

**WHO WILL BE ROCKING THE CRADLE AND WHEN?**  
How Young Women and Men Envision Parenting

By

Elisabeth Wilson, B.A. (Hon.)

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## ABSTRACT

Canada's fertility rates have been below the replacement level ever since the early 1970s. Some of the readily offered explanations are the increased number of women pursuing longer and higher education, as well as increased labour force participation of women and their marriage at a later age. These explanations would suggest that having and bringing up children is primarily a woman's issue and that higher education has a detrimental effect on women's fertility. To debunk this rather simplistic association of higher education and low fertility, this thesis project had a three-fold objective: to find out how both women and men who pursue higher education envision becoming a parent; whether there are any gender differences in envisioning becoming a parent; and how their ideas compare to current fertility trends. My research revealed that while pursuing higher education contributes to delaying childbearing, it does not adequately explain the phenomenon of low fertility rates.

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Thesis Context

With frequent regularity Canadian newspapers feature articles on maternity and fertility and bring to our attention that Canada, like most industrialized countries, has a low fertility rate<sup>1</sup> and that mothers are having their babies at an increasingly advanced age (Bielski 2009; Ottawa Citizen 2009; CBC News 2008, 2009). There is concern about population growth and population aging (Ravanera and McQuillan 2006) and whether low fertility rates will allow Canada to stay economically viable (Beaujot 2003). There is also concern about maternal health and increased risk of infertility if women put off procreation for too long (Baird 2009; Health Canada 2005). Readily offered reasons for these phenomena include the pursuit of longer and higher education by more women (Hango and Le Bourdais 2009); increased labour force participation of women; and marriage at a later age (Mitchell 2006; Gillespie 2003; Stobert and Kemeny 2003; Foot 1998).

The issues of low fertility rates, increased age of mothers, and particularly the offered explanations for these phenomena, intrigued me on several levels. First, most people, when asked, want children (Crompton and Keown 2009; Tudiver 2005; Beaujot 2003). So why then is there such a discrepancy between the way young people envision becoming a parent and what eventually plays out? Second, the way fertility rates are discussed in public discourses presents having children as primarily a woman's issue. Do men not have children?<sup>2</sup> Do they not play a significant enough role in procreative decision-making that it would warrant including their

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada defines fertility as total fertility rate (TFR), which “is the sum of single-year, age-specific fertility rates during a given year. It represents the average number of children that a woman would have if the current age-specific fertility rates prevail over her reproductive period” (Statistics Canada 2009, p. 8).

<sup>2</sup> Men are included in ‘crude birth rates’, which is defined by Statistics Canada as the number of children per total population. However, it is far more common to monitor and report the total fertility rate, which excludes men (see footnote above).

voices and perspectives more prominently in public discourses on childbearing and family formation? Third, I always found the given explanations for low fertility and increased maternal age too simplistic and incomplete. Women are seemingly singled out as the main reason for low fertility and the issue is constructed as a dichotomous choice of women preferring to pursue higher education and a financially independent lifestyle rather than doing their civic duty of reproducing the nation. But is there really a causal relationship between pursuing higher education and low fertility? Does participating in the labour force really ‘cause’ women to have fewer children? In addition, what role do men play in procreative decision-making? Is it not more likely that there are other, more complex factors at play that influence and inhibit the procreative intentions of both women and men? Upon researching my topic more thoroughly, I found that while newspapers often only focus on women and omit other factors when trying to sell their story, researchers are of course also engaging with men and are taking other factors into consideration. There is a growing body of academic literature dedicated to fathers, fatherhood and men’s attitudes toward procreation (Doucet 2009, 2006, 2004; Beaton et al. 2003; Plantin 2003; Marsiglio 1998; Lupton and Barclay 1997). Also, researchers have identified a number of influential factors which play a role in realizing both women’s and men’s fertility intentions, such as: lack of or limited financial means while studying and during the early years in the labour force (Allen 2004); lack of affordable, quality childcare (OECD 2005); and a labour market that is not conducive to the time-intensive childcare needs of parents (Duxbury and Higgins 2009; McQuillan et al. 2008; Wall & Arnold 2007; Kugelberg 2006; Gillespie 2003; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001).

Intrigued by these questions, I chose for my thesis project to research young women’s and men’s ideas about envisioning becoming a parent. My research aimed at elucidating whether

current fertility trends are really reflective of what young people want and consciously plan, or whether there is a discrepancy between intended and actual fertility trends. The literature suggests that most people not only want children, but have this idea of an ‘ideal family size’ which, in industrialized countries, is comprised of two or three children, depending on the regional and cultural context (Gauthier and Philipov 2008; Tudiver 2005; Qu and Weston 2004). I wanted to explore how university students’ fertility intentions compare to this ideal family size. Other than just satisfying my personal interest in this matter, a more accurate sense of how young people really envision becoming a parent and under what conditions they would like to realize their fertility intentions would allow us to rethink and fine-tune state policies that target fertility rates. If low fertility intentions and having children later in life are conscious life-style choices, then it would be interesting to know why young people arrive at these ideas. But more importantly, policies that aim at facilitating young people’s parenting intentions would have to be rethought if it becomes evident that the target group has no such intentions in the first place. Rather, it would be necessary to influence change of intentions by raising awareness of possible health risks and risks of infertility for women who decide to put off childbearing until a later stage in their life. But if, on the other hand, low fertility intentions and having children later in life are not conscious life-style choices, then it would be important to know what might cause such discrepancies, and policies could be better targeted to facilitate the realization of young people’s parenting intentions.

## **1.2 Project Description**

There is no disputing the facts and statistics about low fertility rates. Over the last century, except for the baby-boom years of the late 1940s to mid 1960s, birthrates have significantly decreased and over the last three decades, the age of first-time mothers has

considerably increased (Crompton and Keown 2009; Statistics Canada 2009, 2006; Mitchell 2006; Tudiver 2005). In 2007, there were 367,864 births in Canada, resulting in a fertility rate of 1.66 children per woman within her reproductive period. The highest contribution to fertility (i.e., 49% of all births) was by women between the age of 30 and 34. While fertility rates below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman are monitored with concern (Statistics Canada 2009, 2006; Gauthier and Philipov 2008; Health Canada 2005; Beaujot 2003), there is no indication that this trend might change any time soon. My research project therefore aimed to gain a better understanding of how current fertility trends come about and whether these trends are really representative of young people's fertility intentions.

Having children concerns both women and men and yet, the approach of studying birthrate trends and the age of first-time parents is primarily focused on women. Although there is now also a fledging body of literature dedicated to men and fathers, the traditional approach of reproductive research, policy and health initiatives was mainly focused on women (Tudiver 2005). Women are socially constructed to become mothers and primary caregivers and the rather one-sided gender approach to studying and monitoring birthrate trends is reinforcing the notion that having children is primarily a woman's issue. However, biologically and socially, both women and men play an integral and interconnected role in procreation and procreative decision-making. It was thus important for me to also include men in my research project and to capture and include their ideas on how young people envision becoming a parent.

My research project focused on young women and men pursuing higher education. I particularly targeted this sample population because men, and especially women, who pursue higher education are perceived as one of the main reasons for low birthrates and advanced age of first-time parents. I therefore wanted to elicit the ideas of women and men in their late

teens/early twenties, who are pursuing higher education and are most likely not yet part of the full-time labour market. By capturing the ideas of these young students I hoped to be able to make inferences on how young women and men envision becoming a parent. I wanted to know whether the ideas of young female and male students with respect to becoming a parent and subsequent childrearing responsibilities correspond to the current birthrate level and childrearing patterns. A particular emphasis of my project was to include men's views into the birthrate and parenting debate and to explore the differences in ideas between young men and women with regard to questions such as: do they think of themselves as eventually becoming a parent; at what age do they think they would like to become a parent; how many children would they like to have; whether they would like to be the primary caregiver, or whether they would prefer equally shared childrearing responsibilities; and, whether or not they would like to be stay-at-home or working parents.

I went into my research project with the hypothesis that, on average, young women and men associate somewhat different ideas about becoming a parent and I wanted to explore these gender differences in perspectives. My assumption about gender differences was based on literature that purports that, although the traditional division of labour has undergone changes towards a more egalitarian division over the past few decades, women are traditionally still socially constructed as mothers and primary caregivers of children, while men are still socially constructed as primary breadwinners of the family (McQuillan et al. 2008; Wall and Arnold 2007; Gillespie 2003; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001; Hamilton 1988; MacKie 1987).

Further, women's biological reproductive capacity is time limited whereas men do not have such biological time constraints. On average, women are more likely to leave home, get married and have their children at a younger age than men (Clark 2007). I therefore hypothesized

that, in view of a time-limited window of procreative opportunity and the fact that women tend to have children earlier than men, young women would have more concrete ideas about when they want to become a parent and how many children they would like to have. Conversely, as men are not directly affected by reproductive time limitations and tend to have children later than women (Clark 2007), I assumed that they could think of themselves as a parent, but that they would have less concrete ideas about when they would like to become fathers and how many children they would like to have. Since disagreement between spouses on the number of children and on the timing of childbearing can have a negative effect on couples' realization of fertility intentions (Schoen et al. 1999) I wanted to capture whether and what kind of differences there might be.

With respect to family life and family work, the Canadian census and survey data also illustrate that the dichotomous division of familial labour has been undergoing a tremendous shift, with increasing numbers of women participating in the work force and, most noticeable since the 1980s, fathers playing a more participatory role in their children's upbringing (Nentwich 2008; Statistics Canada 2006; Craig 2006; Rapoport and Le Bourdais 2006; Bianchi at al. 2006; Doucet 2006, 2004; Beaujot 2002). My research project therefore also aimed at exploring whether these shifts in caregiving influence today's young women and men in how they think about parenting and who the primary caregiver should be. More precisely, do their parenting ideas reflect that fathers are now playing a more important role in their children's upbringing, or are traditional gender divisions in parenting roles still prevalent to a certain extent?

Chapter 5 and 6 will discuss the generated quantitative and qualitative data and the picture that emerged when analyzing the procreative and parenting ideas of my student sample.

The data provided answers to a number of my questions and confirmed some of my hypotheses. However, as can happen in exploratory research, some of my assumptions, while informed by scholarly literature, were not supported by my data.

### **1.3 Chapter Outline**

Following this introductory chapter, which provides the context for my research interest and a brief description of the project, chapter 2 discusses the theoretical frameworks, which form the foundational building blocks of my research project. The chapter illustrates why it is important for a researcher to be aware, and to give a detailed account, of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings that inform one's research. This argument is illustrated by exemplifying how social constructionist and feminist paradigms inform my understanding of our social world and in particular my understanding of motherhood and fatherhood. The chapter concludes with a reflexive exercise, positioning myself within my research and uncovering my personal experiences and biases. The purpose of this reflexive exercise is to enhance self-awareness of what biases might influence my research and to enhance transparency for the reader with respect to what informs the interpretation of the generated data and how I arrived at the presented conclusions.

The way people think about gender and parenting roles are not innate sentiments. Rather, the concepts of gender and parenthood are socially constructed and change over time. To better understand what might influence young students in how they envision parenthood and their respective parenting roles, chapter 3 explores how concepts of gender, motherhood and fatherhood are socially constructed, how they have changed over time, and how they differ depending on people's social backgrounds. The chapter further discusses contemporary parenting roles and the types of social factors and constraints that influence parenting behaviour.

Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of the main themes and findings of the literature on fertility rates and parenting trends.

Chapter 4 delineates the methodology applied to this research project and sets the stage with a discussion of the traditional tensions within sociology over the legitimacy and suitability of quantitative and qualitative research methods. It explores the more recent pragmatic approach that moves beyond the dichotomous debate and argues for mixed methods, if the research warrants it. Since all methods have their strengths and limitations, the choice of methods should not be guided by rigid principles but by the suitability for and responsiveness to the research needs. The subsequent section describes the mixed methods I chose for my project and discusses their advantages and limitations. Providing the context for the presentation of the research results in the subsequent chapters, chapter 4 concludes with a detailed description of the student sample.

Chapter 5 discusses the research findings on how my student sample envisions becoming parents. The introduction gives an overview into how envisioning parenthood has been conceptualized and operationalized, and is followed by a discussion of young female and male students' parenting ideas. Overall, gender differences were not as pronounced as I anticipated. The research findings reveal that female and male students' ideas overall are quite congruent and only differ in a few aspects. The concluding section discusses possible implications of students' ideas and argues that the explanation for discrepancies between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates is more complex than public discourses would suggest.

Chapter 6 delineates the research findings on how my student sample envision caring for their children. The outline of how childcare intentions have been conceptualized and operationalized is followed by a discussion of the research data on female and male students' childcare ideas. The results illustrate that there are some gender differences with respect to how

young students envision caring for their children and that while there are strong tendencies toward an egalitarian care model, traditional gender role ideas are still also prevailing. The conclusion derived from the data further substantiates that the phenomenon of low fertility rates is more complex than just being explained by women pursuing higher education.

The concluding chapter 7 summarizes the theoretical and methodological approach and the main themes and trends revealed by my research. It also highlights the gender similarities and differences with respect to what kind of ideas the participants hold about parenting. Despite some limitations of my research, my findings are an important contribution to the body of literature on fertility trends as they reveal current parenting ideas of young people who pursue higher education, and how these ideas compare to current fertility trends. The apparent discrepancy between the number of children young people think they would like to have and what actually is likely to play out during the course of their life span, exemplifies the need for further research into how the discrepancy could be narrowed and how to better support young people in realizing their parenting ideas.

## **CHAPTER 2: Ontology and Epistemology**

### **2.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

There are various ways of how we understand and make sense of our social world and others in it. The spectrum of theoretical frameworks within social sciences ranges from traditional positivist ideologies, which purport that reality is an independent abstract that can objectively be researched, measured and understood, to the more modern social constructivist and interpretivist ideologies, which contend that reality exists externally to people and can only be subjectively understood through a process of social interactions (Guba and Lincoln 2004; Glasersfeld 1984; Berger and Luckmann 1966). Depending on our understanding of reality and on our belief in an objective truth 'out there,' we will draw on different bodies of knowledge, apply different research methods, and arrive at different inferences and interpretations of our research data. It is therefore important for a social researcher to reflect on and account for one's ontological and epistemological understanding (Doucet 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2007; Guba and Lincoln 2004; Doucet and Mauthner 2003; Morrow 1994; Bourdieu 1992).

Reflecting on what informs my world view, I realize that the most salient influences on forming my ontological and epistemological understanding are the readings and teachings I was exposed to during my undergraduate program in Women's Studies and Sociology. I believe that while people have agency, the way we come to behave and understand our reality is to a large extent socially constructed. Influenced by internalized norms and values, we are compelled to perform our roles and to conform to social expectations. I also believe that people are fundamentally equal, regardless of their sex, race/ethnicity or other distinguishing features. The ontological and epistemological framework of my research project is therefore grounded in a social constructivist and feminist paradigm.

## **2.2 Social Constructivist Paradigm**

People are products of their upbringing and environment. Their ideas and behaviours are socially constructed through processes of socialization. The ontological foundation of social constructivism is that reality can be understood as an intangible mental construct held by individuals or groups of people. People come to form these mental constructs about reality through influences of a multitude of intersecting social experiences (Guba and Lincoln 2004). The epistemological underpinning of social constructivism is that individuals or groups come to 'know' what they know through interactive and discursive processes (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Knowledge is not an independent absolute; it is interactively constructed through discourse and mediated by language (Callinicos 1982). Absolute truth is unattainable but discourse can reach degrees of approximation of truth.

Women and men have distinctly different lived experiences and perform distinctly different roles, based on socially constructed and internalized gendered identities. Our gendered identity is part of our self-identity, which in turn is embedded in our interactions with others and relational to our social surrounding (Hall 1995). Our gendered identity is internalized through discourse, which constructs people's way of thinking and accepting it as 'natural' (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). This very internalizing of socially constructed gendered identities produces, reproduces and perpetuates the way women and men think of themselves and of others. The roles we play in life as women and men are instilled in us and internalized by us through intersecting enabling and constraining social structures, such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, class, religion/faith and sexual orientation (McMullin 2004). These interactive and intersecting processes not only mediate understandings of social reality, but they also construct our understanding of gender roles which dictate all aspects of life, including how women and men think of and perform their roles as mothers and fathers.

### **2.3 Feminist Paradigm**

Feminism contends that women and men are equal and should enjoy equal rights in all aspects of life (Elliot and Mandell 2001). People are drawn to feminist theories to find answers and ways of how to bring about social change and gender equality (Delphy 1975). While feminists are united in their objective of equality for women and men, they are divided on how to realize this goal. An ever increasing body of feminist literature illustrates that feminism means different things to different people. People's definitions and understandings of feminism are based on the individual's personal life experiences, shaped by intersecting social factors such as religion, ethnicity/race, class, sexual orientation, age and (dis)ability, to name a few (Rosenberg 2004; Bhavnani and Coulson 2003; Mohanty 2002; Butler 1990; hooks 1984; Bunch 1981(a), 1981(b); Kollias 1981). It is therefore not surprising that there is a vast spectrum of feminist theories and definitions. This spectrum ranges from the more mainstream liberal feminist approaches of improving existing structures to become women inclusive and gender equitable; to more radical feminist approaches of breaking down the existing patriarchal structures, which are deemed oppressive to women, and rebuilding inclusive structures which equally benefit women and men; to lesbian feminism which works toward deconstructing existing and reconstructing new, separate, structures for women and men (Calixte et al. 2005; Elliot and Mandell 2001).

The feminist approach of this thesis is informed by a hybrid of socialist and liberal feminisms (Calixte 2005). Gender inequality is perceived as being mainly a product of a pervasive and oppressive market economy, which, to a large extent, drives and perpetuates men's and women's unequal position in society. In the specific case of Canada, social divisions and inequalities based on race/ethnicity and social class also serve to differentiate both women's and men's opportunities and life choices both socially and politically (Rankin and Vickers 1998; Stasiulis 1991). In my view, a promising method to achieve gender equality would be to improve

and build on existing structures and to make them inclusive, just and fair for all members of society. One effective entry point into the process of improving existing structures is to advocate for state policies that will further women's and men's equality. My research findings will contribute to a better understanding of young women's and men's parenting ideas, which could inform policy changes. Changes in social policies informed by young people's parenting ideas might better facilitate the realization of young people's fertility intentions.

Feminist ontology is grounded in the belief that women's and men's realities are shaped by patriarchal discourses, which value men and masculinity, devalue women and femininity and construct gender roles in a binary, dichotomized way (Nentwich 2008). Feminist epistemology purports that traditional knowledge has been constructed within a patriarchal framework, is thus andro-centric and reflects the ideas of the dominant, male, segments of society (Code 1995). To properly reflect and include women's experiences and knowledge, traditional knowledge has to be critically analyzed and deconstructed. Further, women have to become the focus of scientific enquiry in their own right (Cook and Fonow 1990).

With respect to fertility trends there seems to be no shortage of attention on women. On the contrary, public discourses on fertility trends are primarily focused on women, with only some, albeit growing, attention being dedicated to men. However, making women the centre of enquiry must not be automatically equated with meeting feminist epistemological standards. A mainstream, male-centred, ontology and epistemology are still dominant in social research and public discourses and a patriarchal underpinning in interpreting data on fertility trends are thus still highly prevalent. My research therefore aimed at eliciting whether offered explanations of low fertility and motherhood at an advanced age do indeed reflect how young women envision becoming a parent. Further, since men play an integral part in women's procreative decision-

making, it was important for my research objective to include men and to also elicit their parenting ideas. Generating data of both genders allows me to compare and contrast young women's and men's ideas and to gain a better, more complete understanding of how they envision becoming a parent.

## **2.4 Reflexive Account**

There is a general consensus amongst scholars that reflexivity in social research is of vital importance because a researcher's ontological and epistemological positions fundamentally influence the research design (Doucet 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2007; Guba and Lincoln 2004; Mauthner and Doucet 2003; Morrow 1994; Bourdieu 1992). It also influences the gathering, analysis and interpretation of research data. As argued above, the understanding of our social world and of others in it is socially constructed in an interactive process. Sociological research is no exception to this rule and thus the meaning of the research objective is socially constructed between the researcher and the research participants. It follows that the interpretation of the research data includes the views and values of the researcher (Atkinson and Delamont 2006; Denzin and Lincoln 2007; Doucet 2008; Riessman 2008). This is a contentious aspect with critics of interpretivist and social constructivist paradigms, who argue for a value-free research approach. This thesis is informed by the assumption that the researcher's epistemological and ontological frameworks always impact the way research is designed, data is analyzed and meaning is constructed. This is always the case in any kind of human research whatever paradigm we work with and whether the researcher is aware of this fact or not. All researchers are first and foremost social beings and are therefore inevitably influenced by their subjective understanding of reality. They not only bring their epistemological and ontological viewpoint to the research, but are also influenced by their guiding principles, history, biography, and values.

A proven strategy to mitigate distortions or fallacies in social research when analyzing data and trying to make sense of it, is to engage in a reflexive exercise. The purpose of reflexivity is to explore and reveal one's beliefs and values and how we believe knowledge is constructed. As researchers, we must recognize how our biography and history influence our understanding of the social world and we must make these underlying influences transparent for our audience to enable them to reconcile our research findings (Seale 1999).

As mentioned above, based on the ontology and epistemology I adhere to, I believe that the way women and men think of themselves and behave in general, and as parents in particular, is to a large extent socially constructed within the exigencies and limitations of a pervasive patriarchal world. Girls and boys are instilled with normative heterosexual family values through the processes of socialization. This results in internalizing and normalizing these values and entices people to try to realize these family ideals. Further, my personal history and biography also play a fundamental role in my research. I chose my research topic on how young women and men envision becoming a parent because the explanations for low fertility rates and late-time motherhood, as offered by public discourses, were not congruent with my own experiences and observations about parenting.

Looking back on my own biography, I cannot really pinpoint the exact time, but basically once I reached my teen years I had my future life and family setting all planned out: I would finish high school; work for a few years; then get married (in a white princess-like gown) and have four children. I planned to complete all these tasks well within my twenties, because I did not want to be 'too old' for children. Having been exposed to sociological and feminist teachings and readings, it is not difficult to realize in retrospect how I came to form these ideas. Coming from a white, working class household with a divorced mother and an absent father, and growing

up in a catholic country which idealizes conservative family values, I internalized beliefs of an 'ideal' family and dreamed up my own, 'perfect', Disney-like family as an antithesis to what I grew up with.

However, reality 'bites' and things developed quite differently. I am now in my mid forties and have no children and while this circumstance reflects conscious decisions I made along the way, I am trying to reconcile 'what happened.' Theorizing answers to this question is not only important for my own sake, but will contribute to a better understanding of constraining circumstances which prevent women (and men) from realizing their ideas about becoming a parent. A superficial analysis of my biography would reinforce some of the arguments which are readily offered to explain low fertility. I pursued post-secondary education and entered the labour force, because I wanted to put my schooling to use and have a well paying job. Once I started working and realized that I liked the mental challenge it posed for me, I wanted to advance my career and a baby break would not have been advantageous in this endeavour. When I gained a certain measure of financial stability and independence, giving up work for a year of maternity leave or longer, and having to become financially dependent again, was not an attractive option.

In retrospect, when succinctly summarizing the various circumstances that led me to postpone and eventually abandon my intention of having children, it seems that my example fits squarely within the dominant fertility discourse of women pursuing higher education and a career and thus having fewer or no children. I always felt, though, that this explanation was too lopsided and influenced by a patriarchal ontology and epistemology which shifts the onus of having and bringing up children solely on women. The discourse constructs women as choosing personal gain at the expense of children, but ignores that this should not be an either-or question in the first place. Having children is not only a private matter but also of immense societal

importance. Women, therefore, should not have to fend for themselves to reconcile having children and making a living. We, as a society, are as vibrant and sustainable as we enable ourselves to be. The onus is thus on all of society and its institutions to create an enabling environment for women to have children and for both women and men to then raise them.

There is no doubt that my own experiences with respect to how I envisioned becoming a parent and what ultimately unfolded had a strong influence on my research. It kindled my interest in this topic in the first place and the objective of my research project was to engage with dominant discourses of fertility trends and particularly to engage with, and deconstruct, the suggested reasons as to why fertility is so low and why women become mothers at an advanced age. I hoped that capturing young people's ideas about parenting and juxtaposing these ideas with the explanations for low fertility and motherhood at an advanced age would allow me to challenge these very explanations. I also hoped that the generated data would further allow me to support arguments that advocate for a more accommodating environment that would allow young women and men to realize their fertility intentions.

## **CHAPTER 3: Theories of Gender and Parenting**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As argued in the previous chapter, people's ideas and understanding of reality are socially constructed (Guba and Lincoln 2004; Glasersfeld 1984; Berger and Luckmann 1966). This includes their understanding of gender roles, motherhood and fatherhood and how they live and value these roles (Lupton and Barclay 1997). To better understand the ways in which young people envision becoming a parent and what might inform their ideas, we first need to be aware of the genealogy of gender and parenting roles and how people come to envision certain ideals. The study of gender and parenting roles has, in large part, informed my research design and my understanding and interpretation of the research results.

For the most part, young people today will experience parenting differently than their parents or grandparents did when they were young. As Canadian census and survey data show, there is a trend of having fewer children, and to have them later in life, but there is also a trend toward a more egalitarian caregiving model (Statistics Canada 2009; 2006). All these changes in family formation, family size and couple interaction are inextricably connected with gradually changing gender and parenting roles.

### **3.2 How Social Construction Works**

The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of feminist theories are that women's and men's realities are shaped by a patriarchal discourse, which values men and devalues women (Nentwich 2008). Drawing on Foucault's analysis of discourse, which argues that discourse does not reflect an objective reality, but produces and constructs this very reality by discussing and describing it, feminist theorists appropriated this conceptualization and applied it as an analytical tool to problematize gender (Butler 1990). Gender can thus be understood as a product of a

historical discourse, resulting in a normative heterosexual identity, which penalizes gender role transgressions and perpetuates women's and men's power imbalances through internalized collective gender performativity. These internalized gender roles compel us to 'do gender' and to believe in its 'naturalness' (West and Zimmerman 1987). This internalization obscures the social construction and artificial conceptualization of gender roles. Only when comparing the conceptualization of gender from different cultures and regions or analyzing gender concepts across historical periods does it become obvious that it is neither universal nor static but culturally dependent and changing over time.

Unequal treatment and the unequal valuing of women and men are historically, culturally and socially constructed sentiments and thus can be challenged, deconstructed and reconstructed (Elliot and Mandell 2001). To find an entry point into gender deconstruction, feminist theorists drew on Marx's analytical tool of historical materialism to explore the historic development of inequality. While Marx focused on uncovering the origin of economic inequality, feminist theorists appropriated and adjusted this tool to explore the historic development of gender inequality (Delphy 1975).

### **3.3 Genealogy of Gender and Parenting Roles**

When analyzing gender roles over a period of time, it becomes manifest that gender roles and power relationships between women and men are very different, depending on culture, region and historic times. The one feature that power relations between women and men have almost universally in common throughout history is that women are and always have been subordinate to men. There are only a handful of known, small and localized, exceptions to this rule, where matriarchy and polyandry had been the dominating social order, or where community life had been based on a more gender egalitarian model (Edholm 1993; Leacock 1993; Engels

1964 [1942]). For the most part, however, gender equality is almost universally an elusive ideal for which women have been advocating for a long time, but which still has not been reached yet, at least not *de facto*.<sup>3</sup>

The social construction of gender and sexuality are inextricably linked to the reproductive capacity of women and men and the centrality of the family (Marsiglio 1998; Hamilton 1988; Lerner 1986; Leibowitz 1986). Humans are social beings who need interactions with others, and for humans to exist we need to procreate. The way human reproduction is functioning, male and female sexual differences are equally necessary, equally important, and interdependent. Yet, equal necessity and equal importance of sexual differences and interdependence of women and men have never translated into equally valuing women and men or their respective roles in the procreative process. In prehistoric European times, and until more recently in some remote North American and African tribal communities, procreation and familial systems had been group tasks of the kin or clan (Draper 1993; Leacock 1993; Chevillard and Leconte 1986; Engels 1964 [1942]). Childrearing and the division of labour was not strictly a matter between a wife and a husband, but more broadly a matter of all females and all males of the clan, with childrearing and domestic chores being taken on by women and hunting and food procurement being taken on by men.

These early kin or clan settings made it impossible to know who the father of a child was. Thus, the mother of the child determined lineage. With the emerging importance of accumulating wealth it also became important to pass on this wealth from father to son. This social shift toward importance of immediate, blood family instigated the shift toward male lineage and the institutionalization of patriarchy (Lerner 1986; Chevillard and Leconte 1986). Men had to

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, like constitutions in many other countries, proscribes discrimination based on gender (Section 15[1]) and gender equality exists *de jure*, but the actual realization of treating women and men equitably, *i.e.*, *de facto* gender equality, has not yet been realized.

ascertain the unambiguous origin of their offspring and thus seized control over, and subordinated, women's sexuality. The introduction of patrilineage changed the concept of family from a group effort of the kin or clan to a monogamous unit and at the same time shifted women's control over their own bodies to men (Marsiglio 1998; Lerner 1986). Engels equated this fundamental shift with nothing less than "the world historic defeat of the female sex" (1964 [1942], p. 50).

In Western societies, the more recent historic shift in power relations between women and men and the institutionalization of motherhood and fatherhood can be traced back to the emergence of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. With mass migration from the countryside to urban centres during the seventeenth and eighteenth century the millennia old feudal system started to be eclipsed by a capitalist system. This development not only fundamentally changed the hierarchical social order and people's way of life, but also dramatically changed women's and men's status within the family and within society (Tilly and Scott 1993).

During the feudal system, the majority of people were peasants who lived on parcels of land, which were provided to them by the lord (Hamilton 1988). Peoples' survival depended on their manual labour and what they were able to produce and yield from that land. Due to this harsh way of feudal life the concept of family and shared labour were vital prerequisites for survival. Marriage was an economic necessity for both men and women, and husbands and wives were interdependent on each other's labour. Children were also a vital necessity for the subsistence of the family and they were expected to contribute their labour once they reached the age of four or five (Irwin 2003). There was a distinct gendered division of labour, i.e., women, girls and young boys worked in the house, did household chores, tended to the garden and took

care of small animals. Men and older boys worked outside the house, taking care of agricultural needs and larger animals, and doing maintenance work (Wiesner 2000).

Those who were better off, like nobility, craftsmen and tradesmen, did not have the same harsh life as the peasants, but their family settings and mutual obligations were not all that different (Bennett 1994; Tilly and Scott 1993). The responsibilities of wives and daughters of lords, craftsmen and tradesmen were to manage the household and domestic affairs, whereas sons were groomed to become their fathers' successors. Thus, the mother-daughter and father-son divisions of family interactions were the products of a gendered division of labour and the common way of life during feudal times.

Despite this gendered division of labour and separation of work inside and outside the house, the conceptual separation of the private and public sphere, as we understand it today, had not yet occurred during feudal times and the boundaries were fluid and blurred (Hamilton 1988). Nonetheless, ideas associating women more with the domestic realm and men more with the non-domestic realm already existed. Other concepts, which are predominant today and shape women's and men's gender roles, such as motherhood, fatherhood or childhood and the ideas we associate with these concepts, had not yet played a role during the feudal system. All family members, including children, were interdependent and equally important in a collective struggle for survival.

The literature on feudal family settings asserts that the feudal system was patriarchal and despite the interdependence between men and women, men were the dominant sex and fathers the head of the household (Broughton and Rogers 2007; Boyd 2003; Wiesner 2000). In addition to being the head of the household, fathers were also expected to be actively involved in the upbringing and training of their sons and to uphold family traditions and rituals (Broughton and

Rogers 2007). From a contemporary perspective and in context with the discourse of ‘the new father’ who is involved in his children’s upbringing, it is important to note that in feudal times, both mothers and fathers were active parents and were both responsible for the upbringing and training of their children within their respective prescribed domestic realms.

With the emergence of the industrial revolution and capitalism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the solidification of a capitalist market economy in the nineteenth century, the way of life changed fundamentally, particularly in the western hemisphere, and most notably in England. We see the emergence of industrial centres, urbanization and mass migration from rural areas to cities and women’s power relation vis-à-vis men deteriorated with these changes (Tilly and Scott 1993; Hamilton 1988). Peasant men and women, who used to live off their domestic labour and products of their land during feudal times, had to migrate to urban centres and sell their labour power for wages that barely earned them a living. The traditional division of labour, which compelled women to tend to children and the household, continued to prevail in capitalist times, even though women now had to also venture outside the house to sell their wage labour to support their family. Capitalism is therefore not only the historic transformation to the era of modernity, but also the historic origin of women’s double duty to do unpaid domestic labour in addition to their paid labour (Alexander 1976).

Nobility, craftsmen and tradesmen had, for the most part, an easier transition into the capitalist market economy and became the propertied middle-upper and bourgeoisie classes who owned the means of production. Men owned and ran businesses and factories and dominated the public sphere and their wives were relegated to the domestic sphere (Broughton and Rogers 2007; Wiesner 2000). This is the historic origin in the western world of the socially constructed gender roles of men as ‘breadwinners’ and women as ‘mothers and angels in the home.’ These

newly, socially constructed gender roles and the elite ideal of female domesticity became normative for all women and men, even though the majority of people could not live up to that (Cott 1993). Working class men earned barely enough wages to sustain themselves, let alone their families. This meant that women could not devote themselves to the newly created type of domesticity, but that women and children also had to join the work force to supplement the family income and to make ends meet. But just as this newly created domesticity was riddled with inconsistencies, so were the newly created gender and parenting roles.

### **3.4 Social Construction of Motherhood**

The emergence of capitalism and modernity initiated fundamental changes to social life which, by consequence, resulted in profound changes to gender and parenting roles. Legally, paternal rights and responsibilities of the husband and father were almost sacrosanct. Women and children had no legal standing in their own right and were the property of their husbands and fathers (Broughton and Rogers 2007; Boyd 2003). Working class women had no right to their own wages and women of all classes had no right over their children. Particularly upper class women were reduced to the roles of mothers, wives and social entertainers, which they found very limiting. They thus started to challenge these limitations at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century (Stoddart and Strong-Boag 1975). The First Wave Feminist Movement, which is predominantly associated with women claiming the right to vote, also raised another important claim, i.e., women's right to work and the right to decide over their own income (Hamilton 1988). It needs to be emphasized that claiming the right to work was primarily an issue of upper class women who tried to apply their education in a meaningful way and to break free from their golden cage. The right to work was not an issue for working class women who already were expected to, and had to, work.

Women gaining the franchise did not bring about the anticipated improved status of women in society, nor did it improve women's limiting gender roles. Domesticity and the idea of a 'good wife, mother and angel in the home' and the centrality of family continued to be normatively imposed, despite the fact that the majority of women were still barely in a position to afford this life-style. Fuelled by readily dispensed expert advice and a growing body of expert and pastime literature and lifestyle magazines, which made motherhood and childrearing their central themes, the importance of closeness of mothers to their children, particularly during the early periods of infancy, were strongly advocated (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). This advocated closeness socially constructed women as full-time mothers and primary caregivers.

Women are first and foremost thought of as mothers (O'Reilly and Porter 2005). Women of all ages are readily asked if they have children whereas men are not as commonly confronted with such a question. Motherhood is considered as central to women's femininity and women are engrained with the idea that having children is desirable, enriching and the ultimate fulfilment of womanhood (McQuillan et al. 2008; Gillespie 2003). The centrality of motherhood is also demonstrated in the language because not having children was for the longest time only expressed in terms of a lack, or an absence of something that ought to be. It is usually referred to in terms of 'infertility' or 'childlessness' (Park 2005; Gillespie 2003). This language limitation is based on the assumption that it is 'natural' for women to want children and that women who do not have children suffer from an involuntary condition (Stobert and Kemeny 2003). This approach ignores women's agency in so far as having a child is not the only option open to women, respectively women could make an intentional choice to not have children.

The fact that there are women who intentionally decide not to have children is, however, a recent growing phenomenon, albeit primarily in Western societies. These women are claiming

the term 'childfree' to emphasize that they do not define their femininity through motherhood and that a childfree life-style can be fulfilling and advantageous (Gillespie 2003; Stobert and Kemeny 2003). There are a number of enabling features for this phenomenon such as women's increased power to decide over their own bodies; access to contraception and reproductive controls; and women's increased economic independence to live the kind of life-style they choose for themselves. This newly gained independence of women is not unequivocally appreciated by society. Women who intentionally choose to not have children are challenging the normative female gender role and are often perceived as deviant, unfeminine or at the very least selfish. This controversial perception of childfree women confirms that their transgression of the traditional construction of femininity through motherhood is not readily accepted yet and that the dominant discourses about women are still in connection with women as mothers.

The notions about motherhood in Western societies are still riddled with a number of contradictions. Particularly in North America, where the dominant discourse of motherhood is associated with white, middle class women (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). Popular culture and mass media are usually propagating experiences of 'white' motherhood, whereas Black or Latina women are far less frequently included in this picture (Gillespie 2003). Ironically, however, white women are on average far more likely than Black and Latina women to postpone childbearing to a later age and to stay childfree. On the other hand, Black and Latina women are on average more likely to have more children, which might be a result of overall lower educational attainment (McQuillan et al. 2008). Yet, the dominant idea of 'mother' is 'white' and experiences of mothers of other ethnic backgrounds along with their understanding of motherhood are mostly ignored.

Another salient feature in the discourse regarding motherhood, although rarely discussed explicitly, is that it is mostly relating to mothering of small children (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). The propagated importance of women spending time with their children and children's need for all-time accessible mothers relates to infants and very young children. There is a decisive lack of construction of 'appropriate' mothering in relation to older children or teenagers, who do not need and often do not want intensive mothering anymore. Particularly, discussions around mothers participating in the job market draw on dominant ideas of motherhood, which are shaped by mothering of small children. The readily dispensed advice in popular discourses is that it would be better for women to stay at home and tend to their children, or that combining mothering and working might negatively affect children. That the children might already be older and not in need of intensive mothering is usually not part of popular discourses. Also usually not part of popular discourses are considerations that combining working and childcare might not be an option but an inevitable necessity for survival. Women often find themselves in a position where they feel they have to justify why they spend more time away from their children and combine working and childrearing.

The underlying assumption in the discourses on motherhood and mothering is that it is a woman's 'natural' duty to tend to children. Women are not only socially constructed as mothers but also as primary caregivers. The legacy of an early capitalist gender construction of men as breadwinners and women as mothers and 'angels in the home' is still, in large part, informing our ideas about motherhood to this day. The dominant discourses of motherhood ignore that these very ideas have been socially constructed and also obscure the fact that for most women being a working mother is not a choice but an inevitable economic necessity.

But the flawed ideas about women's caregiving duties are not the only contradictions in the discourses of motherhood. When analyzing the various representations of motherhood as propagated in fictional literature, parenting literature and also in religious texts, it becomes evident that our understanding of a 'good' mother is socially constructed under the influence of patriarchy (O'Reilly and Porter 2005). The spectrum of mothering roles is limited to an oppressive male vision and narrative, which creates an insurmountable oxymoron for women. To be a 'good woman', one has to become a mother, but to be a 'good mother' one cannot be a sexual female being anymore and have an identity other than mother. With the emergence of the Second Wave Feminist Movement in the mid to late 1960s, feminists started to challenge the ideas of 'traditional' family, motherhood and the rigid gendered division of labour, which they perceived as being oppressive to women and perpetuating their subordinate status in society (Hamilton 1988; Friedan 1963). Women started in increasing numbers to participate in the work force again, which impacted on the organization of family life and the role of fathers. Patriarchal ideas of a 'traditional' family, and 'traditional' gender and parenting roles have been institutionalized over centuries and are thus not easily changed. However, decades of feminist engagement with women's subordination and the challenging of unequal gender relations managed to slowly bring about social change in how we socially construct family life, parental roles, motherhood and fatherhood.

### **3.5 Social Construction of Fatherhood**

Scholarly literature suggests that while fathers had an active role in their sons' upbringing during feudal times, with the emergence of capitalism fatherhood became more associated with paternity than with parenting (Broughton and Rogers 2007). Fathers were responsible for the well being of their children, but they were no longer expected to be hands-on fathers. The day-to-

day care was the primary responsibility of mothers, respectively more affluent households contracted out nurturing tasks to wet nurses, in-house teachers and governesses (Doolittle 2007; Tilly and Scott 1993). On the other hand, it was not unusual for working class families that older children would take care of their younger siblings. There was thus a distinction between caring *about* children, which was the responsibility of fathers, and caring *for* children, which was delegated to others.

While men continued to be socially constructed first and foremost as ‘breadwinners’ and head of the family and household, we can see the emergence of another shift after World War II with respect to how fatherhood and the traditional family is portrayed (Dummitt 1998; Daly 1993). After almost five decades of hardship and turmoil with World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, Canadians were finally able to enjoy peaceful times, an improving economy and increased personal material well-being. This was not only the start of a new era, the so-called baby boom years (Foot 1998), but also the beginning of literature and lifestyle magazines focusing their attention on fathers and propagating ideas of how contemporary fathers should behave and how they should engage with their children.

Starting in the early 1950s, people, on average, had more leisure time and more money to spend than they ever had before (Dummitt 1998). The capitalist market economy seized the opportunity to advertise new ways of living to boost sales of new products. Popular depictions in films and advertisements in newspapers, magazines and radio constructed a ‘new’ image of what it meant to be a family. This ‘new’ baby boom family was nuclear, white, middle-class, with a working father and a stay-at-home mother and a very traditional gendered division of labour (Rutherford 1999). But the baby boom father did not just provide the bare necessities for his family. In this time of improved material well-being it was promoted that he made enough

money to buy a car, household appliances, like a state-of-the-art stove, a washing machine and a TV; leisure articles, like a boat; and he could afford to take his family on a vacation. Befitting the newly constructed image of the baby boom men as being able-bodied and masculine, the ideal outlet for these attributes was an outdoor adventure and camping was advertised as being the perfect combination of outdoor adventure and family vacation.

Popular magazines, like Maclean's, published a number of articles that promoted this new way of living, and particularly camping, as the new maxim of how family life should play out. Such publications were influential in the social construction of a new masculine domesticity, which included new domestic trends such as barbecuing (Dummitt 1998). While daily household chores were not part of the masculine picture, outdoor cooking and barbecuing became associated with manliness and a fatherly thing to do. The popular discourse at the time also promoted that fathers take a more active role in their children's lives (Rutherford 1999). Suggestions ranged from taking them to sports events and spending time coaching them, to scouting and getting involved in youth groups and community activities. When critically analyzing the discourse, it becomes evident that this newly promoted active fatherhood was particularly geared toward father-son activities and activities that would fit within the social construction of the baby boom father and the newly promoted masculine domesticity.

Narratives from this time, and also from interviews with men who were fathers during the baby boom era, illustrate that not all fathers could or wanted to live up to this newly created ideal (Rutherford 1999). The promoted white middle-class picture excluded various segments of Canadian society, but these new ideas of what fathers should do and how they should treat their family were nonetheless quite influential for all of society. While men might not have had the financial means to live up to the new standard, some of the applied coping strategies to deal with

possible feelings of inadequacy included comparisons with their own fathers. This often allowed baby boom fathers to reassure themselves that they were better fathers than their own fathers had been, not so much on a financial level, recognizing that economic times were vastly different, but more on an emotional level, and the extent to which they perceived themselves of having been involved in their children's lives.

Not surprisingly, as there are contradictions within the social construction of motherhood, there are also contradictions within the social construction of fatherhood. When analyzing the discourses of fatherhood since the rise of capitalism and particularly during the Victorian age, historians detect a number of contradictions between ideology and lived experiences. For example, the newly socially constructed domesticity became the primary realm and responsibility of women (Cott 1993), yet men were regarded as the legal head of the family and household and as the father figure, not just for their children, but for all members of the household, including domestic servants (Broughton and Rogers 2007). Another contradiction can be seen with the social construction of women as 'mothers and angels in the home'. However, women of the propertied class delegated the actual domestic and childrearing work to servants, nurses and governesses. Thus, fathers were legally responsible for the household and children, mothers were organizationally responsible for the household and children, and the actual work was done by others (Tilly and Scott 1993). Yet, the separation of public and private spheres, which emerged during this historic era, and the socially constructed gender roles of domestic mothers and emotionally distant breadwinning fathers, is a legacy that still very much influences us to this day. It still determines how we organize the labour market and, by consequence, how we organize our work and family life (Duxbury 2009).

### **3.6 Social Construction of Childhood**

Although my research only engages with parenting ideas of young female and male students and draws on their understanding of their respective parenting roles, it is equally important to be aware that our understanding of children and childhood, particularly how we value children and think we should treat them, is also socially constructed and changes over time. Analogous to the analysis of women's and men's status and value within western societies, the analysis of the genealogy of childhood also reveals a non-linear change over time and differences depending on a person's class, race/ethnicity, or other social variables. All societies at all times have had a concept of 'childhood', meaning the developmental state different from that of an adult. But where societies differ is in the *conception* of childhood, meaning how children are valued and should be treated and the age of transition from child to adult (Heywood 2001). The appreciation of children has also differed across time and space. Ranging from "childhood (being) the most vile and abject state of human nature, after that of death" (French cleric Pierre de Bérulle, 1666, cited by Heywood 2001, p. 9), to being treated like small adults and their child-specific needs being ignored, children and childhood have more recently been elevated to "legitimate subjects in their own right, worthy of scholarly attention" (Caputo 2001 p. 179).

Despite the vast spectrum of appreciation of children over time, having children has always been important, albeit in different ways, depending on the child's family background. The ruling classes valued children either as dynastic heirs, in the case of sons, or in cases of daughters, as valuable political pawns who were strategically married off (Bastl 1996). The poor classes valued children as important labour assets to supplement the meagre family income (Tilly and Scott 1993). Historians identify with the emergence of Enlightenment in Europe a slowly but distinctly progressing shift in the conceptualization of children and childhood. This new

philosophy promoted the re-thinking of values, including the value of children (Heywood 2001). The introduction of child labour laws and compulsory education by the end of the nineteenth century invoked a shift from children contributing to the family income from an early age, to children having to be schooled and delaying workforce participation (Irwin 2003). This prolonged period of caring for children initiated a change in the conception of childhood and the value of children evolved, at least for poor families, from an economic asset to an economic cost factor.

In contemporary Western cultures, children are generally seen as a source of joy and happiness but the prolonged period of schooling and delayed transition to adulthood constitute considerable economic burdens for parents, which play an important role in a couples' decision with respect to how many children they will have (Beaujot and Muhammad 2006). Over time, there has also been a shift in ideas about 'appropriate' childcare and how much time mothers, and more recently also fathers, should dedicate to their children. Parents, but particularly mothers, often find themselves in a moral dilemma when having, or wanting, to bridge paid work and childcare (Duxbury 2009; Kugelberg 2006; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001).

### **3.7 Contemporary Parenting Roles and Constraints**

Our political and economic structures, including employment structures, have historically been developed by men to meet male exigencies and enabled by a traditional division of labour. The legacy of these structures is still constraining both women and men in developing a reasonable and equitable family-work life balance that allows both partners to work and to equally care for their children (Duxbury 2009; Boyd 2005). But changes are happening, albeit slowly, and there are a number of improvements with respect to women's and men's equality. For example, combining working and mothering, or fathers taking on a 'mothering' role and

being equal or even primary caregivers of children, is socially far more acceptable in contemporary times than it used to be (Kugelberg 2006; Doucet 2006). Decades of feminist work and gender equality advocacy is slowly starting to become mainstream thinking and gender equality measures are being introduced into laws and policies. Social policies are aiming at changing the gendered structures of traditional familial division of labour and to facilitate parental leave for mothers as well as fathers. This allows both women and men to take some time off after the birth of their child and allows them the re-entry into their job after a specific period of time.

Parental policies are not only intending to facilitate childbearing and childrearing for women, but are also aimed at engaging more men to be participatory fathers. As numerous studies show, however, there is a disconnect between special needs of parents and the extent to which the labour market is willing to accommodate these special needs (McQuillan et al. 2008; Wall & Arnold 2007; Kugelberg 2006; Gillespie 2003; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). An unaccommodating labour market, driven by a profit-oriented economy, is still operating on a patriarchal model with all-time available employees, and where long and inflexible hours are equated with efficiency. Those who want to build a career have to submit to this model. Those who cannot or do not want to submit to this model are not building a career, or are simply not advancing past a certain level.

The negative ramification of this patriarchal model is that children and caregiving, at least for a number of years, are very difficult to bridge. Parents have to decide how to combine work and childrearing, respectively who will be the primary caregiver and who will pursue a career. Since economic considerations play an important role in every household and men, on average, are earning more money than women, most families are repeating the traditional

gendered division of labour and perpetuate traditional gender roles (Statistics Canada 2006; Beaujot 2002). Thus, a capitalist economy, which promotes consumerism and economic affluence, is undermining laws and social policies that encourage gender equality and co-parenting. Consequently, it perpetuates women's financially weaker position within the family as well as within society at large.

The majority of women in most Western societies are, however, trying to combine caregiving and work in one way or another. They juggle these multiple responsibilities either because they want to continue their pursuit of a career, or, more often than not, out of economic necessity. Whatever their motives and economic circumstances might be, studies show that women who combine childcare and work are plagued by sentiments of anxiety and guilt as to whether they are 'good' mothers (McQuillan et al. 2008; Wall & Arnold 2007; Kugelberg 2006; Gillespie 2003). Discourses on 'good' mothers or a 'good' mother-child relationship purports that women should be physically and emotionally accessible for children in order for children to become stable and emotionally balanced persons (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001; Fox 2009). Thus, the constructed understanding of 'good' motherhood, particularly in connection with small children, is a perpetual source of anxiety for women and leads them to question their work-childrearing choices. Carving out a little space for their own needs causes women to doubt whether they do 'enough' and it leaves them with a nagging feeling of guilt. Balancing work and childrearing becomes a daily struggle as women attempt to optimize the limited time to the child's advantage. This struggle often leads women to forego activities other than paid work to be 'there' for their children.

These constant and all-encompassing mothering responsibilities can also lead women to suffer from exhaustion. Since the socially constructed ideal of a 'good' mother is never fully

attainable, some women start to question their sacrificial mothering capacity, which leaves them with feelings of being a 'bad' mother (Wall & Arnold 2007; Rich 1976). Socially constructed gender roles privilege men's work over women's work and family life is often structured around the notion that women's time is negotiable. More precisely, women are often expected to arrange their time commitments around the needs and desires of other family members, often at the expense of their own needs and desires. Men's time, however, is understood to be less negotiable and their commitments to be 'more important' (Kugelberg 2006; Lapierre-Adamcyk 2006; Rapoport and Le Bourdais 2006; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001).

Over the past few decades, however, there have been some significant changes in the roles of fathers, as studies attest. A large body of social research demonstrates that, on average, fathering practices and time investment in childcare are changing and that we are in the process of undergoing a shift in the social construction of fatherhood. Various studies show that fathers are now dedicating more time to parenting. They are more actively involved and their involvement is more hands-on than it used to be the case just a few decades ago (Wall and Arnold 2007; Bianchi et al. 2006; Statistics Canada 2006; Doucet 2006, 2004; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). This significant cultural shift in the practice of fatherhood can be traced back to the early 1980s. Rather than just taking the family camping or doing coaching and barbecuing, this discourse of 'the new father' has prompted an increased expectation of men's hands-on involvement in caring for their children, as opposed to just organizing their leisure activities. As the literature purports, 'the new father' is not only getting more involved, but he also is increasingly enjoying the closer emotional relationships with his children (Doucet 2006).

Some of the features of 'the new father' are that they are now trying to negotiate a more balanced family-work life, are contributing more unpaid labour to the household, are present

during the birth of their child and dedicate more time to parenting than they used to (Nentwich 2008; Statistics Canada 2006; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Promoted by popular culture and supported by social policies, men are now increasingly able to take some time off work or to work more flexible hours, which allows them to take on more parental responsibilities. Fathers are no longer just constructed as breadwinners, but are increasingly portrayed as also being more nurturing, emotionally involved, committed to playing an important role in their child's life and ready to take on the role of co-parent (Ranson 2010, 2001; Wall and Arnold 2007; Doucet 2006, 2004).

Changing father roles notwithstanding, mothers, on average, are still doing more unpaid labour in the household and are assuming the majority of child rearing while reducing their hours of paid labour (Bianchi et al. 2006; Lapierre-Adamcyk 2006; Rapoport and Le Bourdais 2006; Statistics Canada 2006; Beaujot 2002). Fathers, on the other hand, are barely reducing their hours of paid labour, mostly because of an inflexible work environment where 'making a career' still means having to put in the hours (Ranson 2001). But fathers are now also finding themselves increasingly in situations where they have to find ways of balancing work and childcare time. When looking beyond the dominant discourses of 'the new father' and researching actual fathering practices, it becomes obvious that there are contradictions and gaps between the new cultural expectations and real-life experience (Wall and Arnold 2007; Doucet 2006). First of all, not all fathers are stepping up to the plate and performing the newly constructed father role. Those fathers who are getting more involved are primarily taking care of older children, like pre-school children, as opposed to infants who are still primarily cared for by mothers.

There is also a difference between mothers and fathers with respect to the kind of caregiving tasks they perform. Even with hands-on fathers, parenting practices are still underpinned by a gendered division of labour. While mothers are more responsible for the child's physical and hygienic well-being, in other words preparing meals, bathing and providing clean clothes, fathering practices are more encompassing playing with their child and organizing leisure activities (Nentwich 2008; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Fathers are also more likely to spend time with their child in the presence of the mother, whereas mothers are more likely to spend time with their child while the father is away (Bianchi et al. 2006; Lapierre-Adamcyk 2006; Rapoport and Le Bourdais 2006). As opposed to mothers, who usually arrange their work life around family obligations and are more likely to give up personal time in favour of childcare needs, fathers are more likely to arrange their family life around their work obligations in response to an inflexible job market while trying to keep their career options viable (Kugelberg 2006). Overall, 'the new father' is more ubiquitous as a cultural image than an actually lived practice and involved fathering is more often interpreted with the willingness and ability to be a hands-on father as opposed to actually committed time to fathering (Ranson 2001).

The literature also exposes that the public discourse on fathering is carrying certain prejudicial underpinnings with respect to men's capabilities of caring. Images of fathers often portray them as optional, part-time or secondary parents, as less competent, less knowledgeable, and often in need of instructions or help, and as "mother's bumbling assistant" (Nentwich 2008; Wall and Arnold 2007). In commercials for fast food or cleaning products, fathers are often portrayed as similar to children: messy, helpless and just barely able to operate a microwave. Slapstick comedies about fathers rarely pass up the opportunity to show them attempting to change a diaper without nearly dropping or accidentally strangling the baby in the process. These

portrayals seriously undermine the image of fathers and their fathering skills and competency, which they, by all means, can possess, as studies into male primary caregivers show (Ranson 2010; Doucet 2006, 2004).

Although the overall number is still very small, there are more and more fathers who assume the role of primary caregiver. According to Statistics Canada 2002 data, Canadian fathers account for about 10 per cent of stay-at-home parents (Doucet 2006). As studies illustrate, fathers can be just as competent as mothers in caring for their children of all ages, including infants (Ranson 2010; Wall and Arnold 2007; Doucet 2009). Although fathers in these studies often comment on mothers having strong 'natural' emotional bonds with their children, the fathers assert that they are also forming deep emotional bonds and that they are nurturing and affectionate. Fathers also report, however, that they are faced with a certain gendered prejudice and that there is still a lack of public acceptance of physicality between men and children. 'Rough' playing with children on the playground is acceptable, but fathers showing affection and physically touching their children, particularly when they are small, is still subject to public scrutiny. They feel as though they are breaching a social taboo (Doucet 2006, 2004). It seems that the legacy of the Victorian social construction of men and masculinity is still lingering today and that despite the pervasive discourse of 'the new father', certain aspects of caregiving are notionally only associated with women.

Interestingly, when studying fathers' experiences and what they think is influential in constructing or guiding their fathering role, researchers such as Kerry Daly (1993) have found that fathers do not think that they are influenced by the dominant discourses. Although the sociological tenet of social construction purports that how we think we are perceived by others is a crucial element in the process of identity formation, most fathers in Daly's study indicated that

they were less influenced by expectations of their wives or peers, but rather gauged their fathering performance by comparing themselves to their own fathers. Fathers professed the desire to do better than their fathers did by either being more involved, or more present, or more encouraging toward their children. These findings are in line with the studies on baby boomer fathers, who also used their fathers as a yardstick for assessing their own performance of fatherhood. Since studies show that the baby boomer father was indeed more hands-on involved than fathers before, and studies now find that ‘the new father’ is again more involved than fathers ever before, maybe more active fathering will happen in generational increments because the preceding father generations are taken as the yardstick to do it ‘better’.

As this literature review on motherhood and fatherhood illustrates, the way men and women perform their parenting roles are not ‘natural’ phenomena, but are socially constructed, differ between classes, culture, ethnicity/race, and change over time. Despite the changing role of fathers and mothers and the trend toward ‘the new father’ and working mothers, parenthood is still constructed around a gendered division of labour with the majority of women being the primary caregivers and having the ultimate responsibility for their children. Men are primarily in the public sphere, in paid work and are the family’s main provider. While there is empirical data showing that fathers have become more involved in their children’s upbringing since the early 1980s, the popular images suggest that fathers are more involved in childrearing than they actually are. Fathers often interpret their willingness and availability as active fathering whereas their actual time commitment is rather limited. There is no doubt that with respect to parenting, the parental division of labour has somewhat changed over the past thirty years and fathers are increasing their involvement in childrearing. However, mothers are still ultimately responsible

for children's well-being and are particularly bearing the lion's share of responsibility for infants and young children.

Feminist theorists have produced a large body of academic literature on challenging and deconstructing these limiting gender roles, but precisely because the majority of people perceive these ubiquitous gender roles as 'natural', changes are only happening at a very slow pace. The actual realization of 'the new father' is still some time away and thus feminist sociologists who study the family must remain vigilant about the gap between popular perception and actual lived practice. However, as the discussion of my research findings in subsequent chapters demonstrates, both young women and men of my sample group are sharing strong and similar beliefs about 'the new father' and equal parenting. Whether they will eventually realize the ideas that they hold today remains to be seen.

### **3.8 Literature Review**

As discussed above, how we think about women and mothers, men and fathers and parenting in general is socially constructed and differs over time, regionally and culturally. Having children and a family might seem a private matter, based on private decisions. What is largely ignored, however, is the fact that a state, respectively a sovereign, has a vested interest in the composition of a nation's society and demographic changes. Our seemingly private decisions about family, procreation, and how women and men act and interact are thus significantly influenced by facilitating or constraining social structures and social institutions such as a country's legal framework, the economy or education, to name a few (Ravanera and McQuillan 2006). These structures and institutions all work for the benefit of the state and influences are exercised through practices and policies (Gauthier and Philipov 2008). Whether or not these

practices and policies are effective depends in large part on their sensitivity to demographic changes.

In order to devise appropriate economic and social policies, industrialized nation-states are attentive to population numbers and are closely monitoring demographic trends such as mortality, fertility and migration. Demographic projections are not easy or straightforward mathematical exercises, as is vividly illustrated by early Canadian demographic projections, which had a tendency of being completely incorrect. For example, a government projection from 1939, one of the earliest demographic projections in Canada, estimated that the population would reach 15.4 million in 1971 (Beaujot 2003). Projections made after World War II estimated an even lower figure and predicted that Canada would only reach 13.8 to 14.6 million in 1971. In reality, Canada's population was already 21.6 million in 1971 and rose to over 30 million by the year 2000. One of the difficulties in projecting population growth is the prediction of fertility rates, which, for some time, was estimated at a higher rate than was actually the case. Demographers assumed that fertility rates would steady themselves around the population replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman; it seemed inconceivable that fertility might drop below this seemingly magic number (Beaujot 2003). As time has proven, however, actual fertility trends have significantly dropped starting in the mid 1960s and have been below replacement levels ever since 1972 (Statistics Canada 2009).

In 2007, there were 367,864 births in Canada, resulting in a fertility rate of 1.66 children per woman within her reproductive period (Statistics Canada 2009). While this number represents an improvement over the fertility rate of the previous year, it still means that Canada is far from reaching the population replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. Women between the age of 30 and 34 showed the highest increase in birth rate in 2007, i.e., 49% of all

births. The fertility rate of this age group has continuously increased over the past 10 years, while fertility rates of younger women have decreased. In fact, while there has been a substantial downward change in fertility rates over time, the upward change in age of first time mothers has been even more substantial. For example, the average age of first-time mothers in 1976 was 24.4 years, while in 2001, the average age was 27.1 (Beaujot and Muhammad 2006).

A considerable body of literature engages with low fertility and motherhood at an advanced age and theorizes about causes of low fertility rates and possible counter-initiatives. There is concern about an increasingly aging population and Canada's economic viability (Ravanera and McQuillan 2006; Beaujot 2003), as well as women's well-being with respect to maternal health risks and risks of infertility if procreation is postponed for too long (Health Canada 2005; Baird 2009). Explanations of possible causes for low fertility rates include increased numbers of women pursuing higher education (Hango and Le Bourdais 2009); increased labour force participation of women as well as marriage at a later age (Mitchell 2006; Gillespie 2003; Stobert and Kemeny 2003; Foot 1998); social and economic circumstances that impede the realization of fertility intentions, such as financial constraints (Beaujot and Muhamma 2006); an unaccommodating work environment (Duxbury and Higgins 2009; McQuillan et al. 2008; Wall & Arnold 2007; Kugelberg 2006; Gillespie 2003; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001); and lack of affordable childcare (OECD 2005).

What is noteworthy with respect to fertility is that most young people, when asked, do want to have children, as children are seen as a source of joy and fulfilment (Crompton and Keown 2009; Beaujot and Mohammad 2006; Qu and Weston 2004; Beaujot 2003). Fertility intentions, on average, are considerably higher than the actual fertility rate as an analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) data of 2006 illustrates (see Appendix E). Questions on expected

family size generated an average number of children of 2.3 for both women and men between the age of 18 and 25 (Statistics Canada 2006). Analyses of GSS data over the years show that even when controlling for other variables, such as level of education or employment status, there is only very little variation in the desired number of children (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006). This illustrates that the dominant idea of family size in Canada, as in many other industrialized countries, is having 2 or 3 children, depending on the cultural and regional context (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008; Tudiver 2005; Qu and Weston 2004). Yet, ideas do not always translate into behaviour, as low fertility rates demonstrate.

The literature suggests a number of reasons why fertility intentions do not translate into behaviour. That is, people are not dogmatically pursuing a preconceived life plan, but are making fertility decisions one birth and one child at a time (Crompton and Keown 2009). These staged decision-making processes on having children leave room for adjustments, as people get more mature. It often results in reductions of people's fertility intentions, depending on their life circumstances at the time. There are a number of factors that may interactively play a role in people re-thinking their fertility intentions, such as delays in transitions and achievements that typically precede childbearing. Deferred entry into the labour market and building financial security could play a delaying role (Qu and Weston 2004; Parker and Alexander 2004; Schoen et al. 1999). Some of the underlying reasons for these delays in transition are changes in the economy and the labour market, with an economy requiring increasing numbers of high-skilled labour and promoting higher and longer education, yet does not guarantee satisfactory work opportunities. This makes it more difficult, even for well-educated people, to obtain adequate work and causes considerable job insecurity (Ravanera and Rajulton 2007; Weston 2004). Such

insecurities can result in postponing childbearing and in turn may affect the number of children a woman can have, due to decreasing fertility with increasing age.

Another factor is the change in values with respect to family formation, an overall delay and decrease in forming a partnership and an increase in partnership breakdowns (Ravanera and Rajulton 2007; Lochhead 2005). As couples in stable relationships are more likely than single people to have children, delays in partnership formation also result in postponement of childbearing. It is further suggested that women's increased financial independence due to increased participation in the labour force plays a role. Women often choose to reduce the number of children they have or choose to not have children at all in order to be able to stay in the work force, rather than giving up paid work and having to become dependent on their partner (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008; Beaujot 2002).

While, as mentioned above, there are a number of reasons and factors that would indicate why fertility rates are so low, public discourses on fertility still routinely emphasize that one of the reasons are women who pursue higher education. There is no question that higher education has a delaying effect on having children due to a prolonged period of schooling (Clark 2007), but these delays equally affect both female and male students. To purport a correlation between higher education and low fertility rates for women only seems therefore simplistic and flawed. There needs to be more emphasis on other factors that play a fundamental role, such as rigid social institutions like the family, education and the labour market, which are built on patriarchal foundations and a traditional division of labour. These institutions have not yet adequately adapted to gender equality and are thus not responsive to women's and men's needs with respect to having and caring for children. If the promises of higher education, i.e., a career and a better-paying job, are not compatible with having and caring for children, it is not surprising that

female and male graduates are not realizing their fertility intentions (Weston 2004). On the other hand, policies that better allow bridging work and childcare for both women and men could have positive impacts on young people's realization of fertility intentions, as the Swedish model would suggest (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008; Gauthier and Philipov 2008).

Pursuing higher education does not adequately explain low fertility rates since most young people of all educational backgrounds do want children (Statistics Canada 2006; Beaujot and Mohammad 2006). There is no reason to assume that young university students are an exception to this trend and I therefore specifically targeted them for my research project to debunk the purported correlation between higher education and low fertility rates. Since men are generally not figuring as prominently in fertility discourses as women, it was important for me to also obtain and include ideas of male students. My research objective was three-fold: to find out how both women and men who pursue higher education envision becoming a parent; whether there are any gender differences in envisioning becoming a parent; and how their ideas compare to fertility intention studies and to current fertility trends.

## **CHAPTER 4: Methodology**

### **4.1 Methodological Approach**

Every research project requires a well thought-through research approach and a careful selection of appropriate methods that promise to obtain the best possible results and best answer to the research question. For my project I chose a mixed method approach and combined a quantitative and a qualitative method, i.e., a self-administered questionnaire survey, followed by structured interviews. Mixed methods are not without controversy in social sciences, but I chose this approach as it seemed to be the most appropriate to elucidate how young students envision parenting.

The impetus for this research is a fertility discourse that explains low fertility rates and advanced age of mothers with, amongst other things, increased numbers of women pursuing higher education and careers. I wanted to test whether women and men who pursue higher education are intentionally planning low fertility and postponement of childbearing, or whether their fertility intentions correspond to general intention trends of young people, which are higher than actual fertility rates. Since a quantitative method is the most suitable technique to gain a broad sense of students' fertility intentions I chose to undertake a self-administered questionnaire survey as a first step in my research. This technique allows me to gauge students' parenting ideas and to compare them to other quantitative studies. In addition to gauging and comparing students' fertility intentions, I also wanted to explore how they come to hold these ideas, which I hoped would give some insight as to why there is such a discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates. For this purpose, qualitative methods are the most suitable techniques for exploring how people's ideas are socially constructed. I therefore chose the method of

structured interviews to gain a better understanding of how students come to hold the ideas that they revealed through the survey.

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods under the guiding principles of a constructionist and feminist paradigm is not without controversy and contradictions, however (Schulenberg 2006; Brannen 2005; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003). After all, there is to this day a lingering tension in social sciences between traditional positivist ideologies, 'precise' quantitative research methods and an alleged objectivity on the one hand, and the more modern social constructionist and interpretivist ideologies, qualitative research methods and the recognition of the importance to reflect on one's ontological and epistemological underpinning on the other hand (Doucet 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2007; Guba and Lincoln 2004; Doucet and Mauthner 2003; Flyvbjerg 2001; Morrow 1994).

This epistemological and ontological disagreement manifests itself in privileging quantitative methods, which are allegedly scientific and objective, and dismissing qualitative methods, which are purported to be unscientific and not objective. Positivist ideologies believe that an objective research approach and an objective result can be obtained in social research, while the interpretivist, social constructionist and feminist ideologies recognize that social reality is dialogically constructed and that truth and reality can never be objectively known (Denzin and Lincoln 2007), but can only be understood through discourse with others (Guba and Lincoln 2004; Callinicos 1982; Berger and Luckmann 1966). The emphasis here is on the distinction between 'knowing', which cannot be achieved, and 'understanding', which can be achieved through personal contact and interaction with the research subject (Doucet and Mauthner 2008).

Simply put, research informed by positivist ideologies believes in a measurable reality that can be known through quantitative inquiry techniques; whereas research informed by

constructionist and feminist ideologies believes in discursively constructed realities that can be understood through qualitative inquiry techniques (Schulberg 2006). What is easily overlooked in this paradigmatic and methodological debate is that social research must not rigidly subordinate itself to ideological dichotomies, but that the choice of methods must be sensitive and responsive to research needs (Denzin and Lincoln 2007), including combining various methods (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003).

All methods have their strengths as well as their limitations and all methods have their legitimacy. Quantitative methods have their limitations with respect to truly representing the diversity of humans and the richness of social relations, but can provide us with useful information on relations of variables on a medium or macro level (Morrow 1994). On the other hand, qualitative methods have their limitations with respect to validity, reliability and generalizability, but can provide us with useful information on a micro level (Flyvbjerg 2001). Rather than treating these methods as mutually exclusive, they can, and should, be combined, if the research issues warrant it and if mixed methods promise a better understanding of the phenomenon (Brannen 2005; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003). While some scholars reject the compatibility of quantitative and qualitative methods due to the alleged incompatibility of their respective underlying paradigms (Smith 1983), other scholars argue for a pragmatist approach to research, i.e., avoiding claims of 'objectivity', 'truth' or 'reality' and thus opening up space for a third methodological opportunity, the mixed method approach (Howe 1988). Pragmatism embraces a holistic approach to research and is open to a pluralism of methods. It has as its guiding principle the supremacy of the research issue, to which the methodology is subordinate (Schulberg 2006). In other words, the research design has to be guided by the research questions

and the methods to explore these questions have to be chosen according to the research needs, whether this requires quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods.

Since my research questions and hypotheses were informed by literature review of quantitative and qualitative research, I chose to apply this pragmatist mixed method approach to my research project as this promised to be the most appropriate avenue to investigate how young students envision becoming a parent. Traditionally, qualitative methods were seen as a preparatory, exploratory, step in research, which is followed by a quantitative, confirmatory, method (Bryman, 1988). For my research, the more appropriate approach was to start with the quantitative, confirmatory method, which was intended to provide me with results as to what kind of ideas my student sample held with respect to becoming a parent, how the results compared to other studies on this topic, and to test whether there were statistically significant differences between female and male students. The subsequent, qualitative method was intended to put the quantitative data into context and to explore why students hold the kinds of ideas they revealed in the survey and whether there are any gender differences in how students express these ideas. Both methods proved complementary and are given equal weight with respect to data interpretation and inferences.

One of the critiques of mixed methods methodologies is that different methods can lead to different, sometimes even contradicting, results, which can lead to an incoherent conclusion (Seal et al. 2002). This purported weakness did not deter me from applying a mixed method approach. If indeed contradictions between quantitative and qualitative results were to manifest themselves, it would be an indication that ideas generated through quantitative methods, which operate on an average sample basis, might be different from the meaning people reveal on an individual basis, which in turn would indicate a need for further research into these differences.

An influential aspect in women's procreative decision-making is the role of a (male) partner. I therefore specifically chose to break with the traditional approach of engaging with fertility trends by primarily focusing on women and included men as an equally important group in my research. However, while my research targeted women and men equally, only a little more than a third of the eligible survey respondents turned out to be men. Since more female than male students enrol in undergraduate university programs today (Statistics Canada 2010; Clark 2007) it could be that the lower than expected turnout of male survey respondents might simply be reflective of higher female student rates, particularly in arts and social sciences classes, where I conducted the surveys. There were also somewhat fewer male than female interview volunteers, but the overall gender ratio of interviews reflects the gender composition of the sample group. It must be noted, however, that the turnout of volunteers for interviews was overall lower than planned and I acknowledge that these lower than expected numbers might constitute a limitation of my research.

#### **4.2 Quantitative Methods**

The purpose of the self-administered questionnaire survey was to obtain current data of a large sample group of young students on how they envision becoming a parent and whether there are any gender differences in their ideas. My target research population were first-year Carleton University students between the age of 18 and 25. I first formulated broad questions with respect to what I hoped to answer with my research and conducted a preliminary literature review to better inform my understanding of fertility trends and parenting behaviours. I then formulated additional questions and refined them in order to elicit various facets of parenting ideas.

I devised a questionnaire with 30 questions, submitted it to my research supervisor for review and comments, which I implemented, and subsequently submitted it, together with my

interview guide and my research ethics application, to the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee for approval. After implementing a few revisions suggested by the Ethics Committee and receiving approval for my research project, I tested the questionnaire with four students to make sure that all questions were unambiguous and easily understandable. Based on their feedback and additional suggestions from my second committee member, I further refined the questionnaire and streamlined some of the questions to enhance comprehension. The final product was a questionnaire with 28 questions (see Appendix A).

The limited scope of my thesis project did not permit me to conduct probability sampling and necessitated relying on nonprobability sampling of available subjects (King 1985). Well aware of the limitation of such a sampling method, I tried to enhance the representativeness and diversity of my sample by approaching course instructors across disciplines for permission to survey their students during class time. I contacted instructors of Sociology, Human Rights, Mathematics and Women's and Gender Studies. Out of these six requests I received two approvals from instructors of Sociology; one declined; and three requests were ignored, despite following up on my first correspondence. Serendipitously, I was offered the opportunity to survey students in a first-year English class, after the instructor heard about my predicament of getting access to students.

I conducted the surveys in one English and two Sociology classes mid October 2009 and entered and analyzed the data end of October/beginning of November 2009. To manage and analyze the data I used the software program SPSS, which is freely available for students. The surveys were executed without any noteworthy incidents, although it took a considerable administrative and physical effort to copy a large number of questionnaires and to carry them to class; distribute and collect them in class; and manually entering the data. It was suggested to me

to conduct the survey electronically through the online site SurveyMonkey, as this would cut down on the physical distribution of questionnaires and eliminate the manual data entry. I decided against this method as I had concerns about the response rate. I assumed that I would get a higher participation if I provided a hard-copy of the questionnaire and students were given the ten minutes in class that it takes to fill it out, rather than asking them to go online after class to fill out the questionnaire on their own time. While they might have the best intentions to participate, it is easier to 'lose' potential student participants this way. Exchanging experiences with my peers who chose the online survey method confirmed my assumption. Also, while the manual data entry took a long time, I felt as though I got a better sense of the data in the process (for a detailed discussion of the survey findings see chapter 5 and 6).

Quantitative methods, such as a survey, entail very limited-to-no interaction between researcher and research participants. The only interaction I had with respondents entailed introducing my research before handing out the questionnaires, giving some general instructions with respect to filling it in and emphasizing that participation was voluntary. The survey data provided me with a valuable picture of how young women and men envision becoming a parent and how they think they would like to care for their children. My interpretations of the survey results have limitations, however, as there is no opportunity in a survey to discursively construct and reconcile meaning between the researcher and the research participants.

This limitation was confirmed when seeing the range of responses participants gave to questions where they had to self-identify. For example I asked students to self-identify their ethnic or racial background. The majority of participants stated commonly used categories such as Caucasian, Black, White, etc. However, some students identified themselves using, what I consider to be, ambiguous terminology, such as 'Eurasian', or 'half German-half Burmese', or as

'Canadian'. The 'Canadian' identification describes the respondent's citizenship, but does not give an unambiguous indication as to her/his ethnic or racial background. Clearly, 'race/ethnicity' has different meanings for different people but due to the absence of a discursive construction of the meaning between the researcher and the participant, I was deprived of being given guidance as to how to interpret these ambiguous self-identifications. After thorough consideration, I decided to deal with such cases by allocating them to the variable 'other.' The limitation of meaning was further confirmed during interviews, when interviewees often asked me to elaborate on the meaning of my questions, even though the interview questions were almost identical to the survey questions, which respondents had seemingly no problem answering earlier. These experiences illustrate the limitations of a survey with respect to mediated meaning. Admittedly, larger, (better) funded surveys have the resources to do pilot tests to safeguard against such ambiguities and might not face the same issues, as was the case with my survey.

To make the survey data analysis efficient the possible variables for each question should be limited. I habitually restricted the possible answers to 'yes', 'no', or 'don't know.' Some students resisted to be boxed in like this in their range of responses and scribbled additional comments on the questionnaire, such as 'it depends' or 'whoever makes more money.' The limited range of possible answers results, quite literally, in a limited capturing of people's range of ideas and, by consequence, in a limited understanding of their ideas. But to get a better understanding of people's ideas, one has to first have some approximation of understanding of a certain phenomenon. This is why I chose to undertake a survey as a first, preparatory step in my research process.

As often happens in a survey, respondents sometimes chose to not answer certain questions. Such unanswered variables were coded as 'missing data', which were subsequently excluded from data analyses. Only valid cases were taken into consideration and the number of valid cases (n) is indicated for each variable in the respective tables. 'Don't know' answers are often excluded from data analyses, but since one of my hypotheses was that male students might have less concrete ideas about becoming a parent, it was important for my research purposes to include these variables in the analyses. The frequency of 'don't know' answers gives an indication of the degree of young students' uncertainty about some aspects of parenting. My research was primarily concerned with finding gender differences in how young students envision parenting and the data was thus analyzed with descriptive statistics on a bivariate level using cross-tabulations (Schulenberg 2006). Some variables were analyzed on a multivariate level, where literature suggested that there might be differences in ideas based on other sub-categories, such as religion or race/ethnicity. Tests of statistical significance were calculated using chi-square analysis, with significance at the .05 level ( $p < .05$ ).

### **4.3 Qualitative Methods**

Following the preparatory step of gaining a broad idea of how young students envision becoming a parent through the survey, I chose to conduct interviews as a subsequent step to contextualize the results and to enhance my understanding of young students' childbearing and childrearing ideas. Interviewing is one of the most commonly used qualitative research tools and can be defined as a well-prepared conversation with the purpose to gather data and to understand the perspective and meaning of social phenomena as they are experienced by the research subjects (Enosh and Buchbinder 2005). This allows the social researcher to get in-depth insight and a more complete picture of the area of research. Thus, interviews have been accepted as an

appropriate tool for observing subjectively meaningful social behaviours (Hessler 1992).

However, there are a number of aspects to this method of which researchers have to be mindful.

For example, although interviews can enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under

investigation, researchers have to acknowledge that the interviewees' reality and lived

experiences cannot be objectively understood. Because meaning in interviews is subjectively and

discursively constructed, reflexivity is an integral component in interview research (Enosh and

Buchbinder 2005; Campbell 2003). The ontological and epistemological paradigms I bring to my

research and my reflexive account are discussed in chapter 2.

Another important aspect in interviewing is that in order to put the interviewees at ease and to achieve the best possible results from interviews a researcher has to build rapport with the participant (Enosh and Buchbinder 2005; Campbell 2003; Hessler 1992). My attempts to build rapport included chatting with interviewees before starting with the actual interview; choosing a relaxed but not too secluded venue on campus in consultation with the student; offering coffee or tea to enhance the relaxed atmosphere; introducing the topic and objective of my research to provide a better context for the interviewee and giving feedback on their answers from time to time to make them feel at ease with the interview process.

As opposed to a non-interactive, anonymous survey, the researcher is in direct interaction with the interviewees and there are thus hierarchical and power relations at play. These hierarchical and power relations do not inherently have to be negative nor are they only acting in one direction (Enosh and Buchbinder 2005; Campbell 2003; Flyvbjerg 2001). Interviewees can also have power during the interview, or challenge the power of the researcher. I approached my interviews with a feminist research perspective that entails a non-hierarchical research approach and acknowledges that both the researcher and the researched are 'knowers' and that both

construct meaning and knowledge discursively (McDonald 2002). My repertoire of conducting non-hierarchical interviews included introducing myself only with my first name; emphasizing that I am also a student and, albeit a graduate student, not that much further ahead in my academic endeavour than my participants; soliciting questions from my participants throughout the interview or acknowledging their answers from time to time to enhance the interactive and two-way discursive process.

Building on the final version of the survey questions I devised an interview guide, which was also submitted to, and received approval from the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix B). The interview guide had almost identical questions for the purpose of eliciting more in-depth data that would allow me to gain a better, contextualized understanding of the survey findings. My target group were young students who also participated in the survey. Ideally, I would have liked to conduct eight to ten interviews with female and male students respectively, but unfortunately volunteers were not as forthcoming as I hoped. In total, only seven female and five male students volunteered for interviews. All of the interview participants wanted children and all but one of them were Caucasian. I verbally walked students through the consent form and only started the interviews after students have given their written consent. All participants agreed to have the interview audio taped. I then transcribed the interviews to the software program Word and read and cross-referenced the transcripts several times to identify emerging themes and patterns. I then translated these themes and patterns into codes and analyzed the transcripts with the assistance of the software program Atlas.ti, which automates the search for pre-defined codes in the transcripts (for a detailed discussion of the interview findings see chapter 5 and 6).

The interviews all went well and generated useful in-depth data. From a personal perspective, interviews with female students were somewhat more relaxed than those with male students. While the former were visibly at ease and answered questions candidly and in a chatty manner, the latter appeared uncomfortable and fidgety and often answered succinctly, to the point of being monosyllabic. Probing further into an answer and eliciting more wholesome replies was often difficult. Their whole body language signalled that they would rather be somewhere else. This hesitant behaviour took me somewhat by surprise as all my volunteers contacted me on their own initiative. One would assume that if a topic is uncomfortable to talk about, one would not come forward in the first place. I was also surprised because my topic is by no means controversial. When I discussed this peculiar experience with a few of my peers, it was suggested that maybe boys/men do not feel as comfortable talking about children as girls/women. While this is a possibility, my quantitative data suggest that how young women and men envision becoming a parent is quite similar. Thus, the difference seems to be limited to how these ideas are verbally communicated. Another possibility for male participants' hesitant behaviour during the interview could be that I was not successful in establishing a non-hierarchical peer relationship and perhaps they viewed me primarily as a female researcher who is visibly older than themselves. This was, however, not an issue with female participants.

The interview data complemented the results from the survey and allowed for a more contextualized and holistic understanding of students' parenting ideas. The number of interview volunteers was very small and the results can therefore not be deemed representative of the total sample population. I certainly would have liked to interview more ethnic diverse and more male students to generate a more diverse range of responses. On the other hand, the fact that the analysis of the survey data showed that there are very few gender and diversity differences in

how students envision parenting, interviewing more students might not have necessarily generated more diverse results.

As discussed above, truth and meaning cannot be objectively established, but is interactively constructed in a discursive process. I tried to mitigate the construction of flawed meaning on my part during the interviews by frequently summarizing and repeating answers succinctly back to my interviewees, allowing them to interject in case I misinterpreted their answer. But this notwithstanding, the ultimate interpretation of the research data is subject to my understanding and guided by my ontological and epistemological paradigms.

#### **4.4 Research Sample**

My research population were female and male students at Carleton University between the age of 18 to 25, respectively students who were 17 at the time of the survey, but would turn 18 before the end of 2009. I chose university students for my research because fertility discourses routinely identify women who pursue higher education as one of the main causes for low fertility and the phenomenon of motherhood at an advanced age. I therefore wanted to capture how this specific group envisions becoming parents and whether their ideas at such a relatively young age are already indicative of the current fertility rates. I recruited the participants in two first-year Sociology and one first-year English class. Students were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The possible total student number I could have reached in these three classes was 890.

#### ***Sample Population***

The ultimate number of survey respondents, who handed in the questionnaire and also were within the age range of 18 to 25, was 554 (n=554). Thereof, about two thirds (65.7%) were women; and about one third (34.3%) were men. The vast majority (94.6%) of respondents self-

identified as heterosexual and almost half of the respondents (46.9%) self-identified as Protestants, Anglicans, Catholics and Born Again Christians, which I collapsed into the variable 'Christian'. With respect to race and ethnicity, the majority (70.8%) of the respondents self-identified as Caucasian, and the majority of all respondents (78.2%) grew up in Ontario (for a detailed composition of the sample population, see Table 1 below).

Table 1 – Sample Population

	Women <sup>1</sup>	Men	Total
<b>Sample Population: Total Sample Size = 554</b>	364	190	554
Participants (%)	65.7%	34.3%	100%
<b>Sexual Orientation (self-identified), n = 540</b>			
Heterosexual	96.9%	97.3%	97.0%
GLBT	3.1%	2.7%	3.0%
<b>Religion/Faith (self-identified), n = 521</b>			
Christian	51.5%	47.0%	49.9%
Islam	6.8%	7.2%	6.9%
Other	7.0%	9.9%	8.1%
No Beliefs	34.7%	35.9%	35.1%
<b>Race/Ethnic Background (self-identified), n = 535</b>			
Asian	6.0%	9.8%	7.3%
Black	6.8%	6.5%	6.7%
Caucasian	74.1%	71.7%	73.3%
Middle East	3.7%	3.3%	3.6%
Other	9.4%	8.7%	9.1%
<b>Province/country in which respondent grew up, n = 550</b>			
Ontario	81.2%	74.1%	78.7%
Outside Canada	8.3%	14.3%	10.4%
Other Canadian provinces and territories	10.5%	11.6%	10.9%

<sup>1</sup> Women and men do not differ ( $p < .05$ ).

The interview participants were recruited from the same sample population. The interview sample consisted of 5 male and 7 female students. The majority self-identified as Caucasian, one student self-identified as Black, and one as half Caucasian-half Burmese, which

would fall under 'Other.' I did not ask interviewees to self-identify their sexual orientation as this is very private information that they might not have felt comfortable disclosing in a one-on-one interview. Only one participant volunteered the information of being a member of the GLBT community.

## CHAPTER 5: How Students Envision Becoming a Parent

### 5.1 Gauging Procreative Ideas

My research objective was to elicit how young female and male students envision becoming a parent, what kind of ideas they associate with childcare, and if their own family experiences influence their intentions. Studies show that fertility intentions of people are higher than actual fertility rates (Statistics Canada 2001; Beaujot and Mohammad 2006) and one of the reasons habitually identified as contributing to low actual fertility is women who pursue higher education. I thus wanted to test whether or not young students intentionally plan low fertility, and to find out how their intentions compare to actual fertility rates. I particularly wanted to elicit and include the ideas of young men, who are usually absent from fertility discourses.

I conceptualized ‘envisioning becoming a parent’ by whether or not a person has ever thought about having children; whether or not a person wants children; and, if so, how many children s/he wants and at what age. I operationalized the variables with mutually exclusive nominal categories ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’, respectively as ratio-interval variables with respect to number of children and age. To contextualize what might influence students in their fertility intentions, I asked whether they have siblings and whether they think that their experiences with siblings influenced their own parenting ideas. To allow me to theorize about possible discrepancies when comparing research participants’ fertility intentions and actual fertility rates, I also asked what they would like to have achieved before having children. These indicators give insight into what might influence and inhibit the realization of their fertility intentions.

The summary of the research findings discussed below is based on a survey of 554 Carleton University students between the age of 18 and 25, and interviews conducted with 7 female and 5 male students from the same research sample. Although one of my research aims

was to elicit possible gender differences in ideas, the quantitative data analysis revealed that for the most part, female and male students have very similar ideas in how they envision becoming a parent. The subsequent discussion therefore engages with the research findings in a holistic way except where gender differences warrant a gender disaggregate exploration. The discussion themes are introduced with the quantitative data findings and contextualized and complemented with the interview data.<sup>4</sup> (For survey results on fertility intentions of the sample group see Table 2, Appendix C).

## **5.2 Comparing and Contrasting Parenting Ideas**

The literature on fatherhood and motherhood, as well as social constructionist and feminist theories about gender roles suggest that women are socially constructed as mothers and men as primary breadwinners (Broughton and Rogers 2007; Boyd 2003; Wiesner 2000; Hamilton 1988; MacKie 1987; see also Chapter 3). Further, women are more likely to leave home, get married and have their children at a younger age than men (Clark 2007). I would thus have expected to find considerable differences in envisioning parenthood between young women and men. Particularly since women's biological reproductive capacity is time limited whereas men do not have such biological time constraints. I therefore assume that women at a relatively young age already have concrete ideas as to whether or not they want to become a parent one day, when they want to have children and how many children they would like to have. Conversely, I assumed that young men could think of themselves as a parent, but that they would have less concrete ideas about when they would like to become fathers and how many children they would like to have. To my surprise, the quantitative data analysis showed for the most part intriguingly few gender differences. This result is not without precedence, however, as other

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<sup>4</sup> The presentation of the research findings is inspired by Jane E. Miller's *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers* (2004).

quantitative studies have also found similar results (Schoen et al. 1999). While the survey revealed that for the most part there are no gender differences, the interviews revealed that there are certain differences in how young female and male students envision parenting, although these differences are rather subtle and nuanced.

### ***Wanting to be a Parent***

There is a conventional belief that women ‘naturally’ want children, which would imply that it is less natural for men to want children. Yet, questions as to whether they have ever thought about being a parent and whether they would like to be a parent one day generated almost identical responses from women and men, with no statistically significant difference. The vast majority of students (96.4%) have thought about being a parent one day; and a similar majority, albeit somewhat fewer (83.2%), would also like to be a parent one day. Contrary to my hypothesis, female and male students show an almost identical degree of uncertainty as to whether they want to be a parent one day (approx. 12%). Given the ways most boys and girls are socialized I would have expected to see a far higher degree of uncertainty from male respondents at such a relatively young age.

The interviews confirmed the survey results as all interview participants expressed similar strong views on wanting children. An interesting feature revealed through interviews was, however, that there are gender differences in how boys and girls envision becoming a parent when they were children. While, as expected, all the female students indicated that they had been thinking about and wanting children since a very young age, three of the five male interviewees also indicated that they had been thinking about having children since a very young age. The narrative of female students illustrates that already as very young girls they replicated and internalized ‘traditional’ female gender roles by ‘playing mother’ or ‘playing family’ (to

protect the confidentiality of my participants the names are randomly-chosen sex-specific pseudonyms):

Question: “Do you remember approximately when you thought of being a parent for the first time?”

Claudia: “Probably as a kid, when playing with dolls or something. Or playing big sister, or something like that.”

Deena: “I guess since I was little, and playing with babies and when they cried, I played their mom. Like when I played in my friends’ house, I would play house, and would be the mother.”

Indira: “I guess, like even at 6 years old, I would have my dolls and feed them, and cloth them. My parents bought me disposable diapers and I would change their diapers, even at 7 years old.”

Female students voluntarily and candidly offered additional information about the circumstances at which they thought about being a parent. On the other hand, male interview participants did not offer any additional information. They all succinctly answered that they had been thinking about it since they were children, or, in two cases, that they had been thinking about it for the first time about two years earlier.

Peter: “(I thought about having children for the first time) probably around when I was a kid.”

Connor: “(I thought about having children for the first time) probably when I was 12 years old, I don’t know. So quite a while ago.”

Despite the conventional belief that women have a ‘natural’ desire to have children, there are indications of a recent, growing phenomenon in Western societies that women intentionally decide not to have children (Park 2005; Gillespie 2003; Stobert and Kemeny 2003). There is no conclusive data as to how prevalent this intentional decision to not have children is, but an analysis of the data of the General Social Survey of 2006 (hereafter referred to as GSS 2006) indicates that 10% of the surveyed women between the age of 18 and 25, with various

educational attainments and socio-economic backgrounds, do not want children (Statistics Canada 2006; for tabulated GSS 2006 fertility intention analysis see Table 4, Appendix E).

When comparing the age cohort of the GSS 2006, where 10% indicated not to want children and my female sample population with 3.6% indicating not to want children, my research result is considerably lower. This would indicate that far fewer university educated women than the general female age cohort plan on not having children and that there is no correlation between pursuing higher education and not wanting children. This result also casts doubt on the notion that higher educated women disproportionately contribute to low fertility rates. This is manifestly not their intention, at least not at an early stage in their education.

Similarly, there are also men who voluntarily intend to not have children, although there is little attention dedicated to that phenomenon. Men's intentions in this respect are usually captured only as a by-product when studying women. However, there are some, albeit limited, statistical indications about men's fertility intentions as the analysis of the GSS 2006 data demonstrates. 10% of the surveyed men between the age of 18 and 25, with various educational and socio-economic backgrounds, do not want children (Statistics Canada 2006). The rate of 5.8% from my male student sample is considerably lower. While the GSS data is comprised of a more diverse sample than my student sample and the comparison has thus to be taken with some reservation, it is nonetheless an indication that there is no correlation between pursuing higher education and the intentional choice of not having children.

Unfortunately, since none of the students who opted for not wanting children volunteered for an interview, I could not gain insight into what might motivate young people to choose a childfree life-style. The choice per se is absolutely legitimate, but it would nonetheless have been interesting to explore their rationale for choosing to differ from the mainstream.

### *Number of Intended Children*

When analysing the fertility intentions of my sample it becomes evident that there are substantial differences compared to actual fertility rates. As opposed to the current rate of 1.66 children per woman (Statistics Canada 2009) my student sample's intention is 2.3 children per female student and 1.8 children per male student. The analysis also shows a statistically significant difference between the number of children female and male students want. Statistics Canada does not monitor fertility rates of men in the same way as for women and thus comparing the fertility intentions of my male sample to actual fertility rates, which only speak for women, has its limitations. But it serves as a useful indication nonetheless.

When comparing my fertility intention results with other fertility intention studies, which habitually find that intentions are generally higher than actual rates, my sample shows a similar trend for female students, but a lower trend for male students. My female sample group would like 2.3 children on average, which is identical with the GSS 2006 female sample group. But my male sample group would only like 1.8 children on average, which is lower than the 2.3 children the GSS 2006 male sample group would like. It also needs to be noted that the analysis of my survey data revealed a statistically significant difference between the number of children female and male students would like, whereas the GSS 2006 data shows no difference between women and men. This discrepancy in gender difference between my survey and the GSS survey could be due to the difference in educational and socio-economic background of the respective samples.

Studies show that fertility rates are lower for people who do not indicate a religious affiliation (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006). The analysis of my survey data indicated that religious beliefs do not make a difference with respect to whether or not people think about having children, but that they indeed do make a difference with respect to wanting children or

not. More than half of the respondents who indicated not to want children were students who self-identified as not having a religious belief, as opposed to only a third of the non-religious students indicating that they would like to have children.

The literature also suggests that personal family experiences influence fertility intentions (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006; Bibby 2004), and for the most part this was confirmed during interviews. The vast majority of both male and female respondents have between one and two siblings and this experience of growing up with somebody seems to have influenced them positively so that they would like to replicate this family model themselves. But other than just having fond memories of their own childhood with siblings, there are also attempts to rationalize the choice of wanting two or three children as beneficial. Typical answers to the question how many children they would like and why specifically that number, were:

Indira: “(I’d like) 2 to 3, I guess. I come from a family of 3 children. I have a twin sister and a younger brother. And the 3 of us get along pretty well now, as adults. (...), I would never want a single child, I guess. Because in my experience single children do tend to be very spoiled, regardless of the parents. So I think 2 to 3 is a good number.”

Ian: “(I would like 2 children because) I grew up in a family (with) a sister. So there was only 2 of us and (...) we could go on family vacations; and we could afford to do things ‘cause we could afford to all stay in one hotel room.”

Claudia: “(I’d like) probably 2, I guess. Because a lot of my friends are a single child and I find that they don’t have as much social attraction. I find if you have 2 kids they talk to each other. Like me and my sister are very close. But I think that if I had kids I would want them to have someone to talk to.”

Connor: “(I would like 2 because) with my sisters, it’s like one was always left out. If we were 2, no one’s left out; no squeezing.”

Despite the common reference to personal, positive, childhood experiences, which seem to influence young people to replicate the family size, I also found that they wanted two or three children, even if their experience was not all that positive. A number of participants indicated that they did not get along with their sibling(s), fought a lot with them, or at least were ‘not

terribly close.’ Yet, they still wanted more than one child and they rationalized their choice by analyzing what they think might have prevented them from having a good, or close relationship with their sibling(s) and then decided that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks or that they just will do it differently.

Ian: “My sister and I were never terribly close. We still aren’t. It’s not necessarily because we strongly dislike each other. It’s just that we have very, very different personalities. But I do think that having a sibling is important for a child. Because there is sibling bond that you can’t really get any other way.”

Deena: “(My sister and I) we would always fight. But I guess like all siblings do. But she was 4 years older than me. So there was kind of too much of a gap distance for us to (be) really close. (...) So I’d want (my children) to be closer in age.”

One of the interview participants had no siblings, yet still wanted two children and rationalized her choice by saying that she saw her friends grow up with siblings and interpreted it as ‘more fun’ not to grow up alone. It therefore seems conceivable that wanting more than one child is not so much influenced by personal positive experiences with siblings but rather by wanting to approximate an idealized family size, regardless of one’s experiences. There is awareness that siblings are not necessarily ‘best buddies’, yet this notion takes a back stage and the dominant arguments in the rationalization process are that: two or more children provide mutual support; they can ‘do stuff together’; and, they develop better social skills and family bonds.

### ***Intended Age of Having Children***

The analysis of when my sample would like to have their first child also reveals an interesting discrepancy between intentions and actual fertility rates. The average age of first time mothers in 2001 was 27.1 and the trend is increasing, with the strongest segment, who had children in 2007, being women between the age of 30 and 34 (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006;

Statistics Canada 2009). Again, fertility data by Statistics Canada do not capture the age of fathers and the comparison with my male sample data is thus limited. Yet, it still does provide a certain measure of guidance. My sample indicated that they want their first child between their mid to late twenties. Female students, on average, wanted to have their first child between the age of 26 and 27, while male students indicated that they intend to have their first child between the age of 28 and 29. This represents a two-year age difference between female and male students with respect to when they want their first child. When comparing the mode age, more female students would like to have their first child by the age of 25, whereas more male students are tending toward the age of 30. But on average, the age discrepancy evens out at a two-year difference. This age gap in intentions would not have a negative impact on realizing one's fertility ideas, as most men of young, first-time couples are about two years older than their female partners (Foot 1998 [1996]). This phenomenon would mean that a two-year difference in age expectations with respect to when to have children is almost a perfect fit for young women and men.

The rationalization female and male students offered as to why they respectively think this is a good age to have their first child, is very similar. Apart from having certain material needs covered, as discussed below, many indicated that they do not want to be 'too old' when having children and still want to be able to take an active part in their children's life.

Stephen: "I'd like to be having the energy to be able to do stuff with my kids. Like, if I'm little older it might be harder."

Deena: "My mom was 34 when she had me, but my dad was a lot older. I want to be young when my kids are older as well. So that I have time to see the grandkids grow."

Indira: "In terms of (having my first child at) 26, 27, I think that (...) issues about the health of the children when you get passed 30, 40 (...) won't be (of) concern. I won't be one of those old parents that doesn't understand their children. So I guess to me, that's kind of the ideal age."

Ian: “(...) you’d be young enough where, at that age, you’d be able to be an active participant in their lives. And I won’t be too exhausted to play with them or anything. So I think that’d be a good time.”

Marion: “Ah, that’s difficult (to say), because I don’t want to be too old, when I have my first child. On the other hand, I have to balance that with education, a career. So, I don’t think I want to be an undergrad. I’ll wait (until I am) after 23 years.”

### ***Importance of Relationships***

Traditionally, childbearing was conceived as happening within a marital relationship. But over time, changes in acceptance of alternative cohabitation models and an increased valuing of individual autonomy gave way to conceiving childbearing more as an individual gratification (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006). Particularly younger adults are more open to alternative family models and parenthood outside wedlock (Bibby 2004; Tudiver 2005). My research also indicates that it is important for young people to be in a relationship, but clearly, such a relationship does not necessarily have to be marriage. In fact, while the vast majority (97.5%) of students indicated that being in a relationship would be important, only about three quarters (76%) indicated that it would be important for them to be married. However, if marriage or a happy partnership is not in the cards for them, some of the participants could envision themselves as having children anyway. About a third of the female students (31.2%) would choose the option of having children on their own, as opposed to only slightly more than 10% of the male students.

The interview data revealed similar sentiments, with male students being more hesitant than female students to have children without being in a relationship. Most of the female students indicated that they ideally would like to be in a partnership, but would also be willing to ultimately have children on their own, if they could not find an appropriate partner. The readiness of female and male students to have children outside wedlock, and some even outside a

partnership, would dispel the claim of dominant fertility discourses that fewer children or motherhood at a later age are in part due to marriage at a later age.

### *Children as a Fulfilment in Life*

Studies show that most people do want children as they are seen as a source of joy and fulfilment (Crompton and Keown 2009; Beaujot and Mohammad 2006; Beaujot 2003). Again, my sample results show a very similar trend with approximately half of the respondents thinking that children would fulfil their lives. But this percentage is not as high as studies would suggest since it is a long way from ‘approximately half’ of the respondents to ‘most people.’ This lower than expected percentage could imply that there has been a shift in attitudes since the last studies on this topic were undertaken. This would also allow the hypothesis that if fewer women and men think that children will fulfil their lives they are also more inclined to deviate from their fertility intentions when they encounter constraints. On the other hand, the fact that about half of the respondents believe that children will fulfil their lives contextualizes the third of the female and about 10% of male students who indicated that they would like to have children anyway, even if they cannot find an appropriate partner.

As discussed in chapter 3, women have historically been socially constructed to become first and foremost mothers, and men to be the primary breadwinners and paternalistic heads of the household who have to produce offspring, preferably sons, to uphold the family lineage. The results of my sample would indicate, however, that women and men are not feeling pressured anymore to have children. The vast majority of students (84.7%) indicated that they do not feel pressured by family or friends to have children. The interviews elicited that while they might not feel pressured to have children, most of them conceded that there is a certain expectation for them to have children, manifested in expressions like “...you just wait and see when you have

your own kids...” Since all of my interview volunteers wanted children but did not feel pressured to have them, I was not able to extract whether there actually might be pressure but they just do not interpret it as such, because their fertility intentions are in conformity with that of their family.

The interviews also showed that long-standing patriarchal habits seem to die hard. Two out of five male interviewees expressed that while there was no pressure on them, there was certainly a high expectation that they would have children because they are the only sons and since their fathers were also the only sons, the family name and the lineage would otherwise die out. The fact that they both had one or more female siblings who equally pass on their gene pool to their children, and who can pass on their name, if they so wish, or that their own partner might wish to pass her name on to their children, did seemingly not enter their consideration.

### *Accomplishments Before Having Children*

Interview questions as to what kind of accomplishments respondents would like to have achieved before having their first child illustrate that young people are keenly conscious of material needs and that they would like to have them ‘covered.’ All of the interview participants indicated that they would like to finish their education, have a career or a steady job and a measure of financial stability.

Indira: “(Before having my first child I hope) I’ll have myself sorted out, in the sense who I am and what I want to be and hopefully have a career, or if not a career, some sort of economic stability.”

Ian: “(T)hrough planning with my girlfriend, we have talked a lot about when we would like to have children. (...) It would be a time where I would be starting to establish my career and would be able to financially afford a child. I would like to have a stable job. Not necessarily an incredible job, but certainly one that I can rely on to pay the bills for the child.”

Michael: “Well, I would like to be finished with school, with university, and have a fairly decent job. I don’t want to start having children when I’m not financially ready.”

Marion: “(B)efore I have a child I’d rather have a good and secure job.”

Considerations about housing often needed a bit of prompting, as most participants did not mention it on their own accord. But when asked, only one student said that she was not concerned about accommodation, as she would be moving in with her husband. All other interviewees acknowledged that having an apartment or house would be important, preferably owning it, but if they could only afford to rent it that would also be fine. Having ‘enough space’ for the children was an important prerequisite. Some of the students also indicated that they would like to ‘enjoy life a bit and travel’ before having children, yet not wait too long before having children, as they do not want to be ‘too old’ and still physically enjoy time with their children.

### **5.3 Discussion and Implications**

In summary, the vast majority of my sample want to be parents one day, want to be in a relationship, preferably even married, and want two or three children. These results are congruent with the dominant Canadian idea of an ‘ideal family’ (Bibby 2004). The vast majority of my sample also would like to have finished their education, have a career going or at least a well-paying job that would allow them a certain measure of financial stability and a few years to themselves to enjoy life and travel or establish themselves. They would like to have achieved all these accomplishments before having their first child by the age of approximately 26 to 27 for female students, and 28 to 29 for male students. From my somewhat more mature point of view it seems unlikely that all these accomplishments can indeed be realized by that age, particularly ‘having a career’ and ‘financial stability.’ Yet, none of the research participants manifested any

doubt that their life project timeline might be too ambitious. Advanced age of motherhood is thus far more likely to be explained by the kind of accomplishments women and men would like to have realized before having children, such as the vague concepts of 'having a career' and 'financial stability.' It seems unlikely that they will be able to achieve these goals only four or five years after graduating from a bachelor's degree. On the other hand it is quite likely that in a few years' time, they might develop a different interpretation of what constitutes being 'too old' and they might become more accepting of the notion that having children in their early thirties is by all means still a good age.

Pursuing higher education is certainly a delaying factor in childbearing as the vast majority of the respondents indicated that they would like to finish their education first before having children. This result is in line with other studies, which show that the time-intensive life of a student is not compatible with childrearing responsibilities and thus young people typically wait to start a family until they have finished their degree (Hango and Le Bourdais 2009; Bianchi et al. 2006; Lochhead 2005). But female and male students equally share this intention and thus identifying primarily women with higher educational attainment as one of the reasons for delayed motherhood, as some literature suggests (Mitchell 2006; Gillespie 2003; Stobert and Kemeny 2003; Foot 1998), is a flawed conclusion. Having children is not just a woman's issue and women do not autonomously have children in a social vacuum disconnected from men. Rather, women are inextricably integrated into a gendered social reality where both women and men play a crucial, interactive role in procreative decision-making, which in turn is impacted by external social factors. Yet, if men are omitted in fertility discourses and ignored as an integral variable in the fertility equation, it must not surprise us that the conclusion is flawed.

This narrow-minded approach to fertility by primarily focusing on women is premised in an archaic patriarchal mindset that still considers women first and foremost as mothers and those who pursue higher education as 'the other', who deviate from their natural role. Only if we broaden our conceptualization of having children and come to realize and acknowledge that childbearing and childrearing is an issue that equally affects women and men will we be able to get a more accurate grasp of women's and men's reality. And only then will we be able to better grasp the discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates. As my research illustrates, female and male students have very similar fertility intentions. Therefore, it logically follows that both women and men bear an equal share in realizing these intentions.

While pursuing higher education doubtlessly contributes to delaying childbearing, it still does not adequately explain the phenomenon of women, and in all likelihood also men, delaying having children until they are in their thirties. My research results indicate that students would like to start having children while they are still in their mid to late twenties. Also, higher education in and of itself does not adequately explain low fertility because when comparing the results of my students' intentions with the GSS 2006 data, it becomes evident that my sample is quite in line with fertility intentions of the general young population. It is therefore logical to conclude that certain factors, which come into play after finishing their education, play a considerable role in low fertility rates and advanced age of mothers and fathers (Qu and Weston 2004; Parker and Alexander 2004; Schoen et al. 1999).

Fertility intentions are not impeded by higher education per se, but rather by social and socio-economic constraints that come into play after finishing a degree and that impede the realization of fertility intentions (Beaujot and Muhammad 2006). Higher education holds certain promises such as a better job, better wages and a better life-style. Since an increasing number of

people pursue higher education there is more competition in the labour market for these well-paying jobs and, by consequence, the promises of higher education become more elusive for women and men (Ravanera and Rajulton 2007; Weston 2004). Studies show that when people express an intention of having children, it represents a positive influence in their procreative decision-making. Yet, studies also show that people are not obsessively pursuing a preconceived life plan, but that they make fertility decisions one birth and one child at a time (Crompton and Keown 2009). Employment insecurity and/or financial insecurity certainly play an important role in people's considerations about having a second or third child. Postponing having (more) children might result in fewer than intended children, due to women's decreasing fertility with increasing age. It is thus not higher education but socio-economic constraints that follow higher education, or taking longer to achieve an intended life-style, that can have a negative influence on procreative decision-making. Moving beyond the narrow claim that 'the problem' lies with women who pursue higher education, I would argue that researchers and policy makers must give greater attention to the multiple factors and conditions that constrain and facilitate the realization of fertility intentions.

## CHAPTER 6: How Students Envision Caregiving

### 6.1 Gauging Caregiving Ideas

Fertility rates are particularly low in countries where women have the opportunity to pursue education and to participate in the labour force, but also where the family model remains traditional and where women are expected to assume the lion's share of unpaid domestic work, including childcare (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006; Beaujot 2003). Popular fertility discourse habitually only makes associations between low fertility and women pursuing higher education and a career, but ignore the larger, more complex social structure that inhibits women and men from realizing their fertility intentions. When theorizing about possible causes for the discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates, it is therefore important to also explore how young people envision caring for their children and whether or not the trend is toward an egalitarian childcare model. Since decisions about having children are made one child at a time (Crompton and Keown 2009), childcare intentions, and particularly intentions that might lead to women's dissatisfaction with childcare arrangements, could be an indication as to why women (and men) adjust their fertility intentions over time.

As discussed in chapter 3, parenting roles have considerably changed over time and so have traditional childcare patterns. Over the last few decades, there is a decisive trend of more women joining the labour force, two-income households, and fathers becoming more involved in their children's lives and taking on more childcare responsibilities compared to their own fathers before them (Statistics Canada 2006; Lapierre-Adamcyk 2006; Rapoport 2006; Doucet 2004). The majority of childcare is, however, still assumed by women (Wall and Arnold 2007; Bianchi 2006; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Therefore, I wanted to explore how young female and male students who would like to have children envision taking care of their offspring. I conceptualized 'envisioning becoming a parent' by whether or not a person wants children and if so, how many,

which is discussed in detail in chapter 5. I also conceptualized ‘envisioning becoming a parent’ by how young people think they would like to take care of their children, i.e., whether or not they would like to stay home for some time after birth; whether or not they would like to be the primary caregiver; and whether or not they think that both parents can be equally responsible for children. I operationalized the variables with mutually exclusive nominal categories ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’, or ‘self’ or ‘partner’, respectively as ordinal variables with respect to length of time they would like to be a stay-at-home parent. To contextualize what might influence students in their childcare intentions, I asked who their primary caregiver was, whether or not they liked it that way and whether or not they think that their upbringing influenced their own intentions.

The research findings give insight into whether or not there are similarities or discrepancies in how young women and men envision taking care of their children, which in turn allows me to theorize why there are such discrepancies between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates. The research summary discussed below is based on a survey of 554 Carleton University students between the age of 18 and 25, and interviews conducted with 7 female and 5 male students from the same research sample. All scenarios with respect to who should care for the child/children are subject to being in a relationship and financial affordability. The questions on whether or not a mother should be the primary caregiver and whether or not a father should be hands-on in childcare have solely the purpose of gauging participants’ ideas in this respect. These questions do not reflect my attitude of who should be responsible for childcare and I acknowledge that they are problematic insofar as they could be interpreted as childcare being essentially a female task and fathers’ contribution as being optional.

Although one of my research aims was to elicit possible gender differences in ideas, the quantitative data analysis revealed that for the most part, female and male students have very

similar ideas in how they envision caring for their children. The subsequent discussion therefore engages with the research findings in a holistic way, except where gender differences warrant a gender disaggregate exploration. The discussion themes are introduced with the quantitative data findings and contextualized and complemented with the interview data. (For survey results on childcare intentions of the sample group see Table 3, Appendix D.)

## **6.2 Comparing and Contrasting Caregiving Ideas**

The literature on fatherhood and motherhood, as well as social constructionist and feminist theories about gender roles, suggest that women have traditionally been socially constructed as mothers and men as primary breadwinners (Broughton and Rogers 2007; Boyd 2003; Wiesner 2000; Hamilton 1988; MacKie 1987). However, there have been changes to this traditional parenting model over the past few decades. As studies attest, men are increasingly stepping up to the plate and are getting more involved in their children's lives. Yet, women are still taking on the majority of childcare responsibilities and are more 'naturally' linked to children, particularly infants, whereas men assume more the role of an optional parent (Doucet 2009, 2006; Nentwich 2008; Wall and Arnold 2007).

I wanted to gauge young students' views on childcare and whether there are tendencies toward a traditional or a more modern, egalitarian childcare model. I would have expected to find female students leaning more toward an egalitarian model than male students and the survey analysis confirmed, for the most part, that there are gender differences in how young students envision childcare. There are some positive trends emerging with respect to gender equitable childcare attitudes, but there are also some lingering, traditional views still manifest.

## *Stay-at-home Parent*

One of the positive trends that was revealed was that almost a third of female and male students would be ready to be a stay-at-home parent for the first year after birth. Although, considerably more female than male students (i.e., 43.4% and 17.6% respectively) would like to be home with the child for the first three years. Most of the interviewees were ready to stay at home for some time as well, some for one year, some longer. Only one male student wanted to 'definitely' stay home for some time and it was obvious that he found that to be self-explanatory. The other male students just indicated their readiness, but did not elaborate as to what might drive them personally to do so. The point came across as more of an expectation, or duty, that they would be ready to meet, something optional. But there was a distinct lack of the same degree of enthusiasm that some of the female interviewees showed.

Ian: "I think there is a lot of stigma around (staying home). There (are) a lot of stereotypes associated with that. (But) I think if I could financially afford it, this would be something I would do. (...) I think that if it were financially viable, then I definitely think that I'd do it for a while."

Connor: "Yes (I would stay home), why not. If I could afford it, then sure. (...) I think I would probably get bored of it eventually. Am I allowed to work at home? I mean if I'm allowed to work at home, then I'd do that."

Deena: "I think that's definitely something I'd do. Yes, stay at home mom. (...) I think staying at home would be fun."

Indira: "I would ideally like to be with the child for the first year and a half, two years. Just in their formative stages. (...) Because that's the funnest [sic] time when they are cute, and they don't talk back. And you can really enjoy having the child, and celebrate all the milestones with them. You know, their first word, and their first tooth, and the first time they walk. I think it would be pretty sad if I missed that."

There was a recurring theme by some that being home with a child might get boring after some time. Except for one female student, who just recently had a new sibling and mentioned how much more work it was to take care of a baby than she had imagined, none of the other

interviewees indicated that they had thought about what kind of time commitment it might entail to care for a child, particularly for an infant. There was also no mention, neither from female nor male students, how else they would arrange for childcare when they intend to go back to work. It is also interesting that about a third of the male students would not like to stay at home at all, as opposed to only 8% of female students. Since none of the interviewees held these opinions, I was not able to probe into how those students who do not want to stay at home at all intended to take care of their child or arrange childcare.

There seems to be a lingering traditional attitude with respect to who should stay home with the kids and who should be the working parent. When asked whether they would like their partner to be a stay-at-home parent, about a fifth of the female students answered affirmatively and almost half said no. Male students almost inversely mirrored this attitude with close to half answering affirmatively and a fifth saying no. In other words, if it were affordable, almost half of my female sample would opt to be the stay-at-home parent and almost half of my male sample would also opt for them, respectively their (female) partners, to be the stay-at-home parent. On the other hand, a little less than 20% of the female students would like their (male) partner to be the stay-at-home parent and a similarly low percentage of male students would like this option for themselves. About a third of both female and male students could not make up their mind on that question.

Despite the growing phenomenon of the 'new father', with men taking on an increasing responsibility and hands-on role in childrearing, contemporary father discourses are still not constructing men as stay-at-home fathers (Boyd 2005). Although almost 60% of the male sample indicated, at this stage in their lives, that they would like to stay home for some time, almost half of them also would like their partner to be the stay-at-home parent. This apparent contradiction

became clearer during the interviews. While students indicated that stay-at-home dad is a role they would take on, if need be, it also became apparent that, except for one interviewee, this is not something they absolutely want or look forward to. Female students on the other hand indicated that they would like to stay home, at least for some time, and that this is something they would enjoy. One male student said that childcare arrangements should be well pondered before having a child. While he is willing to stay home for some time, if it was affordable, he also indicated an awareness that this might be detrimental to a career.

Although this research finding on stay-at-home parents shows more of a traditional than equitable division of childcare intentions, it is noteworthy that female and male students seem to be in agreement on this point and that both hold seemingly congruent ideas on who should stay home, namely the mother, at least for some time. These attitudes could derive from traditional parenting models, which are deeply engrained by how people have been brought up themselves and this internalization in turn might shapes their ideas (Doucet 2009). As will be discussed in more detail below, the majority of my research respondents had identified their mother as their primary caregiver. Hence, it should not surprise us that a considerable number of them are intending to replicate this pattern to some extent.

### ***Bridging Paid Work and Childcare***

As discussed in chapter 3, women are socially constructed as primary caregivers who are expected to schedule their paid labour around their family duties (MacKie 1987). Beyond providing some time off for parental leave, which is now an option in Canada, studies show that the labour market is generally not accommodating with respect to childcare needs, neither for mothers nor for fathers (Duxbury 2009; Kugelberg 2006; Ranson 2001). My student sample appeared to not have an informed opinion on this topic. About a third of the students thought that

the job market was accommodating to child care needs for mothers and fathers; about a third thought that it was not; and about a third indicated that they did not know. A similar vague picture emerged during the interviews.

Stephen: “Well, I don’t have much experience with this. I would imagine it would be equally (accommodating for fathers and mothers), I think.”

Marion: “I’m not sure about childcare but I know (...) from news articles and also from my dad that it’s more accommodating for women than for men.”

Catherine: “I don’t know. I don’t think it’s quite the same (for fathers).”

Michael: “No (I don’t think it is accommodating for fathers). I think it’s different for women. It might be, I’m not sure.”

These data illustrate that while most students of my sample want children, as discussed in chapter 5, they have not really thought about how they will care for their children with respect to time commitment, ‘being there for them’ or how they will reconcile working and childcare. While some had vague ideas about staying at home for some time and then taking up work again, only one, female, respondent had a concrete plan of how she will take care of her children. She intends to become a teacher because this will mean that she only has to work when her children are in school, and this will give her the opportunity to be at home when the children are off school and need supervision.

### ***Parental Division of Childcare Responsibilities***

Female students had a somewhat more egalitarian vision than male students with respect to whether or not mothers should be the primary caregivers. About one third of the female students, as opposed to almost half of the male students, thought that mothers should be the primary caregivers. On the other hand, about two thirds of the female students and a bit more than half of the male students thought that mothers should not be the primary caregivers. Despite

this rather divided position as to whether or not a mother should be the primary caregiver, there was an overwhelming affirmation by both female and male students, with 95.6% and 90% respectively, that fathers should be hands-on in childcare and invest the same amount of time as mothers. In interviews, only a few students opted for the mother as primary caregiver model, rationalizing this choice with women probably having a special bond with, or closer attachment to children, but all of them indicated that fathers should be involved in their children's lives.

There is also quite a confidence vote from both female and male students with respect to fathers' childcare capabilities. About two thirds of the students thought that men can care for and be responsible for children in the same way as women. What became evident during the interviews, however, is that the belief in men's childcare aptitudes has more nuances than the survey results would suggest. The majority of both female and male interviewees were convinced that fathers can make a valuable contribution and that men can care for children as well as women, except for breastfeeding. Some of the interviewees, however, thought that while fathers definitely can care for children, their care is not in the same league as that of mothers. The special mother-child bond was introduced into the narrative again (see also Doucet 2006). Some settled for the answer that the care of a father is equal, but different.

Claudia: "I think that women always have something more to add. I think men can do more or less the job that they need to do but I think that women have more to add and that gives them the upper hand. But I think mostly, women can take care better, not better, but are more nurturing."

Ian: "I don't know that (fathers) can care for them the same way. I think they can care for them equally. I think a father can love and nurture a child just as much as a mother can. But at the same time I believe that there is a distinct sort of mother's love that you can't replicate with anyone else. (...) But at the same time, if you looked at it from the other side, there is probably a definite father's love as well, that you can't replicate with the mother's. So I think that they can't do it equally. Maybe equally, but different."

When analyzing public discourses on fathering, it becomes evident that male caregiving carries certain prejudicial underpinnings with respect to men's nurturing capabilities, which raise doubt as to whether men can care for children the same way as women (Nentwich 2008; Wall and Arnold 2007). While those students who thought that men cannot care for children in the same way as women were a minority, there are still some lingering hesitations as to whether the care of fathers can really be equated with the care of mothers. This hesitation seems to be grounded in the patriarchal notion of the woman as 'natural' mother, rather than as the socially constructed mother. But, as studies into male primary caregivers show, caring for children is not a question of gender. Fathers can be just as competent, loving and nurturing caregivers as mothers (Doucet 2006, 2004).

While there might be some hesitation as to whether men can care in the same way as women, there is a very sizeable affirmation that at least they should care equally for their children. Almost 90% of both female and male students opted for equal childcare when asked who the primary caregiver should be, and interview participants indicated a similarly strong opinion on equal childcare. On the other hand, a very traditional picture is revealed with respect to whose career should have precedence if working and childcare cannot be combined. Since the job market is, in general, not very accommodating to parental needs, many families are faced with the decision that one parent has to focus on her/his career, whereas the other parent will have to put childcare before career (see chapter 3). Traditionally, the stay-at-home parent used to be the mother. In contemporary families, this option is not automatically a foregone conclusion. Overall, however, we can see that there is still a strong tendency toward a traditional pattern. While about one third of the women opted for their own and two thirds opted for their partner's career, male students took almost the exact opposite position with more than two thirds opting

for their own career and less than one third opting for their partner's. Again, both female and male students opted for a more traditional pattern and have congruent ideas that men's careers should have precedence.

This result needs to be interpreted with some reservation as a number of respondents did indicate on the survey that it would depend on whoever makes more money, and this was also the prevailing theme in interviews. Some students also said that it would depend on whoever has the better career options, or who enjoys working the most, but the overarching theme was whoever makes more money. It could very well be that the survey result really reflects the overall traditional view students hold on this issue, although the interview results cast doubt on that. It is also possible that both female and male students are aware that, in general, men are earning higher wages than women and that therefore female students opted for their partner's career and male students opted for their own.

### *Influences of Childcare Intentions*

In order to be able to gauge what might influence students in their childcare intentions, I asked who their primary caregiver was, in order to establish a baseline and to then compare as to whether or not they are repeating the caregiving model they had grown up with. The positive trend that emerged was that while the mother was identified as the primary caregiver for the majority of students, a third of the students indicated that both their parents were equal caregivers. Given that the phenomenon of the more involved 'new father' started to emerge in the 1980s, my student sample seems to be the generation that already benefited from this new, more egalitarian parenting model.

It was revealed in interviews that 'both parents caring equally' took many forms. Either both parents worked and one parent was at hand in the morning before going to school, and the

other parent was available after school; or one parent, usually the mother, although not exclusively, was home when the child was little, then went back to work and the other parent was home. Interestingly, what seems to have registered positively with students was that both parents were there for them, albeit at different stages in their lives and that this 'being there for them' is interpreted as 'equal care'. The kind of duties the parents respectively performed did not make any difference in their interpretation of equal care. As a critical analysis of parenting reveals, even though fathers are more hands-on than they have been in the past, women usually bear the greater share of responsibilities (Doucet 2009, 2006; Nentwich 2008; Wall and Arnold 2007; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). However, this aspect of different responsibilities seems to not have mattered to my research respondents and it is not clear whether they have even noticed it.

Hanna: "In the morning, getting ready and all that stuff, it was my mom. Because I got up very early and I was with my mom. In the afternoon, evenings (...) when I got home, my dad was always there. And (...) between mom getting home and dinner being made by whoever, mom wanted her time, which was cool. And I played with my dad. And then I did my homework with my mom. And then late at night she would go to bed and then my father would read to me, or something like that. I would play with my dad, because he stayed up until all hours of the night, so... It seems pretty equal."

Claudia: "Yes, I think this is probably how I was brought up. So because I think when I was a very young child that my dad took mostly care of me and later on my mother did. (...) I think that equal amount of time is very important. (...) Overall (the primary caregiver) was probably my mother. But my dad did have a lot of things he did, though. Overall, it was 50:50 more or less. It was equal, but different. My mother would pick us up from school and give us snacks. So she was more nurturing in a sense. And my dad did just not have the time. But he was there for us when we were younger. So they took care of us at different times."

Deena: "I always had nannies until I was like 13. And then my dad retired around then. So he would always be at home. But my mom tried to be more involved, I think. So it was pretty even."

All interviewees reflected on their own upbringing and they agreed that it influenced them, to a certain extent, in how they intend to care for their children. Either because they liked

the way they were brought up and would like to replicate it, or because they would have liked it differently and intend to do it 'better' with their own children.

Ian: "I (am) thinking about my experiences with my father. And I think about maybe sharing those experiences with my son, later, later on."

Catherine: "My mom (was the primary caregiver). She was a stay-at-home mom. And she was always there before I started school. My father was also present and took part in my upbringing, and was a present father figure. Mom was a stay-at-home mom for all the kids. And she has decided, about 7 years ago, to start working again. She had a number of jobs and started a 2-year degree course in social work. And she already did her 1st year and will be graduating this summer. I'm proud of her. My mom had always something on the go. She wasn't just a stay-at-home mom. The way my parents brought us up influenced me in how I would like it to be when I have kids."

Michael: "My mom (was my primary caregiver). I would have liked my dad to be more involved with me.

Question: Do you think that influences you to be more present in your children's life, the way you grew up?

Michael: Yes!"

An absent or only occasionally present father figure was perceived as missing out on something. Some students indicated that their father had to work a lot, or had a high profile career and therefore was not there for them as much as they would have liked. This absence or reduced availability was not begrudged, but did nonetheless leave traces in so far as participants would like to do it differently with their own children. Implementing these differences will be easier for male participants, because they can simply choose for themselves how differently they would like to raise their children. Female participants who would like the fathers of their children to be more available and hands-on depend on their partners' willingness in this respect.

### **6.3 Discussion and Implications**

When summarizing the research results on parenting ideas we can see some positive trends toward egalitarian childcare intentions, but also some lingering traditional childcare ideas. The majority of female and male students of my sample indicated that they would like to stay

home after birth, some for one year, some for up to three years, and some even longer. Yet, about a third of the male sample would rather not stay at home at all. Female students would rather be the stay-at-home parent, if they could afford it, as opposed to male students who would rather be the working parent. However, the majority of both female and male students indicated that they would not mind being the working parent if their partner wanted to be the stay-at-home parent. There were no clear ideas about whether or not the job market is conducive to childcare needs, but if “push comes to shove” and participants had to decide whose career should take precedence, the majority of both female and male students opted for the traditional pattern and favoured men’s careers. There is a little caveat in this respect, however, as there is also a tendency to favour the career of the parent who makes more money.

Mothers are not necessarily seen anymore as the inevitable primary caregiver and the vast majority of female and male students think that fathers should invest the same amount of time in childcare as mothers. In fact, the vast majority would like to have an equal care model when raising their child/children. There is a bit less certainty as to whether men can care for children in the same way, but still, about two thirds of both female and male students do think that they can. During interviews it became evident that participants evaluated the model of their own upbringing and it influences them in so far as they either would like to replicate it, if they liked it, or to do better, if they feel that they missed out on something.

What the research into parenting ideas clearly illustrates is that while the majority of my sample had a strong desire to have children, there is less clarity as to how they will care for them beyond covering material needs. There is a large body of literature on constraints in the labour market for parents, lack of affordable childcare, and the difficulty in finding an accommodating workplace and a reasonable family-work balance (Duxbury 2009; McQuillan et al. 2008; Wall &

Arnold 2007; Kugelberg 2006; Boyd 2005; OECD 2005; Gillespie 2003; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). However, my sample had rather vague ideas as to whether or not the job market is conducive to childcare needs. Undoubtedly, they sooner or later will find out and will have to negotiate their way around combining work and childcare. As studies show, despite fertility intentions, people make fertility decisions one birth and one child at a time (Crompton and Keown 2009). Thus, the fact that they might find it more difficult than expected to balance work and childcare might impact on and impede the realization of both women's and men's fertility intentions. In addition to a rather ambitious life project timeline, as discussed in chapter 5, an idealistic expectation of combining work and childcare would further explain why there is such a discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates.

Despite the tendency of my sample to opt for equal childcare between mother and father, people are often confronted with a reality that makes paid work and childcare, at least for a number of years, simply incompatible. Regardless of their intentions, parents are often faced with the decision as to who will be the primary caregiver and who will focus on paid work. If my sample had to make this decision, they would opt for the traditional model, respectively for the parent who makes more money, which again is in all likelihood the male partner, as they earn more, on average. It is thus quite conceivable that couples mutually agree to curtail their fertility intentions to allow the female partner to re-enter the labour market and to stay financially more viable as a family.

Asked at this stage in their lives, my sample has a distinct preference for more egalitarian childcare patterns with a more involved 'new father.' These intentions are, however, not yet firmly solidified, neither with female nor with male respondents. When confronting them with a scenario of choice, such as whether they would like their partner to be a stay-at-home parent; or

with a scenario of constraint, such as whose career should have precedence if childcare is not compatible with work, both female and male participants defaulted into the traditional childcare model of women as primary caregivers and men as breadwinners and optional fathers. Research has shown, however, that when women have the opportunity to pursue education and to participate in the labour force but are confronted with a traditional family model of primary caregiver and having to assume the lion's share of unpaid domestic work, fertility rates are usually lower than when domestic work is shared more equally (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006; Tudiver 2005; Beaujot 2003). In other words, while students might opt for the traditional childcare model of mothers as the primary caregivers, it might turn out to be less satisfactory than they envisioned and could impact their childbearing decisions. While my sample showed tendencies of a traditional childcare model, it does not mean that they, particularly women, will also like it when they actually have to live it. This assumption is further strengthened when looking at countries with higher degrees of gender equality and better family support policies, which make it easier for women (and men) to combine childcare and work. These countries show comparatively higher fertility rates, albeit still below the population replacement level (Gauthier and Philipov 2008; Oláh and Bernhardt 2008).

What is not sufficiently teased out in this argument is that low fertility seems to be correlated with a traditional familial division of labour, but that this traditional familial division of labour continues to be re-invoked in large part due to a rigid capitalist market economy and an unaccommodating labour market (Duxbury 2009; Boyd 2005). The entry point into change has thus to be a focus on how this cycle can be interrupted. As examples of other countries show, policies toward a more egalitarian work-childcare balance for both women and men prove promising. In brief, more thought has to be put into how the realization of young people's

fertility intentions can be better facilitated, rather than just identifying the problem as women who pursue higher education and a career.

## CHAPTER 7: Conclusions

### 7.1 Summary of Research Project

Intrigued by public discourses on fertility which habitually identify women who pursue longer and higher education as one of the reasons for low fertility rates and the advanced age of mothers, this thesis project endeavoured to elicit how both young female and male students envision becoming a parent and how their ideas compare to actual fertility trends. When asked, most people want children (Crompton and Keown 2009; Qu and Weston 2004; Beaujot 2003). So why then is there such a discrepancy between fertility intentions of young women and men and actual fertility rates? Do women (and men) who pursue higher education consciously plan low fertility? Or could there be other factors at play, which influence and inhibit fertility intentions of both women and men?

To find out whether low fertility is a conscious intention held by people who pursue higher education, I conducted research on young female and male students to find out what kind of ideas they hold with respect to becoming a parent. There is no disputing the fact that fertility rates are lower than fertility intentions. Particularly the fact that fertility rates are below the replacement level seems to be of concern to demographers and policy-makers alike (Baird 2009; Ravanera and McQuillan 2006; Health Canada 2005; Beaujot 2003). There are social policies in place to encourage procreation, such as parental leave, but these policies do not seem to have the anticipated success with respect to boosting fertility rates. It is therefore important to get a better understanding how, and under what circumstances, young people envision becoming a parent.

My research questions and hypotheses led me to undertake a pragmatist mixed method approach to my research project. This promised to be the most appropriate avenue to investigate how young students envision becoming a parent. Although this methodological approach can

pose methodological and epistemological challenges (Bryman 1988), mixing quantitative and qualitative methods proved to be complementary and an optimal approach to explore how young students envision becoming a parent. It enabled me to theorize why there might be such a discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates.

To this effect, I undertook a self-administered questionnaire survey of 554 Carleton University students between the age of 18 and 25, and interviews with 7 female and 5 male students from the same sample pool. The quantitative and qualitative findings revealed an interesting, complementary picture of young students' fertility intentions and provided valuable insight into why there might be such a discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates, which are much lower.

### **7.2 Who will be Rocking the Cradle and When?**

If my student sample realized their fertility intentions as they envision them today, then both women and men would equally be rocking the cradle, several times actually, and they would start to do so while still in their mid to late twenties.

Based on a literature review and personal experiences and observations, the underlying assumption of this research project was that young students do not consciously plan low fertility or having children in their thirties. When analysing the fertility intentions of my sample it becomes evident that female students would like to have, on average, 2.3 children, and that male students on average would prefer to have 1.8 children. While this result is considerably higher than actual fertility rates, this is not so far off when comparing the fertility intentions of my sample with the General Social Survey (GSS) 2006 fertility intention data. The GSS 2006 data indicates that a similar age cohort, with all levels of educational attainment and various socio-economic backgrounds, would like 2.3 children per woman as well as per man (Statistics Canada

2006). This clearly speaks to the fact that pursuing higher education per se does not adversely affect fertility intentions, as is habitually suggested by public discourses. An explanation for the discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates has to be sought elsewhere.

The vast majority of my sample do want to be parents one day, want to be in a relationship, preferably even married, and want two or three children, which is in line with the dominant idea of an 'ideal family' (Bibby 2004). They would like to have finished their education and have a career going or at least a well-paying job that would allow them a certain measure of financial stability. These are the intended prerequisites before having their first child by the age of approximately 26 to 27 for female students, and 28 to 29 for male students. My student sample had no discernable doubt that this might be a too ambitious objective for such a short time line. Advanced age of motherhood is thus far more likely to be explained by the kind of accomplishments women and men would like to have realized before having children, such as the vague concept of 'having a career' and 'financial stability.' It seems unlikely that they will be able to achieve these goals within only four to five years of graduating from a bachelor's degree.

Pursuing higher education is certainly a delaying factor in childbearing as the vast majority of the respondents indicated that they would like to finish their education first before having children. Yet, female and male students equally share this intention. Identifying only women with higher educational attainment as one of the reasons for delayed motherhood, as suggested by some literature (Mitchell 2006; Gillespie 2003; Stobert and Kemeny 2003; Foot 1998), is therefore a flawed conclusion because it misses and does not address the deeper, underlying problems that inhibit young women and men from realizing their fertility intentions. Higher education holds certain promises such as a better job, better wages and a better life-style

but these promises often remain elusive for women and men, at least in the five or so years following their graduation from a bachelor's degree.

What might also contribute to lower than intended fertility rates is that, while the majority of my sample manifested a strong desire to have children, there is less clarity as to how they will care for them or combine working and childcare. Despite empirical data on labour market constraints, my sample had rather vague ideas as to whether or not the job market is conducive to childcare needs. They indicated that they might stay at home with the child for some time and then go back to work. But there was no elaboration as to who then will take care of the child or how they will arrange childcare. Thus, the fact that they might find combining working and childcare more difficult than expected might also have impacts on the realization of young people's fertility intentions. This might be just as likely an explanation of why there is such a discrepancy between fertility intentions and actual fertility rates.

With respect to childcare responsibilities, the research revealed that, on average, my student respondents have similarly egalitarian views and male participants are ready to play an important role in their children's lives. This attitude is very promising and laudable. From a feminist perspective, however, the praise is still rather muted because while female and male students indicate a strong desire for fathers to equally take on responsibility for their children, there is a lack of awareness that this responsibility is already inherently theirs and that involved fathering should not be an option.

Studies show that when people express an intention of having children, it represents a positive influence in their procreative decision-making (Crompton and Keown 2009). Yet, studies also show that people are not dogmatically pursuing a preconceived life plan, but that they make fertility decisions one birth and one child at a time. I originally thought that young

women and men would hold somewhat different ideas about becoming a parent and that these differences might to a certain extent adversely affect fertility intentions (Schoen et al. 1999). However, my research, to my surprise, revealed that female and male students have quite similar ideas of how they envision becoming a parent (see Schoen et al. 1999). It is thus not the difference in their ideas, which might negatively affect their fertility intentions, but rather the very *kind* of ideas they hold and the kind of accomplishments they would like to have achieved before having children. Consequently, it needs to be emphasized that it is not pursuing higher education that has a negative influence on procreative decision-making, but rather it is other factors that come to play after graduation, such as socio-economic constraints, the lack of affordable and available childcare in Canada (Michel and Mahon 2002), and an unaccommodating labour market. These factors delay the achievement of people's intended lifestyle and defer their intentions of starting a family. Attention, thus, needs to be focused on how we, as a society, can provide a conducive environment and facilitate the realization of fertility intentions, rather than just insinuating that the problem lies with women who pursue higher education. What gets easily obscured in this simplistic approach is that gender and parenting roles are socially constructed and that they are still constructed in a way that is constraining for women and men, mothers and fathers. To improve the status quo, feminist research needs to further explore workplace conditions for parents, social policies around parental leave and childcare, and how gender and parenting roles can be reconstructed to better meet women's and men's needs.

### **7.3 Research Limitations**

Due to a relatively small feasible research scope of a master's thesis, my research findings are based on nonprobability sampling of available subjects between the age of 18 and

25. The results are thus not representative for the total student population of Carleton University, nor the total age cohort. Another limitation was the relatively small number of survey respondents (n=554) and interviewees (n=12).

My research results are based on my sample and, therefore are subject to sampling errors. A different sample population of students between the age of 18 and 25, or with a different class or race/ethnicity composition, or sampling in a different region of Canada might have generated different results. In spite of these limitations, my research provides valuable insight into how young university students envision becoming a parent and whether or not their ideas are indicative of current fertility trends.

#### **7.4 Key Contributions of Research**

My research of Carleton University students between the age of 18 and 25 contributes to a better understanding of parenting intentions of young students and an understanding of possible factors in the discrepancy between young people's fertility intentions and actual fertility rates. As illustrated, young women and men pursuing higher education do not have a preconceived intent of having fewer children or of having them later than the rest of society. On the contrary, when asked, female students would like to have on average 2.3 children starting between the age of 26 and 27, and male students would prefer to have on average 1.8 children starting between the age of 28 and 29. The discrepancy between parenting intent and actual parenting behaviour seems to be correlated with young women's and men's ambitious expectations of what they think they would like to have accomplished before having their first child. Financial stability has been expressed as a very important factor in parenting decision-making. Policies that better target the facilitation of young people's financial stability might therefore prove favourable with respect to sustaining fertility rates.

The phenomenon of low fertility is of vital interest to policy makers because fertility rates below the population replacement level can lead to an aging population, which in turn has major economic and social implications and can affect the viability of a society (Tudiver 2005). My research does not claim to be representative for all young women and men in Canada between the age of 18 and 25, or even for all university students of that age. But what my sample population illustrates is that low fertility is not a conscious intent of young men and women who decide to pursue higher education. They do not see it as an either-or question, i.e., either to have children or to pursue a degree. Ideally, they would like to have it all, and all still at a relatively young age. Therefore, a better grasp of how the realization of young people's fertility intentions could be facilitated is particularly important in light of a competitive economy that encourages and rewards post-secondary education, since this will inevitably entice an increasing number of young people to pursue this educational path (Lochhead 2005). Demographers are not hopeful that more favourable policies will increase fertility rates to replacement levels, but at least they may allow more people to have the children they would like to have (Beaujot 2003).

When studying possible constraining aspects of realizing fertility intentions, such as delays in transitions and achievements that typically precede childbearing (Qu and Weston 2004; Parker and Alexander 2004; Schoen et al. 1999); an unaccommodating work environment (Duxbury and Higgins 2009; Kugelberg 2006); parental leave policies (Doucet et al. 2009); a low state priority on high quality childcare (Mahon 2009); or a disproportional childcare burden on women (Statistics Canada 2006), it becomes evident that countries that have public policies that alleviate these constraints and support families and gender equity are less afflicted by low fertility (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008; Gauthier and Philipov 2008). Conversely, countries where public policies favour a 'traditional' family division of labour and disproportionately burden

women with childrearing, like eastern and southern European countries, low fertility is more prominent as it seems that women can better maintain their options of equality when reducing childbearing (Beaujot and Mohammad 2006; Tudiver 2005). These comparisons support the call for better, more family and women friendly public policies that make childbearing and childrearing a more balanced and equitable task of all of society and its stakeholders and allows mothers and fathers to better balance paid work and family life (Beaujot and Mohammed 2006; Lapierre-Adamcyk et al. 2006).

### **7.5 Further Research**

More research is needed on fertility intention deterrents to mitigate their effects, as policy interventions are only going to be effective when they are based on a sound understanding of what might prevent young people from realizing their fertility intentions. Thus, my research findings are a valuable contribution as they illustrate what ideas young people have with respect to what kind of accomplishments they would like to have achieved before having children. These findings could inform further explorations as to how to facilitate this transition.

An increased attention should be given to policy considerations that look at how young people could be facilitated in achieving their goals that typically precede childbearing and how to make economic and labour force demands more compatible with childbearing and childrearing. Policies that would better promote gender equality and which facilitate combining paid work and childcare for both women and men prove promising with respect to enabling young people to realize their fertility intentions, as examples from other countries illustrate (Gauthier and Philipov 2008; Olah and Bernhardt 2008).

To gain an even better understanding of parenting ideas of Canadians who pursue higher education, further research should be conducted with a more diverse sample that better reflects

Canada's diversity in class and ethnicity. A particular focus, for example, could be on how young people in new immigrant families conceptualize paid work and parenting decisions. Furthermore, continued research attention could be paid to Quebec's more advantageous childcare and parental leave policies, compared to policies of other Canadian provinces (Jenson, 2002; Doucet et al., 2009) and how these different policy regimes may impact upon the fertility decisions of young women and men in Canada.

APPENDIX A



QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) What is your sex?  FEMALE?  MALE?
- 2) What age are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) How would you identify?  Heterosexual  GLBT
- 4) What is your faith/religion? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) What is your race/ethnic background? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) In which Canadian Province did you grow up? \_\_\_\_\_ /  Did not grow up in Canada
- 7) Have you ever thought about being a parent one day?  
 YES  
 NO
- 8) Would you like to be a parent one day?  
 YES  
 NO  
 DON'T KNOW
- 9) At what age might you want your first child?  
Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Don't Know
- 10) How many children would you like?  
Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Don't Know



- 11) Is it important to you to be in a relationship before having a child/children?
- YES
  - NO
- 12) Is it important to you to be married before having a child/children?
- YES
  - NO
- 13) In case you cannot find an appropriate partner with whom you would like to be in a long-term relationship, would you like to have a child/children anyway?
- YES
  - NO
  - DON'T KNOW
- 14) Do you think a child/children will fulfil your life?
- YES
  - NO
  - DON'T KNOW
- 15) Do you feel pressured by family or friends to have a child/children?
- YES
  - NO
- 16) If you could financially afford it, would you like to be a stay-at-home parent?
- for the first year after your child's birth
  - for the first 3 years after your child's birth
  - for longer than 3 years after your child's birth
  - or not at all
- 17) If you were in a relationship and could financially afford it, would you like your partner to be a stay-at-home parent?
- YES
  - NO
  - DON'T KNOW



18) If you were in a relationship and your partner wanted to be a stay-at-home parent, would you mind being the working parent?

- YES
- NO
- DON'T KNOW

19) Do you think the job market/work environment is accommodating to the childcare needs of a mother?

- YES
- NO
- DON'T KNOW

20) Do you think the job market/work environment is accommodating to the childcare needs of a father?

- YES
- NO
- DON'T KNOW

21) Do you think the mother should be the primary caregiver of children?

- YES
- NO

22) Do you think the father should be hands-on in childcare and invest the same amount of time as the mother in taking care of their child/children?

- YES
- NO

23) Do you think men can care for and be responsible for children in the same way as women?

- YES
- NO
- DON'T KNOW

24) If it was financially affordable, would you be in favour of the father taking paternity leave?

- YES
- NO



25) If you were in a relationship, who would you like to primarily care for your child/children?

- YOURSELF
- YOUR PARTNER
- EQUALLY YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNER
- DON'T KNOW

26) If childcare and pursuing your career cannot be combined and you were in a relationship, whose career do you think should have priority?

- YOURS
- YOUR PARTNER'S

27) Do you have siblings?

- YES. If yes, how many \_\_\_\_\_
- NO

28) Who was your primary care-giver when you were a child?

- MOTHER
- FATHER
- EQUALLY BOTH MOTHER AND FATHER
- OTHER (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**



**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Sex? (F/M)

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you identify? (Heterosexual / GLBT)

What is your faith/religion? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your race/ethnicity background? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever thought about being a parent one day?

Would you like to be a parent one day?

At what age would you want to have your first child?

Why do you think this would be a good age to have your first child?

How many children would you like? \_\_\_\_\_

Why only one child/Why x children?

Do you have siblings?  
If yes, how many?

Do you think the number of siblings (not having siblings) has in any way influenced your decision about how many children you would like?

Do you think a child/children will fulfil your life?



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What would you like to have accomplished before having a child/children?

- finish your education?
- have a permanent job?
- own an apartment/house?
- being in a relationship?
- being married?

In case you cannot find an appropriate partner with whom you would like to be in a long-term relationship, would you like to have a child/children anyway?

Do you have the feeling that your family or friends have a certain expectation that you will have a child/children one day?

Do you think there is a societal expectation for women to have children?

Do you think there is a societal expectation for men to have children?

If you were in a partnership and you could afford it, would you like to be a stay-at-home parent?

If yes, for how long?

If no, would you like your partner to be a stay-at-home parent, if you could afford it?

If you were in a partnership and you had an accommodating workplace, would you like to combine working and childcare?

If your partner wanted to be a stay-at-home parent and you could afford it, would you mind being the working parent?

Do you think the job market/work environment is accommodating to the childcare needs of a mother?

Do you think the job market/work environment is accommodating to the childcare needs of a father?



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Do you think women should be the primary caregiver of children?

Do you think fathers should invest equal time and effort in taking care of their child/children?

If it was financially affordable, would you be in favour of the father taking paternity leave?

Do you think fathers can care for and be responsible for children in the same way as mothers?

If you were in a relationship, would you like to be the primary care-giver of your child/children, or would you like to equally share childcare responsibilities with your partner?

If childcare and pursuing your career cannot be combined would you like your career to take priority and your partner to take on more childcare responsibilities?

Who was your primary caregiver?

Did you like it that way?

Or would you have liked your other parent/(or your mother or father; or your adopted mother or adopted father) to be also more hands-on and there for you?

APPENDIX C

Table 2: Fertility Intentions

	Women	Men	Total
<b>Sample Population: Total Number = 554</b>	364	190	554
Participants (%)	65.7%	34.3%	100%
<b>Have you ever thought about being a parent one day? (n = 554)</b>			
Yes	97.3%	94.7%	96.4%
No	2.7%	5.3%	3.6%
<b>Would you like to be a parent one day? (n = 554)</b>			
Yes	83.8%	82.1%	83.2%
No	3.6%	5.8%	4.3%
Don't know	12.6%	12.1%	12.5%
<b>At what age might you want your first child? (n = 530)</b>			
Don't know	19.4% *	35.8%	24.9%
At 18	0.0% *	0.6%	0.2%
At 20	0.6% *	0.0%	0.4%
Between 20 and 21	0.3% *	0.0%	0.2%
At 21	0.6% *	0.6%	0.6%
At 22	0.9% *	0.6%	0.8%
At 23	4.0% *	0.0%	2.6%
Between 23 and 24	0.6% *	0.0%	0.4%
At 24	5.7% *	1.7%	4.3%
Between 24 and 25	0.3% *	0.0%	0.2%
At 25	15.4% *	7.8%	12.8%
At 26	10.8% *	2.2%	7.9%
At 27	10.8% *	6.7%	9.4%
Between 27 and 28	0.6% *	0.0%	0.4%
At 28	14.0% *	12.8%	13.6%
Between 28 and 29	0.6% *	0.0%	0.4%
At 29	4.0% *	2.2%	3.4%
Between 29 and 30	0.3% *	0.6%	0.4%
At 30	8.8% *	19.6%	12.5%
At 31	0.0% *	1.7%	0.6%
At 32	2.0% *	1.7%	1.9%
Between 32 and 33	0.3% *	0.0%	0.2%
At 33	0.0% *	0.6%	0.2%
At 34	0.3% *	0.6%	0.4%
At 35	0.0% *	3.4%	1.1%
At 40	0.0% *	0.6%	0.2%
At 42	0.0% *	0.6%	0.2%
Mode age	25 *	30	28
Mean age	26.66 *	28.68	27.25

\* Women and men differ (p<.05).

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**Table 2: Fertility Intentions (continued)**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sample Population: Total Number = 554</b>	364	190	554
Participants (%)	65.7%	34.3%	100%
<b>How many children would you like?</b>			
(n = 530)			
Don't know	16.2% *	26.7%	19.9%
1 child	2.0% *	4.5%	2.8%
Between 1 and 2 children	2.6% *	1.1%	2.1%
2 children	<b>33.9% *</b>	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>34.5%</b>
Between 2 and 3 children	5.1% *	4.5%	4.9%
3 children	22.2% *	20.1%	21.5%
Between 3 and 4 children	2.6% *	1.1%	2.1%
4 children	9.7% *	3.9%	7.7%
5 children	3.4% *	1.7%	2.8%
6 children	1.7% *	0.6%	1.3%
7 children	0.3% *	0.0%	0.2%
8 children	0.3% *	0.0%	0.2%
Mean number of children	2.3 *	1.8	2.1
Median number of children	2.0 *	2.0	2.0
<b>Is it important to be in a relationship before having a child/children? (n = 553)</b>			
Yes	97.2%	97.9%	97.5%
No	2.8%	2.1%	2.5%
<b>Is it important to be married before having a child/children? (n = 549)</b>			
Yes	77.8%	72.3%	76.0%
No	22.2%	27.7%	24.0%
<b>In case you cannot find an appropriate partner, would you like to have a child/children anyway? (n = 552)</b>			
Yes	31.2% *	12.1%	24.6%
No	34.3% *	58.4%	42.6%
Don't know	34.5% *	29.5%	32.8%
<b>Do you think children will fulfil your life? (n = 554)</b>			
Yes	53.3%	48.9%	51.8%
No	14.6%	19.5%	16.2%
Don't know	32.1%	31.6%	31.9%
<b>Do you feel pressured by family or friends to have children? (n = 554)</b>			
Yes	15.9%	14.2%	15.3%
No	84.1%	85.8%	84.7%
* Women and men differ (p<.05).			

**APPENDIX D**

**Table 3: Childcare Intentions**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sample Population: Total Number = 554</b>	364	190	554
Participants (%)	65.7%	34.3%	100%
<b>If you could financially afford it, would you like to be a stay-at-home parent?</b>			
(n = 552)			
For the first year	31.6% *	31.9%	31.7%
For the first 3 years	43.4% *	17.6%	34.6%
For longer than 3 years	17.0% *	13.8%	15.9%
Not at all	8.0% *	36.7%	17.8%
<b>If you were in a relationship and could financially afford it, would you like your partner to be a stay-at-home parent?</b>			
(n = 552)			
Yes	19.6% *	46.3%	28.8%
No	47.2% *	17.4%	37.0%
Don't know	33.1% *	36.3%	34.2%
<b>If you were in a relationship and your partner wanted to be a stay-at-home parent, would you mind being the working parent? (n = 554)</b>			
Yes	24.7% *	7.9%	19.0%
No	58.0% *	83.2%	66.6%
Don't Know	17.3% *	8.9%	14.4%
<b>Do you think the job market/work environment is accommodating to the childcare needs of a mother? (n = 550)</b>			
Yes	33.2% *	42.3%	36.4%
No	36.6% *	25.4%	32.7%
Don't know	30.2% *	32.3%	30.9%
<b>Do you think the job market/work environment is accommodating to the childcare needs of fathers? (n = 551)</b>			
Yes	25.4% *	33.3%	28.1%
No	41.7% *	31.2%	38.1%
Don't know	32.9% *	35.4%	33.8%
<b>Do you think the mother should be the primary caregiver of children? (n = 548)</b>			
Yes	37.6% *	47.3%	40.9%
No	62.4% *	52.7%	59.1%

\* Women and men differ (p<.05).

(continued next page)

**Table 3: Childcare Intentions (continued)**

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sample Population: Total Number = 554</b>	364	190	554
Participants (%)	65.7%	34.3%	100%
<b>Do you think the father should be hands-on in childcare and invest the same amount of time as the mother in taking care of their child/children? (n = 551)</b>			
Yes	95.6% *	90.0%	93.6%
No	4.4% *	10.0%	6.4%
<b>Do you think men can care for and be responsible for children in the same way as women? (n = 553)</b>			
Yes	68.1%	60.3%	65.5%
No	24.2%	30.2%	26.2%
Don't know	7.7%	9.5%	8.3%
<b>If it was financially affordable, would you be in favour of the father taking paternity leave? (n = 544)</b>			
Yes	75.0%	69.0%	73.0%
No	25.0%	31.0%	27.0%
<b>If you were in a relationship, who would you like to primarily care for your child/children? (n = 552)</b>			
Yourself	10.7% *	1.1%	7.4%
Your partner	0.5% *	4.3%	1.8%
Equally yourself and your partner	87.9% *	88.3%	88.0%
Don't know	0.8% *	6.4%	2.7%
<b>If childcare and pursuing your career cannot be combined and you were in a relationship, whose career do you think should have priority? (n = 481)</b>			
Yours	37.2% *	76.4%	50.3%
Your partner's	62.8% *	23.6%	49.7%
<b>Do you have siblings? (n = 546)</b>			
No	9.1%	9.2%	9.2%
Yes (between 1 and 17; mode being 1)	91.0%	90.7%	90.8%
<b>Who was your primary care-giver when you were a child? (n = 546)</b>			
Mother	58.8%	62.0%	59.9%
Father	2.5%	1.1%	2.0%
Equally both mother and father	35.7%	33.7%	35.0%
Other (granny, nanny, grandparents, aunt)	3.1%	3.2%	3.1%

\* Women and men differ (p<.05).

## APPENDIX E

**Table 4: Fertility Intentions (General Social Survey 2006)**

Intended # of children:	Women <sup>1</sup>	Men	Total
No children	10%	10%	10%
1 child	5%	4%	5%
2 children	48%	52%	50%
3 children	25%	23%	24%
4 children	10%	8%	9%
5 children or more	2%	3%	2%
Mean number of children	2.3	2.3	2.3
Median number of children	2.0	2.0	2.0

Source: Tabulation based on Statistics Canada (2006). GSS 2006.  
 Note: n=1,903; representing a population of approx. 3.2 million Canadian aged 18 to 25 years living in the ten provinces.

<sup>1</sup> Women and men do not differ in the number of children they intend to have ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 5: Number of Children by Canadian between 18 and 80 plus years (General Social Survey 2006)**

Number of children:	Women*	Men	Total
No children	34%	40%	37%
1 child	14%	14%	14%
2 children	27%	26%	27%
3 children	15%	13%	14%
4 children	5%	4%	5%
5 children	2%	2%	2%
6 children or more	3%	1%	1%
Mean number of children	1.6*	1.4	1.4
Median number of children	1.0	1.0	1.0

\* Women and men differ in the number of children they have ( $p < .05$ ).

Source: Tabulation based on Statistics Canada (2006). GSS 2006.  
 Note: Results are weighted and bootstrapped; n=23,571; representing a population of approx. 26.5 million Canadian aged 18 to 80 plus years living in the ten provinces.

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