1999) because church members enjoy better health on average than nonmembers (less drinking, smoking, and promiscuous sex). Gerdtham and Johannesson (2001) have found a positive correlation between health status and happiness. Their results suggest that health status may be as important as income in regards to influencing happiness.

Another variable that has been linked to happiness is social participation. In a study in which 600 adults were interviewed in their homes, Phillips (1967) measured social participation by asking questions about how often the respondent had gone out with or visited friends in the last two weeks, how many neighbors they knew well enough to visit, and how many organizations they were actively involved in. Happiness was measured by asking respondents whether they were very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy, and by using measures of positive and negative effect. Results indicated that the higher a person's self-reported level of social participation, the higher number of positive feelings the individual reported. In addition, the percentage of respondents indicating they were "very happy" increased with social participation (Phillips 1967).

In a follow-up study on happiness, Phillips (1969) examined the impact of socioeconomic status on the relationship between social participation and positive and negative feelings and social participation and happiness. Data from interviews with 600 adults were used. Voluntary social participation, happiness, and positive and negative feelings were measured using the same items used in the previous study (Phillips 1969). Hollingshead's Two-Factor Index of Social Position was used to measure social class position; this index rates weighted and combined scores on occupation and education and then groups social classes into five clusters.

The relationship between social participation and positive and negative feelings held constant in this second study when social class position was held constant (Phillips 1969). At all class levels, the more people report engaging in social participation the higher the number of positive feelings they report. Social class was also found to impact positive feelings independent of social participation in that at every level of social participation, those participants higher in social class reported higher levels of positive feelings compared to those occupying lower social positions (Phillips 1969). The relationship between social participation and positive feelings was of a much greater magnitude among participants of lower socioeconomic status (SES) compared to those of higher SES. Phillips (1969) concluded that those participants occupying lower social classes have fewer opportunities to participate in social interaction. Because they have fewer opportunities they tend to invest more in those activities in which they do participate.

In a more recent study, Haller and Hadler (2006) conducted an international comparative analysis of how social structures and relations can influence happiness and life satisfaction. They proposed that happiness is the result of an interaction between micro- and macro-level variables with macro-level variables having more of an impact on life satisfaction than happiness. On the micro-level side of the equation are individual characteristics and aspirations including good social relations, occupational involvement and success, as well as sociocultural orientations (altruistic and religious). On the macro-level side are social relations and macrosocial structures including a well-established welfare state, relatively equal social structures, political democracy, and economic prosperity (Haller and Hadler 2006).

A comparative, multilevel regression analysis was used to analyze data from 41 nations that took part in the World Value Survey 1995-1997. The results supported the hypothesis that both happiness and life satisfaction are outcomes of an interactive process between individual characteristics and macrosocial relations and structures (Haller and Hadler 2006). Age, gender, financial satisfaction, subjective health, and feelings of being free all significantly impacted happiness and life satisfaction. It was also found that people who are embedded into close relationships (married individuals and people with children) and people who were religiously and socially active were significantly happier compared to individuals who were suffering lack or losses in these areas such as those who were unemployed or divorced (Haller and Hadler 2006).

At the macrolevel Haller and Hadler (2006) found support for their hypothesis that institutional characteristics and macrosocial structural characteristics are related to happiness and life satisfaction. They found higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction in countries characterized by a more equal distribution of income as well as in richer countries. Politically free countries and well-developed welfare states had higher levels of life satisfaction (Haller and Hadler 2006).

Radcliff (2001) made the argument that prominent features of democratic politics strongly affect life satisfaction and happiness in industrial democracies. According to Radcliff (2001), political strategies classified as "traditional Left" support a state guarantee of human needs while the "traditional Right" favors relying on the market. He theorized that if these two strategies contribute to meeting needs then they should also influence happiness and life satisfaction. Radcliff (2001) used data from the 1990 World Values Survey with data from 15 countries. The results supported the hypothesis that life

satisfaction and happiness are positively affected by governments on the Left and also "enhanced by the extent to which states reduce market dependency through decommodification of labor and, in general, adopt a social democratic welfare regime" (Radcliff 2001, p. 947).

Other studies examining happiness across nations have resulted in similar findings. Schyns (1998) compared data from 40 countries and examined the influence of national economic and cultural living conditions on happiness. Schyns (1998) found that the countries ranking in the top five on happiness were wealthy and culturally free Northern European countries (the Netherlands, Iceland, Denmark, Ireland, and Sweden). Four out of the five countries ranked at the bottom for happiness (India, Hungary, Romania, Russia, and Bulgaria) were restricted former Eastern Block countries and relatively poor. Schyns (1998) concluded that "higher economic prosperity and more cultural freedom go together with higher levels of average happiness" (p. 14). Schyn's (1998) conclusion is consistent with that of Diener and Suh (1997) who studied economic, social, and subjective indicators of quality of life and concluded there is more to quality of life than economics.

Veenhoven (2005) studied happiness utilizing data obtained from 67 nations. He found that people were happier in nations characterized by freedom and justice as well as economic affluence. In Veenhoven's (2005) sample, Switzerland was the happiest country and Moldavia was the least happy. Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, and Ireland ranked two through five respectively in happiness while Russia, Armenia, and the Ukraine ranked low in happiness, ranking slightly above Moldavia (Veenhoven 2005).

Indicators of happiness were compared across 80 countries using data from nearly 113,000 respondents (Borooah 2006). Consistent with other studies, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Moldova ranked among the least happy. While Switzerland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, and Ireland had high happiness rankings, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Mexico ranked in the top three on happiness scores, respectively (Borooah 2006). In regards to correlates of happiness, perceived good health was the most influential factor. Education, sex, and religion were also correlated with happiness. Even after controlling for income, the well-educated were happier than the less well educated. Women were happier than men and those who reported religion was important to them were happier than those who did not attach a lot of importance to religion (Borooah 2006). Several components of social capital were also found to affect happiness. These included belonging to a voluntary organization, living in a bad neighborhood, and spending time with others. Consistent with other studies, Borooah (2006) found that married respondents were more likely to be happy than those who were divorced and people in high incomes were more likely to be happy compared to those in low and middle income ranges.

Life satisfaction is a complex construct with multiple domains including satisfaction with family, living environment, work, and self (Zullig, Huebner, and Pun 2007, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin 1985). Although life satisfaction is considered to be a construct distinct from happiness (Haller and Hadler 2006), the two concepts are often discussed together in the literature as they share some of the same correlates (Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith 1999) and each construct may impact the other (Pavot and Diener 2008). Whether people are feeling happy or unhappy can

impact their perceptions of life satisfaction and life satisfaction can impact perceptions of happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith. 1999, Pavot and Diener 2008, Peterson, Park, & Seligman 2005).

Numerous variables have been found to influence life satisfaction. A recently published study explored correlates of life satisfaction in a sample of 11,945 participants who took part in the Iranian National General Health Survey in 2007 (Mousavi, Shiani, Mohammadi, Sadjadi, Tabatabaee, and Assari 2011). Logistic regression was used to identify predictors of high life satisfaction. Gender, marital status, employment, ethnicity, family income, living condition, and family size were all found to be significant predictors of life satisfaction. A study conducted in Turkey found that health, income, and employment significantly influenced life satisfaction and happiness (Selim 2008). These findings are consistent with studies conducted in the U.S. and other countries (Mousavi et al. 2011).

As with happiness, health and perceptions of health have been found to impact life satisfaction (Pavot and Diener 2008, Spreitzer & Snyder 1974). People with disabling conditions have been found to be less likely, compared to nondisabled groups, to report being somewhat or very satisfied with their lives (Diener et al. 1999). Income has also been found to be correlated with life satisfaction in the U.S. but the relationship is weak (Diener et al. 1999). Unemployment has been found to negatively impact life satisfaction for years following the job loss even when the person regains employment (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener 2004, Salim 2008). As with happiness, education has been found to correlate with life satisfaction but this may be due in part to the relationship between education and income (Diener et al. 1999, Haring, Stock, and Okun 1984).

Life satisfaction is also influenced by income and social class (Laubach, Schumacher, Mundt, & Brähler 2000, Spreitzer & Snyder 1974). In a study of 2,948 individuals in Germany, Laubach, Schumacher, Mundt, and Brähler (2000) found that people belonging to lower social classes had significantly lower life satisfaction when compared to those in higher social classes. Those in lower social classes also reported poorer health and had lower self-efficacy regarding their health status. Laubach et al. (2000) conclude that this self-assessment is an expression of the individuals' reflections of their social situation and argue that psychological theories and stress theory should be included in sociological theories on the impact of social inequality. They propose that resources of the individual (such as ability to cope) interface with social class to impact life satisfaction and disease (Laubach et al. 2000).

Another correlate of life satisfaction is religion which is correlated with life satisfaction even when income, marital status, and age are controlled for (Diener et al. 1999). In one study, Ellison (1991) found that religion accounted for about five to seven percent of the variance in life satisfaction. Age has also been studied in relation to happiness and life satisfaction but with mixed results. While life satisfaction has been found to increase slightly from the 20s to the 80s, happiness has been found to decline somewhat with age. Decline in happiness with age may be due to the fact that emotional intensity decreases with age (Diener et al. 1999). In other words, in late adulthood, individuals are less likely to experience extreme or intense emotional states, whether positive or negative. Not only do most people by this time learn not to "sweat the small stuff" but they are also less likely to experience extreme sadness and happiness compared to younger adults (Diener et al. 1999).

Another variable that correlates with both happiness and life satisfaction is marital status. Some results indicate that married individuals report greater happiness and life satisfaction compared to those who are divorced, never married, or separated (Diener et al. 1999). However, in a study of Black women examining marital status, household structure, and life satisfaction, Ball (1983) found the highest levels of life satisfaction among married, widowed, and divorced women. Women who were single or separated had lower levels of life satisfaction although Ball (1983) proposed this difference could be caused by age or other variables. In studies with White participants married people living with their spouses report the highest levels of life satisfaction and happiness while the lowest levels are reported by separated and divorced persons. Ball (1983) proposes that his findings with Black women are different from the findings in studies of White women because Black families have historically developed alternative family forms with women-headed households being more common. These households typically incorporate relatives and friends which may be advantageous in terms of life satisfaction and happiness (Ball 1983).

CORRELATES OF SELFISHNESS

Selfish behavior involves a concern for self that results in acting solely for one's own interest; it is the opposite of pro-social behavior – behavior that benefits others (Stebbins 1981, Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, and Bartels 2007). While the literature on prosocial behavior is vast, the literature on selfishness is comparatively sparse and most of it has been experimental in nature. From an early age, children are socialized to behave in an unselfish manner and taught to feel guilty when they behave selfishly and unselfish behavior is used as a gauge of maturity (Ribal 1963).

While there is a lack of available research on selfishness using survey data, a number of experimental studies on selfishness have been conducted (Andreoni & Vesterlund 2001, Eckel & Grossman 1998, 2008). One characteristic that many researchers have examined in relationship to selfishness is sex. The results of studies examining the relationship between sex and selfishness have produced mixed results with many indicating men are more selfish, some indicating women are more selfish, and others finding no significant difference (Eckel & Grossman 1998). Failure to control for environmental differences and lack of consistency in various aspects of experimental design may have led to these contradictory results. For example, some of the studies on selfishness involve taking a risk. Sex differences in risk taking exist – men are more willing to take risks compared to women (Eckel & Grossman 1998). Therefore, when studies examining selfish behavior involve potential risk and the results indicate that women are more selfish than men, such sex differences may be due to women's greater tendency to avoid risk, compared to men, rather than a tendency to behave more selfishly (Eckel & Grossman 1998).

In the last two decades a number of studies have attempted to shed further light on the relationship between sex and selfishness by using social dilemma and ultimatum experiments (Andreoni & Vesterlund 2001, Eckel & Grossman 1998, 2008). These methods give participants an opportunity to behave in a selfish manner or a cooperative manner but choosing the cooperative approach involves risking a low payoff in social dilemma experiments or rejection in experiments involving ultimatum games (Eckel & Grossman 1998). Testing men and women in both types of experiments can provide greater clarity regarding potential gender differences in selfishness. If men and women

only differ in their tendencies to behave selfishly then the results of social dilemma and ultimatum experiments should be similar. But if the sexes differ only in their tendency to avoid risk (with men more willing to take risk) then we would expect women to make decisions showing greater risk aversion and therefore they would behave more selfishly in the social dilemma and more generously in the ultimatum game. In a double-anonymous game that eliminated alternative explanations by removing risk, the experimenter effect, and the possibility of gender-related subject interactions, Eckel and Grossman (1998) found that women behaved less selfishly than men. Social dilemma research has also indicated that age is correlated with selfishness with younger adults more likely to behave selfishly compared to older adults (List 2004).

CORRELATES OF PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Because there is a greater abundance of literature examining correlates of the opposite of selfish behavior – pro-social behavior – some of this literature will now be discussed in order to provide greater understanding of characteristics that may impact whether a person will behave selfishly. Alexis de Tocqueville (1974) noted that people in the U.S. have formed many associations for the purpose of engaging in pro-social behavior. As early as 1923, sociologists were using social service as a measure of unselfish behavior (Bogardus 1923). One form of social service, participating in volunteer work, is a well-established means in the U.S. of behaving for the benefit of others. Volunteering has been used as a measure of unselfishness in empirical research. In his article addressing myths about emerging adults, Arnett (2007) uses statistics regarding the increasing number of college freshmen engaging in volunteer work as evidence that emerging adults are not selfish. Marital status has been found to

correlate with volunteering. Studies with adults have found that compared to single individuals, married people are more likely to engage in volunteer work (Twenge et al. 2007). Prosocial behavior has also been explored in relation to age. The relationship between age and helping behavior appears to be curvilinear, with helping behavior peeking in midlife (Mutchler, Burr, and Caro 2003).

In developing a sociological theory of volunteer work, Wilson and Musick (1997) have identified several correlates of this form of prosocial behavior. As other researchers have concluded (Mutchler, Burr, and Caro 2003), Wilson and Musick (1997) found that age is correlated with volunteer behavior. A second correlate of volunteer work is gender. While Wilson and Musick (1997) conclude that volunteering is not a gendered activity, women report more helping behavior compared to men. They also find that race correlates with volunteering with Whites having higher volunteer rates compared to Blacks.

A cross-cultural study of altruism compared data from six countries including Australia, Egypt, Korea, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the United States (Hawaii and Missouri), and Yugoslavia (Johnson, Danko, Darvill, Bochner, Bowers, Huang, Park, Pecjak, Rahim, & Pennington 1989). In regards to the frequency with which respondents gave and received help, the data indicated the samples were very similar. Respondents from each country were also similar in their ratings of the importance of providing help to others (Johnson et al. 1989). Sex differences were found with males in all countries more likely to give and receive help. However, it should be noted that the prosocial items were phrased in terms of helping acquaintances or strangers and research indicates

females are more likely to help those with whom they have a close relationship (Eagly and Crowly 1986).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described perceptions of the childless in the context of America's pronatalist society. Techniques for managing the stigma of childlessness were discussed. Characteristics of the childless have also been described. Previous studies examining happiness and life satisfaction in parents and nonparents were discussed. In addition, this chapter has described correlates of happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. In the next chapter, the theoretical perspective used in this study will be described. The chapter will describe the social constructionism and how it can be used as a framework for investigating the relationship between childlessness and happiness, life satisfaction, and unselfish behavior in the United States.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the last chapter perceptions and characteristics of the childless in pronatalist America were described. Correlates of happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness were also identified. Chapter three will describe the theoretical framework for the study. First, symbolic interactionism and social constructionism are discussed in the context of how they can be used as a framework for investigating the relationship between childlessness and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfish behavior in the United States. Next, dramaturgical theory will be applied to the experience of the childless.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Many theorists have contributed to the development of symbolic interactionism (SI), but Blumer (1969) coined the term symbolic interaction. Blumer (1969) emphasized the necessity of interpreting signs and symbols and he believed that only full access to a person's mind could bring about complete understanding. There are three basic premises of social interactionism (1969). The first premise is "that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them" (p. 2). The "things" could be other people or objects in the environment. The second premise is that such meanings arise out of the interaction of the individual with other people (Blumer 1969). As people interact toward others in regards to particular things, meanings of those things develop; actions define things for people. The third and final premise is that an interpretive process is used by people in each instance in which they must deal with

things in their environment (Blumer 1969). Therefore, meanings of objects can change over time. Interpretation is a process and not just an automatic occurrence.

Stryker (1959) used structural symbolic interactionism to illuminate the influence of social structures on identity development. SI addresses the question of how human beings are socialized. In regards to gender, SI emphasizes how gender and the cultural meanings attached to gender are expressed in various situations and institutional contexts (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin 1999). It examines how males and females acquire the attitudes, norms, values, and ways of behaving appropriate for their genders. To understand this process of socialization one must understand the *social act,* an act in which a person acts in reference to another person (Stryker 1959). All social acts require a minimum of two people. During the course of social acts people learn the meaning of symbols and how to react to them. Therefore, symbols can serve as predictors of behavior because we are likely to react to symbols in consistent ways.

Sometimes a symbol represents generalized ways in which people behave toward specific objects. These generalizations are *categories.* A category applies "a class term to a number of objects, to signify that a number of different things are, for certain purposes, to be treated as the same kind of thing." (Stryker 1959, p. 114). Categories are very important in social life because without them we would have to respond to every object we encounter in our environment as unique. When we respond to an object that is part of a familiar category we tend to respond to it in ways similar to how we have responded to that category in the past. A social position is a type of category; examples include family positions such as mother, father, child, as well as occupational positions, and types of people such as "athlete" or "intellectual." We classify

others and ourselves in terms of positions and other categories and these classifications impact our responses to others (Stryker 1972). Early in our lives our parents place us in the category of "boy" or "girl." We learn to classify ourselves as such and this category becomes part of our concept of *self.*

When we classify ourselves it indicates that we have a *self.* Our self develops through interactions with others and the meanings we apply to their responses to us (Stryker 1959). The self evolves gradually over time (Stryker 1972). We begin to categorize ourselves in the same way that other people categorize us. We also behave in ways that are consistent with others' expectations of us. In regards to our classification of self by gender, children learn much about gender roles and ideology from their parents who place them in the category of "boy" or "girl" (Stryker 1959) and serve as primary socialization agents (Leaper 2000). Parents and teachers expect children to behave in ways consistent with the categories to which they have been assigned. Through the institutions of family and education, children have various interactions with parents and teachers through which they learn to define their "self" and develop an understanding of society's dominant gender discourse (Stryker 1959, Coltrane 1998). Boys are expected to play with trucks, engage in rough-and-tumble play and in general be very active. Girls are expected to be quiet and to play with dolls and tea sets. Social structures constrain the behavioral choices of males and females (Stryker 1994). When boys and girls consistently behave in the ways parents and teachers expect for their genders the behaviors become cumulatively reinforcing to their identities (Stryker 1968). Therefore, it is likely that these children will continue to behave in ways consistent with their gender identities.

While most children will come to think of their gender identity in stereotypical ways, this outcome is not inevitable. It is possible to overcome the behavioral constraints of gender (Stryker 1994). Children are exposed to various actors and expectations and through role-taking can evaluate their behaviors from numerous perspectives (Stryker 1972). It is possible for children to interact with others who do not expect them to behave in ways stereotypical for their gender. In the context of family, it is also possible that children can be encouraged to deviate from social stereotypes of gender by parents and other relatives (Eccles & Bryant 1994; Huston & Alvarez 1990; Weisner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990). When children learn to think in less conventional ways about gender they are able to perceive cultural norms, such as becoming parents in adulthood, as debatable (Weisner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990). As they develop into adulthood, they may interpret gender in ways that do not include parenthood yet provide other roles for finding meaning and fulfillment in the context of gender.

Every person has a set of identities (Stryker 1972). These identities are arranged in hierarchies based on salience. In any given situation, the identity most relevant is salient (Stryker 1968). Gender is considered by some to be a "master identity" due to the fact that it is evoked in many different situations and because it is associated with specific institutional roles (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin 1999). Gender provides a background for an individual's personal identity and it influences behavior while specific roles are enacted. In adulthood, raising children is an expected behavior for both men and women. For adults with children, parenthood tends to be at the top of their identity salience hierarchies (Rogers & White 1998). However, for adults who do not have

children, other identities take precedence, perhaps identities associated with careers or other roles.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

According to social constructionism, over time human behavior becomes habitualized, such that when a person performs a behavior repeatedly, a pattern is developed (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The individual derives meaning from the habitualized actions and that meaning can eventually become institutionalized. When a pattern of behavior has become institutionalized, other individuals share the meaning of the behavioral pattern. People within a society come to expect the habitualized behaviors and may form norms or taboos that encourage others to act in accordance with the expected behaviors (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Social constructionists argue that human beings have to learn gender; they are taught how to be males and females (Lorber 1994). In regards to gender roles, social constructionists argue that society's role assignments and the self-selection of individuals into these social roles is the basis for the social construction of gender (Wood & Eagly 2002). These roles, and not biological differences, determine gender differences. Women and men learn to *do* gender. According to West & Zimmerman (1987) "Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender." (p. 137). During social interactions males and females do gender by behaving in ways consistent with the gender roles they have learned (Wood & Eagly 2002).

One important characteristic of gender roles is that they are dynamic; they change over time and are influenced by institutions such as religion and government (Lorber 1994). For example, when birthrates drop after an economic depression and a government wants to increase births, they establish social policies to encourage women to have and raise children, even if they are poor and/or unmarried. However, when a country becomes more prosperous and there is more available food, maternal health improves and the infant mortality rate decreases. Under these conditions if a government becomes concerned about overpopulation, couples (rather than all women) are encouraged to have fewer children (presumably so they will be healthier and better educated) (Lorber 1994). Gender categories and the ways in which gender is constantly constructed and reconstructed are important because "gender is an integral part of any social group's structure of domination and subordination and division of labor in the family and the economy." (Lorber & Farrell 1991, pp. 1-2). Gender is a major status and it shapes each person's opportunities in family, sexuality, reproduction, education, and work.

Although childless adults in the U.S. may develop meanings of gender that deviate from the traditional male/female binary system, others in society may continue to judge them in the context of gender stereotypes. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that "If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions)." (p. 146). The prevalence and persistence of stereotypes about the childless indicate a negative

perception of those who fail to fulfill societal expectations (Gillespie 2000). The ideology is that those who do not take on the role of parent are selfish individuals who eventually find themselves unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives. In spite of this ideology, some men and women resist or rebel against gender norms and in so doing, have altered but not eroded gender statuses (Lorber 1994). It is possible that childless adults socially construct other adult roles through which they find happiness and satisfaction. A qualitative study by Blume and Blume (2003) found that females in the study sometimes chose to reject traditional binary gender roles and expectations even if it resulted in disapproval. Blume and Blume's (2003) results are consistent with McNay's (2000) argument that people can exercise agency and construct roles that vary from the binary system of traditional gender roles still prevalent in U.S. society.

While accepting a binary system of sex and gender roles could lead to negative outcomes such as unhappiness and dissatisfaction for those who voluntarily or involuntarily deviate from them, the rejection of such a system may lead to social constructions focused on personal choice and flexibility (Risman 1998; Weisner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990). Social constructionist theory can explain why the childless adult can exercise agency when confronted with pronatalist ideology (Blume and Blume 2003). Those who choose a childless lifestyle, even if doing so following a period of infertility (by choosing not to adopt), may then feel comfortable with their choice and construct other meaningful roles and relationships that bring happiness and fulfillment.

DRAMATURGICAL THEORY

Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach can be used to analyze the ways in which childless adults interact with others in their social environments. When

people interact with others, each individual gives a performance and uses roles, scripts, and props to influence the perceptions of those with whom they interact. According to Goffman (1959), when someone enters our presence we seek information about that person. We seek this information because it helps us to define the social situation. One of the first things we notice about people is gender. In every society newborn infants are immediately categorized as either male or female (Goffman 1977). Goffman (1976) stated "that one of the most deeply seated traits of man, it is felt, is gender; femininity and masculinity are in a sense the prototypes of essential expression—something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual." (p. 75). In addition to taking note of gender, adults in the U.S. interacting in social settings in which they are meeting new people are likely to be asked questions such as: "What do you do?" "Are you married?" "Do you have children?" An honest answer to this last question can reveal the stigmatized identity of the childless.

In his book on stigma, Goffman (1963) relays that it is in our best interest to control the conduct of other people, especially how they respond to us. The way in which we achieve this control is by defining the situation which other people come to formulate. It is possible for us to influence the definitions formed by others by expressing ourselves in ways that will lead others to voluntarily act in accordance with our plans. Goffman (1959) uses the term "performance" to refer to activities that serve to influence other participants. Although society has different expectations of males and females (Goffman 1977) both are expected to become parents in adulthood. Since the childless have failed to meet this expectation, they may give a performance that will lead others to believe

they are "responsible adults" rather than a performance that may confirm stereotypes of the childless as immature and selfish.

The dramaturgical approach proposes that everywhere we go we are constantly playing a role on a more or less conscious level. We know ourselves as well as others through these roles. Goffman (1959) uses the label "front" to refer to the part of a person's performance that regularly serves to define the situation for the people observing the performance. The front includes the setting which would include physical layout, furniture, décor as well as background items that create the scenery and stage props used for human action. According to the dramaturgical approach, an appropriate setting is required before a performer can begin an act. The performance is terminated when the person leaves this setting (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1959, p. 106) defines a stage "as any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception." Performances are delivered in the front stage in view of the audience.

According to Goffman (1967), "In all societies, rules of conduct tend to be organized into codes which guarantee that everyone acts appropriately and receives his due." (p. 54). The childless have violated a rule of conduct that states responsible adults will have and raise children. Therefore, when on front stage the childless may engage in a behavior Goffman (1963) labeled as *passing* in an effort to manage the impression others have of them. Passing involves giving a performance that implies they will have children "one day" or "when the time is right." Passing leads others to assume that one day the childless person will do what is expected and desired by society by having children; an action that prevents the childless from being stigmatized. When asked if he or she has children, a childless adult can engage in passing by using this simple script,

"Not, yet." The implication is that while the person does not have children, eventually he or she will have children.

CONCLUSION

The three theories discussed—symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and dramaturgical theory, shed light on the meanings attached to gender, how males or females are socialized into gender roles, how they are expected to become parents, and how it is possible for them to reject or rebel against this expectation and manage the stigma associated with childlessness. Symbolic interactionism explains how we learn to attach meanings to gender in situations and institutional contexts. It also illuminates how categories and social positions, such as male and female and husband and wife, are used to classify people and also become part of our *self.* In U.S. society, most adult men and women are expected to become parents. Those who remain childless have failed to meet this expectation. The meaning attached by others to this childless state is one of unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and selfishness.

Although we learn gender categories and the expectations that go with them, social constructionism helps us understand how gender expectations can be transcended. Social constructionist theory proposes that agency is possible when facing traditional cultural messages regarding gender roles (Blume & Blume 2003). Adult men and women can deconstruct and reconstruct gender narratives; exercising agency and creating new roles and scripts for their gender that do not include parenting roles. Historically, theories of adult development have incorporated the concept of generativity – contributing to the next generation – a need which is commonly met through raising children (Blatterer 2007). However, the childless can create new gender scripts and

meet generativity needs through alternative means such as volunteer work, paid employment, or involvement with children of family or friends. Therefore, it is not inevitable that the childless will behave selfishly because the need to be generative can be fulfilled in various other ways. It is also not inevitable that the childless will be unhappy or lacking in life satisfaction. Fulfillment through the creation of alternative gender roles and scripts can enable the childless to find happiness and feel satisfied with their lives.

Dramaturgical theory can shed light on how the childless can manage the stigma assigned by others who call them to account for violating the norm of becoming parents in adulthood. All actors, including the childless, engage in performances in order to influence other participants. When the childless are called to account for not having children, they may engage in passing (giving the impression that they will, one day, have children) or other forms of impression management in order to avoid being stigmatized. Successfully avoiding stigma may enable the childless to feel happy, satisfied and fulfilled in other roles in spite of their childless state.

In this study the theory that the relationship between parental status and life satisfaction, happiness, and selfishness is influenced by age, income, education, marital status, health, and race was tested. Although the childless are stereotyped as unhappy, dissatisfied, and selfish, it is likely that age, income, education, marital status, health, and race—all variables found in previous studies to impact happiness and life satisfaction—influence the relationship between parental status and happiness and parental status and life satisfaction. Figures 1 and 2 depict the theoretical model proposed. In the first part of the model (see Figure 1), all of the control variables – age,

education, income, marital status, race, health, and sex – influence happiness and life satisfaction directly and serve as control variables in the relationship between parental status and life satisfaction and parental status and happiness. Happiness and life satisfaction also influence each other. Previous studies have found that sex and age influence selfishness. In the second part of the model (See Figure 2) sex and age influence selfishness directly and serve as control variables in the relationship between parental status and selfishness.

This chapter describes the theoretical framework utilized in this study. Structural symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and dramaturgical theory were discussed in the context of how they can be used as frameworks for understanding the relationship between childlessness and happiness, life satisfaction, and unselfish behavior in the United States. In the next chapter the methodology of the study will be discussed.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model – Part 1

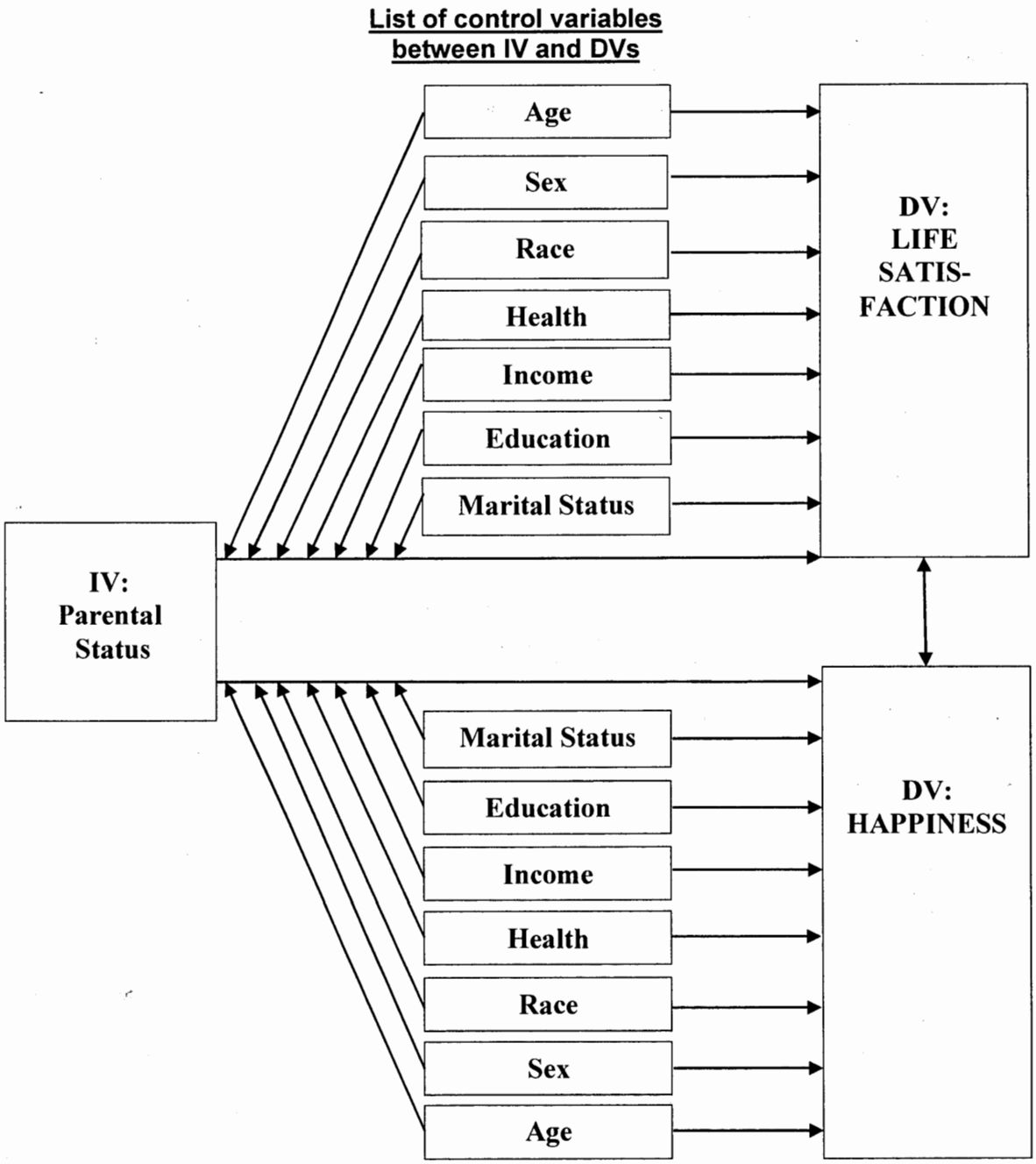
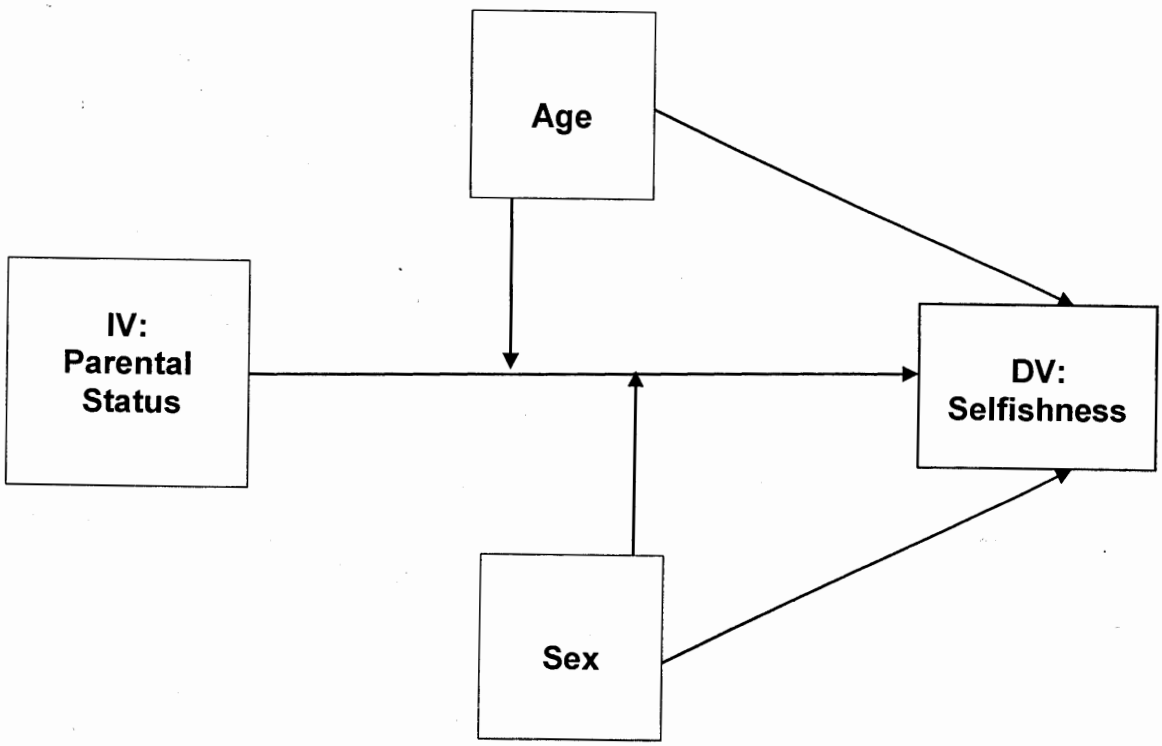


Figure 2. Theoretical Model – Part 2



CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the methodology used in the study is described. The research questions and hypotheses are identified and key terms are defined. Next, the participants and sampling method is described. The procedure used in the study is discussed. Finally, the variables in the study are operationally defined and the analysis is described.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study was to explore the following research questions:

1. "What is the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness?"
2. "How do age, income, education, marital status, sex, health, and race interact with parental status to predict happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness?"

This study empirically tested the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. The hypotheses tested were:

1. Parental status will not be a significant predictor of happiness, selfishness, or life satisfaction when age, income, education, marital status, sex, health, and race are controlled for.
2. Age, income, education, marital status, sex, health, and race will impact life satisfaction and happiness.
3. Life satisfaction will impact happiness and happiness will impact life satisfaction.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Pronatalism: Pronatalism is a value that elevates the role of parent and encourages reproduction (Jamison, Franzini, and Kaplan 1979). Pronatalist ideology links an individual's value in society to procreation (Parry 2005). In pronatalist societies parenthood is considered a normal developmental stage (Hoffman and Levant 1985). Pronatalism is an ideology that is often hidden in U.S. society yet it reflects attitudes, moral values, and social and political beliefs that shape the way society interprets the gender roles of men and women. Pronatalist ideology propagates and reinforces dominant social beliefs about the necessity of becoming a parent in order to be a healthy and mature adult (Parry 2005b).

According to Blake (1994), pronatalist ideology is so ingrained into the fabric of our society that the belief in voluntarism as applied to fertility is a delusion. She argues that free choice and voluntarism do not truly exist because most societies have coercive pronatalist policies. Krause (2006) states there exists both explicit and implicit pronatalism. Explicit pronatalism is evident in some policies and many socialization agents. Implicit pronatalism constitutes "sneaky pronatalism" according to Krause (2006 p. 3). Sneaky pronatalism involves attempts "to entice people, particularly women, to have more children" (Krause 2006, p. 3). One example of sneaky pronatalism is when demographers "frame low birthrate as a serious problem" (Krause 2006, p. 3). Blake (1994) purports that the "voluntary" reproductive choices people make now are not really voluntary due to the pressures of pronatalism. Thus societies that would like to limit reproduction due to overpopulation, "effective anti-natalist policy" would actually allow more freedom of choice than most individuals now enjoy (Blake 1994, p. 168).

Although pronatalism influences all adults, Parry (2005) argues that women are affected to a greater extent than men. In spite of the fact that roles available to women in the U.S. have increased in the last 30 years, motherhood remains the primary social role for women. In a pronatalist context, women without children are perceived as incomplete, unfulfilled, and inadequate (Parry 2005b). Not only are women expected to become mothers, but biological motherhood is valued as the true path while those who become mothers through alternative means such as adoption are perceived as lacking in some way (Parry 2005b).

Childlessness: Two types of childlessness are discussed in the social science literature, 'involuntarily' childless and 'voluntarily' childless. The label 'involuntarily' childless has commonly been used to describe those who, due to infertility, have been unable to have children. Infertility in women is often defined as an inability to conceive after 12 months of unprotected sex (Letherby 2002). The term 'voluntarily' childless has been used for those who do not have children by choice. The state of being involuntarily childless is perceived as a medical condition while voluntary childlessness is a social experience. While these types of childlessness may seem like binary categories, many sociologists consider the distinction between them to be blurry (Letherby 2002).

The lack of clarity in defining types of childlessness is due to the dynamic nature of one's intentions in regards to becoming a parent. According to Letherby (2002), it is beneficial to conceptualize voluntarily and involuntary childlessness as a continuum rather than as dichotomous variables due to the fact that attitudes and decisions about parenting options are fluid. People who at one point in time think of themselves as involuntarily childless sometimes change their identity to voluntarily childless at a later

point in time. Such a shift in identity is common among adults who are involuntarily childless and choose to remain childless rather than adopt (Letherby 2002). Keizer, Dykstra, and Jansen (2008) argue that for most nonparents, their childless state was not a single decision to refrain from having children rather; it was the result of never making the decision to have children. In other words, through a series of decisions to delay parenting to focus on educational or career goals, many individuals end up childless.

METHODS

Data and Data Collection

The data for this study came from the GSS data gathered in 2004. The 2004 GSS data was chosen because it includes all of the variables being tested in this model. While the independent variable of parental status, the dependent variable of happiness, and all of the control variables were asked every year, the variables measuring satisfaction and selfishness were only asked in select years. Data in the sample were obtained using a modified probability design, using a quota element at the block level, and also through full probability sampling (Davis, Smith, & Marsden 2009). Currently, the GSS is transitioning from a replicating cross-sectional design to a design that uses rotating panels. A total of 2,812 respondents took part in the study in 2004. The sample consisted of adults, age 18 and over, living in the United States (Davis, Smith, & Marsden 2009). The adults age 40 and over in the sample totaled 1,705. One advantage of this sample is its large size. In addition, since the late 1970s, data have been collected using full probability sampling, a design superior to the modified probability design utilized in earlier years.

One limitation of the data set is the amount of missing data. The independent variable, parental status, had only two missing responses out of the subsample of 1,705. However, each of the independent variables had numerous missing responses. The question measuring the happiness of the respondent was answered by 800 respondents. Three items were combined to measure life satisfaction. Only 205 of the respondents answered all three of these items. The question on selfishness was answered by 1,390 of the 1,705 respondents. AMOS was used to perform the structural equation models for the study. AMOS uses full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation to handle missing data (Byrne 2001). Research indicates that FIML outperforms other common techniques for handling missing data such as mean substitution and listwise and pairwise deletion (Byrne 2001, Jöreskog & Sörbom 1993, Enders & Bandalos 2001).

Participants

Data from adult participants in the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) were used. Data from adults age 40 and over will be used. This age was selected because most parents have their first child by age 40 (Abma & Martinez 2006). Of the 2,812 respondents who took part in the study in 2004, 1,705 were age 40 or over. In this subsample, about 46 percent (N=781) were male and about 54 percent (N=924) were female. Approximately 58 percent (N=984) of the subsample reported they were married, about 12 percent stated they were widowed (N=198), about 19 percent were divorced (N=318), three percent were separated (N=52), and nine percent had never married (N=153). The majority (about 84 percent) of the subsample was White (N=1,428), about 12 percent were Black (N=199), and the remaining four percent were of other races

(N=78). In regards to educational achievement, about 15 percent of the subsample (N=247) had less than a high school education, about 49 percent (N=842) had completed high school, approximately eight percent had degrees from junior colleges (N=130), about 17 percent had bachelor's degrees (N=287), and about 12 percent had graduate degrees (N=198). Approximately 17 percent (N=282) had no children and about 83 percent (N=1,421) had one or more children.

Procedure

The GSS uses a structured questionnaire to collect data in face-to-face interviews. Interviews last about 90 minutes each. From 1972 until 2000 a paper-and-pencil format was used but beginning in 2002 the GSS was conducted using computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) (Davis, Smith, & Marsden 2009). The survey questions include items about demographic information, family history and structure, religion, social and political issues, health, recreation, happiness, satisfaction, benevolent behavior, etc.

VARIABLES

Independent Variable

In this study, the independent variable, parental status, was measured by the question, "How many children do you have?" (CHILDS). The answers were recorded such that "0" meant the respondent had no children and 1-8 were used to indicate the respondent had one to eight children, respectively. This variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable such that 0 = no children and 1 = 1 or more children. Table 1 shows the frequency distributions for the independent and dependent variables used in

the study. Close to 17 percent of the sample had no children and about 83 percent reported they had one or more children.

Table 1. Frequencies and Valid Percentages of Dependent Variables and Independent Variable Used in the Model, U.S. Adults Age 40 and over, 2004 GSS*

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percent	Mean	S.D.
Independent Variable				
Parental Status			.83	.372
0 (no children)	282	16.6		
1 (1 or more children)	1421	83.4		
Dependent Variables				
Happiness			2.16	.646
Not too happy (1)	112	14.0		
Pretty happy (2)	446	55.6		
Very happy (3)	244	30.4		
Life Satisfaction				
Dissatisfied (0)	86	19.3		
Satisfied (1)	359	80.7		
Selfishness			4.00	1.000
Not a good description at all (1)	606	43.5		
Not a very good description (2)	662	47.6		
A fair description (3)	83	6.0		
A good description (4)	25	1.8		
A very good description (5)	16	1.1		

*Mean and standard deviation provided for ordinal variables.

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable, happiness, was measured by one item in the GSS as follows:

- the question "Taking all together, how would you say things are these days – would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" (HAPPY).

The item was coded as 1 = very happy, 2 = pretty happy, and 3 = not too happy. The item was reverse coded so that higher numbers indicated greater levels of happiness. For this ordinal variable, Table 1 also shows the mean and standard deviation. The mean for the dependent variable happiness was 2.16 with a standard deviation of 0.646 (N = 802). Fourteen percent of the sample reported being not too happy, about 56 percent reported they were pretty happy and about 30 percent reported they were very happy.

The second dependent variable, satisfaction, was measured by three items:

- the question "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do – would you say you are very satisfied, moderately satisfied, a little dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?" (SATJOB) (This question is asked of respondents who are working, temporarily not at work, unemployed, or keeping house.)
- the question "We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. So far as you and your family are concerned, would you say that you are pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation, more or less satisfied, or not satisfied at all?"" (SATFIN)

- the question "Indicate your agreement with each of the following statements by selecting the number that comes closest to your answer: On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." (SATSELF).

Job satisfaction was coded as follows: 1 = very satisfied, 2 = moderately satisfied, 3 = a little dissatisfied, 4 = very dissatisfied. Financial satisfaction was coded: 1 = pretty well satisfied, 2 = more or less satisfied, 3 = not satisfied at all. Self-satisfaction was coded: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. Each item was reverse coded so that higher numbers indicated greater satisfaction and next the three variables were summed. Chronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of these variables as a scale. Alpha equaled 0.523 and could not be improved by deleting any of the three items. Since an alpha below 0.7 is generally considered questionable, the decision was made to treat the dependent variable as a dichotomous variable (George & Mallery 2010). The three combined items were recoded as a dichotomous variable in which "0" meant the respondent was dissatisfied and "1" meant the respondent was satisfied. Approximately 19 percent of the sample reported being dissatisfied while about 81 percent reported being pretty or very satisfied.

The third dependent variable, selfish behavior, was measured by one item on the GSS that asks the respondent:

- "A selfish person. Is this..... (SELFISH)
    - A very good description of you (1)
    - A good description of you (2)
    - A fair description of you (3)
    - Not a very good description of you (4)
    - Not a good description at all (5)

The answers were coded as indicated in parentheses above. These codes were reversed so that higher numbers indicated higher amounts of selfishness. The mean for the dependent variable selfishness was 4.0 with a standard deviation of 1.0 (N = 1392). Approximately 44 percent of the sample reported "a selfish person" was not a good description of them at all while about 48 percent stated it was not a very good description of them. Six percent stated it was a fair description, about two percent a good description, and about one percent reported it was a very good description of them.

Control Variables

The following will serve as control variables:

- respondent's age (AGE),
- In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes, that is? (INCOME98),
- respondent's education (EDUC).
- Are you currently – married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married? (MARITAL),
- Would you say your own health, in general, is excellent, good, fair, or poor? (HEALTH),
- respondent's sex (SEX), and
- Race of the respondent (RACE).

These variables were chosen because previous studies have found them to be correlated with the dependent variables. Happiness has been found to be correlated with age (Spreitzer & Snyder 1940), education (Argyle 1999, Cantril 1965), income (Haring, Stock, & Okun 1984), marital status (Glenn & Weaver 1979, Veenhoven 1994),

race (Campbell et al. 1976), health (Borooah 2006), and sex (Haller & Hadler 2006). Sex, marital status, health, and income have been found to be correlated with life satisfaction (Mousavi et al. 2011, Selim 2008, Diener et al. 1999. Laubach et al. 2000) and experimental studies have found sex to influence selfishness (Andreoni & Vesterlund 2001, Eckel & Grossman 2008). The respondent's age was coded in whole numbers based on their age at their last birthday. Respondents 89 and over were coded as "89." Frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the control variables used are shown in Table 2. In the sample used of adults age 40 and over, the mean age was about 57 years with a standard deviation of 12.31 (N = 1705). Approximately 35 percent of the participants were in their 40s, about 28 percent reported being in their 50s, about 20 percent in their 60s, approximately 11 percent in their 70s, and about six percent reported they were 80 years of age or older.

Income was coded: 1 = under $1,000, 2 = $1,000 to $2,999, 3 = $3,000 to $3,999, 4 = $4,000 to $4,999, 5 = $5,000 to $5,999, 6 = $6,000 to $6,999, 7 = $7,000 to $7,999, 8 = $8,000 to $9,999, 9 = $10,000 to $12,499, 10 = $12,500 to $14,999, 11 = $15,000 to $17,499, 12 = $17,500 to $19,999, 13 = $20,000 to $22,499, 14 = $22,500 to $24,999, 15 = $25,000 to $29,999, 16 = $30,000 to $34, 999, 17 = $35,000 to $39,999, 18 = $40,000 to $49,999, 19 = $50,000 to $59,999, 20 = $60,000 to $74,999, 21 = $75,000 to $89,999, 22 = $90,000 to $109,999, and 23 = $110,000 and over. Many of the income categories had valid percentages below five percent. Therefore, the decision was made to combine categories such that each category had a range of no less than $10,000. The new categories were coded as follows: 1 = 0 to $9,999, 2 = $10,000 to $19,999, 3 = $20,000 to $29,999, 4 = $30,000 to $39,999, 5 = $40,000 to $49,999, 6 =

$50,000 to $59,999, 7 = $60,000 to $74,999, 8 = $75,000 to $89,999, 9 = $90,000 to $109,999 and 10 = $110,000 and over. The mean for the control variable income was 5.0 with a standard deviation of 3.0 (N = 1482). Approximately eight percent of the sample reported incomes of $9,999 or less, 12 percent reported incomes between $10,000 and $19,999, about 11 percent reported incomes from $20,000 to $29,999, approximately 12 percent between $30,000 and $39,999, about nine percent from $40,000 to $49,000, approximately nine percent from $50,000 to $59,999, about 11 percent from $60,000 to $74,999, about seven percent from $75,000 to $89,999, approximately seven percent from $90,000 to $109,999, and about 15 percent reported incomes of $110,000 and over Approximately eight percent of the Education was coded as 0 = no formal schooling and 1-20 equal one to twenty years of education, respectively. The mean for the control variable education was 13.59 years with a standard deviation of 3.083 (N = 1704). Almost one percent of the sample had four or fewer years of education, approximately five percent had five to eight years, about 37 percent had completed nine to twelve years, around 43 percent had completed 13 to 16 years, and approximately 15 percent of the sample had completed 17 to 20 years of education.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations (S.D.) of Control Variables Used in the Analysis, U.S. Adults Age 40 and over, 2004 GSS*

Variable		Frequency	Valid Percent	Mean	S.D.
Age				56.62	12.311
	40-49 years	603	35.4		
	50-59 years	480	28.2		
	60-69 years	338	19.8		
	70-79 years	183	10.7		
	80 years and over	101	5.9		
Income				5.00	3.000
	$9,999 and under	124	8.4		
	$10,000-19,999	178	12.0		
	$20,000-29,999	168	11.3		
	$30,000-39,999	170	11.5		
	$40,000-49,999	126	8.5		
	$50,000-59,999	135	9.1		
	$60,000-74,999	156	10.5		
	$75,000-89,999	108	7.3		
	$90,000-109,999	98	6.6		
	$110,000 and over	219	14.8		
Years of education				13.59	3.083
	0-4	15	0.9		
	5-8	78	4.6		
	9-12	633	37.1		
	13-16	726	42.6		
	17-20	252	14.8		
Marital Status				1.94	1.300
	Married	984	57.7		
	Widowed	198	11.6		
	Divorced	318	18.7		
	Separated	52	3.0		
	Never Married	153	9.0		
Health				3.00	1.000
	Poor	51	6.3		
	Fair	158	19.6		
	Good	367	45.5		
	Excellent	231	28.6		
Sex					
	Male	781	45.8		
	Female	924	54.2		
Race				1.21	0.506
	White	1428	83.8		
	Black	199	11.7		
	Other	78	4.6		

*Mean and standard deviation provided for ordinal variables. 5.0 with a standard deviation of 3.0 (N = 1482).

Marital status was coded as follows: 1 = married, 2 = widowed, 3 = divorced, 4 = separated, 5 = never married. The mean for marital status was 1.94 with a standard deviation of 1.30 (N = 1705). Approximately 58% of the sample reported they were married, about 12 percent were widowed; approximately 19 percent reported they were divorced, three percent were separated, and nine percent had never been married.

The respondent's health status was coded as: 1 = excellent, 2 = good, 3 = fair and 4 = poor. The health variable was recoded so that higher numbers indicated better health. The mean score for health was 3.00 with a standard deviation of 1.000 (N = 807). Approximately six percent of respondents rated their health as poor, about 20 percent reported fair health, approximately 46 percent reported good health, and about 29 percent of the sample reported excellent health.

The respondent's sex was coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female. Approximately 46 percent of the sample were male and about 54 percent were female. Race was coded as: 1 = White, 2 = Black and 3 = other. The mean score for race was 1.21 with a standard deviation of 0.506 (N = 1705). Approximately 84 percent of respondents reported their race as White, about 12 percent reported they were Black, and about five percent reported their race as "other."

DATA ANALYSIS

This study involved a secondary analysis of 2004 GSS data. The dependent variables in the study were happiness, satisfaction, and selfishness. The independent variable was parental status. Control variables included age, income, years of education, marital status, health, sex, and race. The initial analyses involved descriptive statistics. Crosstabulations were calculated on parental status and each of the

dependent variables; and bivariate correlation matrices were run on each dependent variable with the independent and control variables. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to examine the relationship between the independent, dependent, and control variables. SEM was the appropriate analysis because the model being tested was a nonlinear model and had multiple dependent variables.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

In this chapter the results of the study are described. First, results of descriptive analyses are discussed. Descriptive analyses include crosstabulations of the dependent and independent variables as well as correlations between the independent, dependent, and control variables. Next, the results of tests of structural equation models are described. The findings of the study as they relate to the hypotheses, theoretical model, and research questions are discussed.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The results of crosstabulations between the dependent variable, happiness, and the independent variable, parental status, are shown in Table 3. Within the subsample of 1,705 adults who were 40 years of age or older, approximately 17 percent (N=282) had no children and about 83 percent (N=1,421) had one or more children. A total of 800 of the participants age 40 and over responded to the question regarding their overall happiness. Regardless of whether or not a respondent had children, most reported they were pretty happy or very happy. Given this result, it is possible that the results reflect a desirability bias; respondents may not be willing to report they are unhappy out of concern they may be negatively perceived. Both 31 percent (N = 43) of respondents without children and 31 percent (N = 201) of those with children reported being very happy. Those respondents with no children were slightly more likely than those with children to report being pretty happy with 57% of the childless and 55% of parents

reporting being very happy. Respondents with children were slightly more likely to report not being too happy compared with childless respondents. An ANOVA indicted the happiness means across groups were not significantly different, F (1, 798) =.195, p = .659.

Table 3. Crosstabulations of Happiness, Satisfaction, & Selfishness with Parental Status, U.S. Adults Age 40 and over, 2004 GSS*

	Parental Status	
	0	1
Happiness		
not too happy	12%	14%
pretty happy	57%	55%
very happy	31%	31%
Total	100%	100%
Satisfaction		
not satisfied in any area	14%	21%
satisfied in 1 area	59%	50%
satisfied in 2 areas	19%	24%
satisfied in 3 areas	8%	5%
Total	100%	100%
Selfishness		
not a good description at all	42%	44%
not a very good description	47%	47%
a fair description	8%	6%
a good/very good description	3%	3%
Total	100%	100%

The results of crosstabulations between the dependent variable, satisfaction, and the independent variable, parental status are also shown in Table 3. A total of 205 of the participants age 40 and over responded to all three questions measuring satisfaction with job, finances, and self; these three items were combined to form the satisfaction variable. Most of the respondents, regardless of parental status, reported they were satisfied in one area of their lives (job, finances, or self). Few respondents in each parental category reported they were not satisfied in any of the areas of their lives measured. The childless were the least likely to report they were not satisfied in any area of their lives (14 percent of childless respondents, N=7). Twenty-one percent of those with children reported they were not satisfied in any area of their lives (N=33). Regardless of parental status, few respondents reported being satisfied in all three areas of their lives measured. An ANOVA indicted the satisfaction means across groups were not significantly different, F (1, 202) =.462, p = .497.

Table 3 shows the results of crosstabulations between the dependent variable, selfishness, and the independent variable, parental status. A total of 1,390 of the participants age 40 and over responded to the question measuring selfishness. The majority of the respondents in both parental statuses reported they were not selfish as measured by their response of "not a good description at all" or "not a very good description" when asked how well "a selfish person" described them. It is likely that responses to this question were influenced by social desirability bias since selfish behavior is negatively perceived by others in U.S. society. Childless respondents were slightly more likely (11% of childless compared to 9% of respondents with children) to report that "a selfish person" was "a fair" or "a good/very good description" of

themselves. An ANOVA indicted the selfishness means across groups were not significantly different, F (1, 1388) =.396, p = .530.

CORRELATION MATRICES

A bivariate correlational analysis was run with all of the variables in the study in order to examine potential relationships between them. The results are in Table 4. The number of children a respondent had was not significantly correlated with happiness.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix for Variables Used in the Analysis, U.S. Adults Age 40 and over, 2004 GSS

	Parental Status	Happiness	Satisfaction	Selfishness	Age	Income	Education	Marital Status	Health	Sex	Race
Parental Status	1.00										
Happiness	-.016	1.00									
Satisfaction	- .048	.345**	1.00								
Selfishness	-.017	.009	- .104	1.00							
Age	.135**	-.013	-.101	-.057*	1.00						
Income	.026	.230***	-.380***	.054	-.248***	1.00					
Education	- .068**	.102**	- .189**	.040	-.176***	.441***	1.00				
Marital Status	-.386**	-.225***	.235***	- .018	-.092***	- .363***	-.057*	1.00			
Health	.027	.279***	-.213*	.051	-.155***	.386***	.329***	-.085*	1.00		
Sex	.091**	.006	.083	-.035	.046	-.118***	-.068**	-.003	.003	1.00	
Race	.040	-.044	.036	-.008	-.124***	-.100***	-.070**	.080***	-.117***	.011	1.00

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$
Source: The 2004 General Social Survey

Four control variables – income, education, marital status, and health – were significantly but weakly correlated with happiness. Marital status was negatively correlated indicating that married respondents reported higher levels of happiness compared with respondents who were widowed, divorced, separated, or never married. Income, education and health were positively correlated indicating respondents with higher incomes, more education, and better health reported higher levels of happiness. Happiness and life satisfaction were significantly, but not strongly, correlated.

Some previous studies have found parental status to be correlated with life satisfaction (Weiss 1993, Somers 1993). However, in this sample of U.S. adults age 40 and over, parental status was not significantly correlated with satisfaction, consistent with findings in several other studies (Burman & de Anda 1986, Callan 1986, 1987). Marital status was positively correlated with life satisfaction indicating that married respondents were less likely to report being satisfied compared with those who were not married. Income, education, and health were all significantly and positively correlated with satisfaction but the correlations were weak.

Parental status was not significantly correlated with selfishness. The only control variable significantly correlated with selfishness was age. Consistent with previous research (List 2004), the correlation between age and selfishness was negative indicating that as the respondents' age increased reported selfishness decreased.

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELS

Structural equation modeling using Amos was performed to analyze the relationships between the independent, dependent, and control variables. Two analyses were performed. One analysis was performed to test the first part of the theoretical

model with happiness and life satisfaction as the dependent variables and another was run to test the second part of the model with selfishness as the dependent variable.

Figure 3 shows the structural equation model of happiness and life satisfaction. This model tests whether parental status impacts happiness and life satisfaction along with six control variables previous studies have indicated influence them. Table 5 shows the unstandardized and standardized estimates and significance levels for this model. Several indices of fit were used to determine whether the model fit the data including chi square which equaled 938.76, df = 26, $p<.001$. The chi square is well above the critical value for 26 degrees of freedom which equals 56.89 ($p < .001$). The statistical significance of the chi square indicates the data are significantly different from the proposed model. Therefore, the proposed model is not supported by the data from the sample used in the study. RMSEA equaled .144 also indicating an unsatisfactory fit since it was above 0.08. The CFI of .357 also indicated a poor fit since it was not over 0.95 (Bollen and Long 1993).

An examination of the path coefficients for this part of the model indicated that as hypothesized, parental status did not account for a significant amount of the variation in happiness or life satisfaction. Health and marital status did account for a significant amount of the variation in happiness at the .001 level and income accounted for a significant amount of the variation in happiness at the .01 level. Income, age, and health accounted for a significant amount of the variation in life satisfaction with p values of .001, .01, and .01, respectively.

Figure 3. Structural Equation Model of Happiness and Life Satisfaction

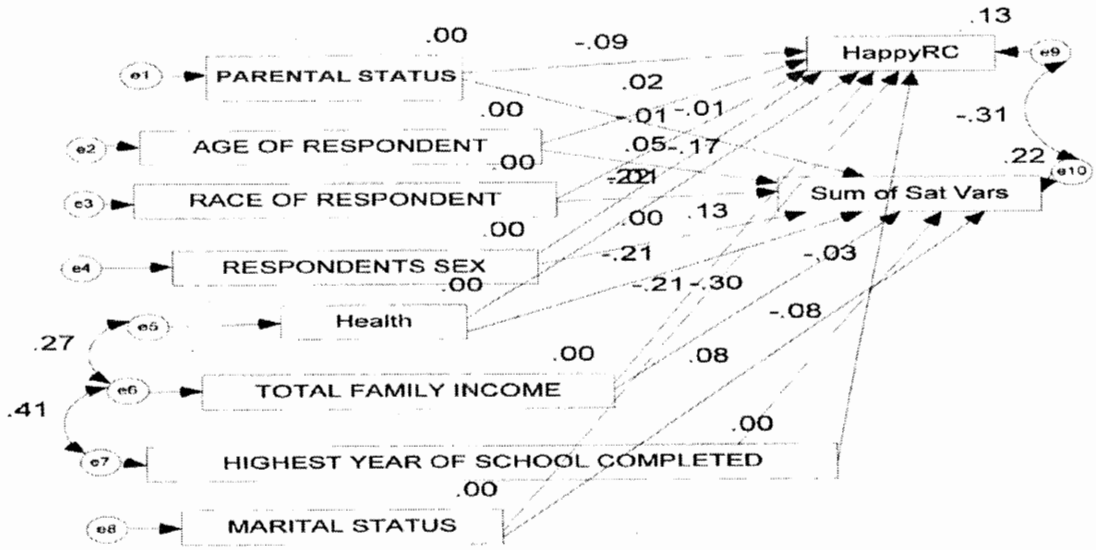


Figure 4. Structural Equation Model of Selfishness

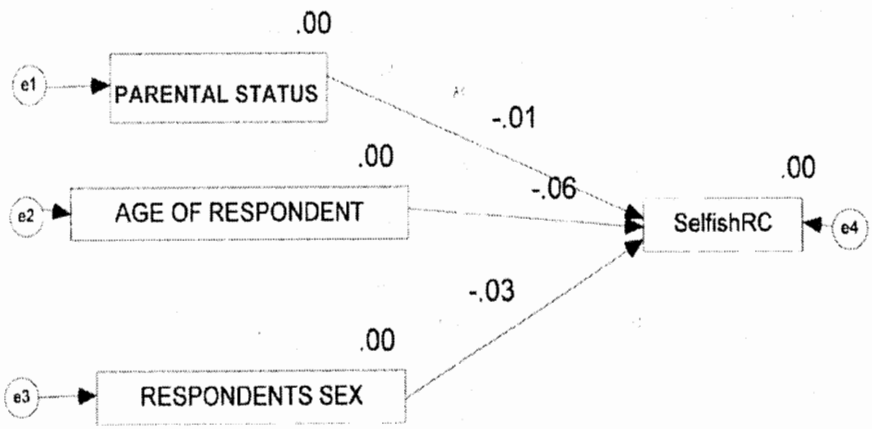


Table 5. Unstandardized & Standardized Estimates and Significance Levels for Model in Figure 1 (Standard Errors in Parentheses; N = 1705).

Parameter Estimate	Unstandardized	Standardized	p
Happiness ← parental status	-.058 (.058)	-.092	.062
Happiness ← age	.001 (.002)	.020	.552
Happiness ← race	-.008 (.042)	-.007	.842
Happiness ← sex	.059 (.043)	.045	.173
Happiness ← health	.166 (.031)	.220	.001
Happiness ← income	.015 (.005)	.126	.003
Happiness ← education	-.006 (.008)	-.028	.460
Happiness ← marital status	-.105 (.016)	-.212	.001
Satisfaction ← parental status	-.026 (.131)	-.012	.842
Satisfaction ← age	-.011 (.004)	-.165	.006
Satisfaction ← race	-.023 (.096)	-.015	.807
Satisfaction ← sex	.000 (.097)	.000	.999
Satisfaction ← health	-.195 (.072)	-.206	.007
Satisfaction ← income	-.045 (.011)	-.297	.001
Satisfaction ← education	-.020 (.018)	-.078	.243
Satisfaction ← marital status	.051 (.037)	.082	.169

Note: X^2 = 938.76, df = 26, p < .001; RMSEA = .144, CFI = .357

Figure 4 shows the structural equation model of selfishness. This model tests whether parental status impacts selfishness along with two control variables shown to influence selfishness in previous studies. Table 6 shows the unstandardized and standardized estimates and significance levels for this model. Indices of fit indicated the model did not fit the data. Chi square equaled 47.289 with three degrees of freedom, p < .001. RMSEA equaled .093 and the CFI was .000. These scores all indicated the model was a poor fit with the data; meaning that the proposed model was significantly different from the sample data used in the study. The path coefficients for this part of the model indicated that as hypothesized, parental status did not account for a significant amount of the variation in selfishness. Of the two control variables, age accounted for a significant amount of the variation in selfishness but sex did not.

Table 6. Unstandardized, Standardized, and Significance Levels for Model in Figure 2 (Standard Errors in Parentheses; N = 1705).

Parameter Estimate	Unstandardized	Standardized	p
Selfishness ← parental status	-.015 (.013)	-.032	.239
Selfishness ← age	-.003 (.002)	-.051	.057
Selfishness ← sex	-.050 (.041)	-.033	.224

Note: X^2 = 107.72, df = 3, p < .001; RMSEA = .143, CFI = .004

Although the structural equation models tested did not prove to be a good fit for the data, the results were informative in regards to the research questions and hypotheses proposed. All variables known to influence the dependent variables were incorporated in the model. Although the results indicated some of these variables did not significantly account for any of the variation in the dependent variables, the models were not modified and retested as there was no theoretical basis for adding other variables. In addition, the objective of the study was to explore the relationship between parental status (and the control variables) and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness in order to test stereotypes of the childless. The objective was not to develop a model to explain happiness, life satisfaction, or selfishness.

HYPOTHESES

The first hypothesis, "Parental status will not be a significant predictor of happiness, selfishness, or life satisfaction when age, income, education, marital status, sex, health, and race are controlled for" was supported. Based on cross tabulations, adults age 40 and over with children are no more or less likely to be happy or satisfied with their lives than their childless counterparts. In addition, parental status was not correlated with happiness or life satisfaction nor did it account for a significant amount of the variation of happiness or satisfaction in the structural equation models.

The second hypothesis "Age, income, education, marital status, sex, health, and race will impact life satisfaction and happiness." received some support. In the structural equation model, health, income, and marital status all accounted for a significant but small amount of the variation in happiness; however, age, education, sex, and race had no significant impact. Health, income, and age accounted for a significant but small amount of the variation in satisfaction but education, marital status, sex, and race did not account for a significant amount of the variation. One potential explanation for why some of the variables tested did not significantly impact happiness and life satisfaction may be the complexity and dynamic nature of these constructs. Previous studies have revealed numerous variables that are correlated with happiness and life satisfaction (Argyle 1999, Gerdtham and Johannesson 2001, Haller and Hadler 2006, Radcliff 2001, Zullig et al. 2007). Each has only a small influence and this may make the impact of any one variable more difficult to detect. All of the correlates identified have been found to be significant predictors in some studies while others have not found them to be significant. Additional research is needed to clarify the relationships between these correlates and happiness and life satisfaction.

The third hypothesis "Life satisfaction will impact happiness and happiness will impact life satisfaction." received support from the results of the correlations. Life satisfaction and happiness were significantly and positively correlated which indicates that as life satisfaction increases happiness increases. Evidence for a connection between the two variables also came from the results of the structural equation model. In the SEM the covariance between satisfaction and happiness was also significant. These

results indicate that a relationship exists between the two variables; however, further study is needed to determine whether a causal relationship exists between the two.

THEORETICAL MODELS

The findings lend some support for the first part of the theoretical model proposed in this study (See Figure 1). Happiness and life satisfaction are complex constructs and are each influenced by numerous variables (Lyubomirsky & Lepper 1999, Mousavi, et al. 2011, Zullig et al. 2007). In this study, health and income influenced both life satisfaction and happiness. Life satisfaction was also influenced by age and happiness was also impacted by marital status. In addition, consistent with previous studies, happiness and life satisfaction were found to influence each other (Diener et al. 1999, Pavot and Diener 2008). Although previous studies have found race, education, and age to influence happiness and life satisfaction (Argyle 1999, Cantril 1965, Spreitzer and Snyder 1940) the findings in this study did not find them to account for a significant amount of the variation in happiness and life satisfaction. This may be due to a weak relationship between each of these correlates and happiness and life satisfaction. In previous studies in which race, education, and age were found to be predictors of happiness and life satisfaction the relationships were not strong (Argyle 1999, Cantril 1965, Spreitzer and Snyder 1940).

Although some studies have found that parental status influences happiness and life satisfaction (Krishnan 1993, Monarch 1993, Angeles 2010, Margolis & Myrskylä 2011), in this study parental status did not have an impact on these variables when age, sex, race, health, education, income, and marital status were controlled for. These studies may have found parental status to be a significant predictor because only some

or none of the known correlates were controlled for. Consistent with the findings of this study, others who have controlled for one or more of these variables have not found parental status to be a predictor of happiness or life satisfaction (Glenn and McLanahan 1981, Burman & de Anda 1986, Callan 1986, 1987). Another reason why parental status may not have influenced happiness and life satisfaction in this study may have to do with contemporary ways of doing gender. Although the childless are negatively stereotyped in pronatalist U.S. society (Letherby 2002; Parry 2005), they are able to *do* gender in nontraditional ways and construct meaningful roles that contribute to happiness and satisfaction.

The findings of the study provided some support for part two of the theoretical model in that parental status does not directly impact selfishness. In spite of the fact that some previous studies have shown sex to impact selfishness (Andreoni & Vesterlund 2001, Eckel & Grossman 1998, 2008), it did not account for a significant amount of the variance of selfishness in this study. This may be due to limitations in the measurement of selfishness. Social norms favor unselfish behavior thus, self-reports of selfishness may be influenced by a social desirability bias. Age accounted for a significant amount of the variation in selfishness but the relationship was weak and negative.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question examined was "What is the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness?" The results of this study indicate that having or not having children does not impact a person's happiness, life satisfaction, or selfishness. This is likely due to the myriad ways in which adults can construct gender roles and create opportunities for fulfillment and generativity. The

second research question was "How do age, income, education, marital status, sex, health, and race interact with parental status to predict happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness?" Health and income were found to influence both happiness and life satisfaction while marital status impacted only happiness, and age influenced only life satisfaction. Parental status did not impact selfishness. Inconsistent with previous studies, this study found that neither age nor sex had an impact on selfishness. This may be due to limitations in measurement.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study lend some support to the theoretical model proposing that parental status does not impact happiness, life satisfaction, or selfishness when other variables are controlled for. Health, income, and marital status influence happiness while health, income, and age impact life satisfaction. Selfishness is not influenced by parental status or sex but is influenced by age. The results of the current study add to the available literature by examining the relationship of parental status to life satisfaction, happiness, and selfishness while controlling for known correlates; something not considered in previous studies. The finding that parental status does not impact happiness or life satisfaction revealed in the current study is consistent with some previous studies and inconsistent with others.

In this chapter the results of the study were described and considered in relation to the research questions, hypotheses, and theoretical models. In the next chapter the study will be discussed. The procedures and main findings will be summarized. Implications of the findings will also be discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research will be described.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the study is summarized and discussed. First, the procedures and main findings are summarized. Next, the implications of the findings are described. Finally, suggestions for future research are made.

SUMMARY

This study examined the impact of parental status on happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness in a subsample of 1,705 adults age 40 and over from the 2004 GSS. Crosstabulations and ANOVAs revealed that parental status had very little impact on whether a respondent was happy, satisfied, or selfish. Differences between those respondents without children and those respondents with one or more children were not significant.

The results of correlational analyses revealed that parental status was not correlated with happiness, life satisfaction, or selfishness. Some of the control variables were found to correlate with the dependent variables. Age, income, marital status, and health were correlated with happiness and satisfaction. Only age correlated with selfishness but all correlations were weak. As predicted, happiness and life satisfaction were significantly but weakly correlated. Happiness and life satisfaction are dynamic and complex constructs that are most likely influenced by additional variables not examined in this study.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the relationship between parental status and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. SEM was used because the proposed models were nonlinear and because multiple dependent variables were tested. Two structural equation models tested the goodness of fit of the data and theoretical models proposed. Both models were significantly different from the data, indicating lack of a good fit between the data and models. Parental status and the control variables examined did not account for much of the variance in happiness and life satisfaction and they did not account for much of the variance in selfishness.

IMPLICATIONS

The lack of a good fit between the data and the proposed models was both expected and surprising. It was expected in regards to parental status. It provided evidence that, as hypothesized, parental status does not influence happiness, life satisfaction, or selfishness when the control variables of age, income, education, marital status, health, sex, and race are controlled for. What was somewhat surprising was the lack of a relationship between many of the control variables and happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness. This may be due in part to the fact that previous studies have found only weak relationships between these variables and the dependent variables examined in this study (Argyle 1999, Haring et al. 1984, Haring-Hidore et al. 1985). Missing data may also account for the lack of a significant relationship. A large number of participants did not answer the questions related to happiness, satisfaction, and selfishness. Less than half of the respondents in the sample (800 out of 1,705) answered the question regarding happiness and only 205 answered all three questions measuring life satisfaction. The question regarding selfishness had a better response

rate with 1,390 out of 1,705 answering the question. The small number of responses, especially for the satisfaction variable, may have made existing relationships more difficult to detect. Neither of the variables found to impact selfishness in previous studies were significant in this study. Little is known about the impact of demographic variables on selfishness and further study is needed to reveal the correlates of this variable.

One important contribution of this study is that it challenges existing stereotypes regarding family structure. While the childless are stereotyped as unhappy, dissatisfied, and selfish, this study did not find parental status to be related to any of these variables. In contemporary U.S. society, families without children are perceived less positively than families with children (Ganong, Coleman, & Mapes 1990). In spite of increases in childlessness as well as the results of some studies indicating that whether an individual has children does not impact his or her happiness or life satisfaction; stereotypes about the childless have not changed in recent years. Several problems result from these stereotypes. First of all, they distort perceptions such that they lead people to evaluate the childless less favorably regardless of their behavior. Thus, even if a childless adult is happy and satisfied with his or her life, others may perceive the individual as unhappy and dissatisfied. Secondly, stereotypes about the childless can impact the interactions they have with others as stereotyped groups tend to be treated differently than other groups. For example, some adults may be reluctant to attempt to form friendships with childless adults due to a belief that the childless are selfish, an undesirable trait. Finally, stereotypes of the childless can be harmful because they can influence how the childless perceive and value themselves. For example, a negative stereotype of the childless can lead to lower self-esteem in adults without children (Ganong et al. 1990).

The results of this study have implications for the way U.S. society perceives gender roles and the outcomes of parenting choices. The findings of this study indicate that contrary to prevalent stereotypes, parental status does not impact how happy or satisfied a person is, neither does it impact whether individuals behave selfishly or unselfishly. Such results call into question the benefit of pronatalist ideology which holds that having children is beneficial both for the individual and society. If the childless are no more or less likely to be happy, satisfied, or selfish perhaps adults should be encouraged to view parenthood as optional and to make the choice that best suits their preferences, goals, and lifestyle. Encouraging all adults to have children can lead to individuals becoming parents when they would prefer not to. Children who are not wanted are at increased risk of child maltreatment (Finkelhor & Jones 2006) therefore, decreasing the incidence of unwanted children may decrease the incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment in families.

LIMITATIONS

The GSS dataset has limitations. One disadvantage of the sample is that only English-speaking households were included until 2006 when Spanish interviews were first conducted. Thus, prior to 2006 all households in which English was not spoken were excluded and since 2006, all those households in which neither English nor Spanish are spoken have been excluded. An additional problem with the dataset is the large amount of missing data for the dependent variables in this study.

Another limitation includes the measurement of satisfaction. Only three domains of satisfaction are measured in the 2004 GSS – job satisfaction, satisfaction with financial situation, and satisfaction with self. Domains not measured include satisfaction

with family, friends, and living environment. It is impossible to know whether a more comprehensive measure of life satisfaction would impact the relationship between satisfaction and the other variables tested. The reliance on self-report measures, particularly for the variable of selfishness, is another limitation. Self-reports are subject to memory biases including salience and memory reconstruction. In other words, respondents' self-ratings are subject to how easily they can remember the last time they acted in a selfish or unselfish manner. In addition, reactivity is a potential problem; respondents may try to provide socially desirable answers that make them look good. Since people in the U.S. are socialized into a social norm that unselfishness is desirable, the selfishness item is subject to a social desirability bias (Ribal 1963).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Since happiness and life satisfaction are complex constructs that can be measured in various ways, it would be beneficial to reexamine the relationship between parental status and these variables by utilizing measurement techniques other than the questions used in the GSS, perhaps by using other instruments with established reliability and validity. Further study may shed light on the relationship between parental status and selfishness. Measurement of a respondents' perceived selfishness may be influenced by social desirability bias, using alternative measurements of selfishness to examine the relationship between parental status and selfishness could yield different results. While some years of the GSS contain items that could be used to measure selfishness, such as how often the person has volunteered in recent months, given up their seat on a bus, carried a stranger's belongings, etc., these items are limited in scope. In addition, they are biased in favor of males in that a number of them refer to

helping strangers and men are more likely to help strangers while women are more likely to provide help to people they know (Skoe, Cumberland, Eisenberg, Hansen, & Perry 2002).

It would also be beneficial to replicate the study with more recent data. The 2004 data used in this study is already dated. An examination of these variables with current data is advisable as gender roles are dynamic. If childlessness continues to increase it may become more acceptable in U.S. society. A change in norms may bring about changes in stereotypes and expected outcomes of parenting choices. For example, if childlessness becomes more accepted, childless adults may no longer be expected to be unhappy, dissatisfied, and selfish.

It is possible that the results of this study would not generalize to developing countries. Future studies comparing cross national data on the impact of parental status on happiness, satisfaction, and selfishness could increase understanding of the impact of pronatalism. While the U.S. is a pronatalist society, there are countries in which pronatalism is stronger including China and many countries in Africa. Perhaps in countries in which adults do not consider parenthood a choice the impact of childlessness may be more pronounced. For example, a childless couple may be more likely to be unhappy or dissatisfied in such cultures. Within the U.S., oversampling by ethnicity may also be valuable since pronatalism may be stronger in some ethnic groups compared to others. Another issue to consider is globalization and the spread of western culture. As developing countries gain greater access to western media there is a potential for pronatalist ideologies to be weakened. As a result, in coming decades alternative family models such as childfree families may become more visible.

Understanding how parental status may influence happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness could also be enhanced by qualitative research. For example, in-depth interviews would provide narratives about how parents and nonparents perceive the impact of their parental status on happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness in their own voice.

Additional areas for future research include looking at the voluntarily childless and involuntarily childless as two separate groups. It would be informative to compare these groups on happiness, life satisfaction, and selfishness to discover whether the desire to have children, and not just the presence or absence of children, impacts these variables. It would also be beneficial to explore the policy implications of childless trends. For example, should the childless be required to pay taxes to school districts when they have no children attending those schools?

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