

# Decisions to Have Children in Late 20th and Early 21st Century Australia

## A Qualitative Analysis

**Abstract** The literature on dyadic decision-making regarding childbearing is not voluminous. This volume presents a comprehensive analysis of such decision-making based on 115 in-depth interviews conducted in eastern Australia in 2002–2003 with females, males and couples for whom family formation was a recent, current, or imminent future issue. It traverses contemplation of parenthood during adolescence and early adulthood, talk about children during courtship, the process by which family size is determined, and then decision-making in respect of first, second, third and fourth children. The variety of decision-making approaches and issues, and the extent to which explicit and implicit decision-making prevail at different parities, are assessed.

## Introduction

This volume is a product of the Australian Family Formation Decisions (AFFD) Project, a study conducted in eastern Australia in 2002–2003 that sought to obtain insight into family formation decision-making via in-depth interviews with 115 individuals and couples for whom family formation was a recent, current or imminent future issue of concern. Several papers focused on relationship formation (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007b), the formation, purposes and roles in the marriage process of living together relationships (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007c), and circumstances that lead some individuals and couples physically able to have children to remain childless (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007a) have previously been published. However, product dealing with decisions to have children, when to have them and how many to have has languished unpublished, partly because of difficulty condensing it to journal article length and partly because other academic priorities took precedence. Now, its author in retirement, time has been found to make this material available.

Past attempts to apply qualitative research methods to decision-making around having children have typically concentrated on births of a particular parity (e.g., Evans et al. 2009; Rijken and Knijn 2009). Here an effort is made to be more comprehensive, with decisions about first, second, third and fourth births

examined separately for internal heterogeneity, but also contrasted to highlight broad parity-specific characteristics and differentials. Prior to adopting this focus, however, attention is also paid to other potentially significant aspects of decision-making processes, such as the degree to which informants recalled being engaged by thoughts of future family formation before entering serious relationships during adolescence and early adulthood, the attention children had received during relationship formation and courtship, and the process by which family sizes had ultimately been determined or seemed likely to be determined.

The fact that informants were recruited from respondents to an earlier longitudinal quantitative survey—the *Negotiating the Life Course Survey*, or NLCS—created a unique opportunity to quiz some of them about family size expectations they had expressed while still childless when responding to that survey some years earlier in their late teens or early 20s, and whether they now saw their parental lives unfolding any differently. Interrogating the process of family size determination is a logical outgrowth of this analysis, given that it has been widely observed in developed populations that childbearing intentions or expectations frequently change over time, with achieved fertility typically below expectation in aggregate, although clearly it may also exceed expectation for individuals (Quesnel-Vallée and Morgan 2003; Testa and Toulemon 2006; Liefbroer 2009; Morgan and Rackin 2010; Iacovou and Patricio Tavares 2011).

The account that follows cites the words of informants liberally—some might argue too liberally. However, without carrying the approach to extremes it is contended that there is value in multiple expressions of similar sentiments as a way of conveying how commonly they were encountered. It is acknowledged that informants were not infrequently recalling decisions that had been made some years previously, and it is not unreasonable to wonder how accurate that recall was. The births of children are, though, momentous life events, and one's impression from the many interviews conducted is that circumstances surrounding them, the focus of this study, were for the most part vividly etched in people's minds.

## Explicit and Implicit Decision-Making

An overriding theme through the study is assessment of the degree to which decision-making with respect to having children was explicit or implicit. In the task-oriented and workaday worlds decision-making tends to be explicit, guided by focused processes, open debate, defined responsibilities and clear lines of authority. In intimate relationships, by contrast, implicit decision-making largely holds sway (Sillars and Kalbflesch 1989). It is characterized by 'silent arrangements' (decisions reached without verbal agreement), linguistic pragmatism (limited prior discussion), frequent assumption of partner concurrence based on precedent, an approach that is incremental and often spontaneous or impulsive, a desire to avoid open conflict, and stoicism. It occurs for several reasons: the volume of decisions intimate couples make, which would overwhelm them were explicit agreement always needed; the

tendency of assortative mating to pair those with similar values and expectations; the role tradition plays in creating dyadic spheres of authority; a desire not to risk disharmony through unnecessary debate; the embedding of much decision-making in daily activity; and a predilection for preserving one's intimate relationships (Sillars and Kalbflesch 1989). Explicit decisions are not absent from the dyadic arena, but tend to arise either in relationships between very independent individuals who both value their personal autonomy, or when issues of real moment are at stake.

Such issues often are associated with times of relationship crisis, but decisions about whether and when to have children also qualify as momentous, as do those pertaining to such things as migration, major changes of employment and the acquisition of housing. So is decision-making about having children typically explicit? The writings of Giddens (1991, 1992), Beck (1994), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) propose that in an age of reflexive modernization through the late twentieth century a profound individualization of lifestyles developed that was conducive to negotiation, and hence explicit decision-making, by intimate couples. It has been argued for the Australian sample focused on here that in respect of relationship formation there *is* evidence of the 'do-it-yourself' biographies these authors project as the new norm (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007b). But to what extent has the focus on individual autonomy also permeated decision-making with respect to having children *within* relationships to promote explicit rather than implicit decision-making? A recent qualitative study of 17 younger (mother  $\leq 25$  at first birth) and 16 older (mother 33 or older) Dutch couples' decisions to have first children concluded that "the decision-making ... was generally quite implicit" (Rijken and Knijen 2009:792).

## Context: Delayed Childbearing

Post-war fertility peaked in Australia in 1961 at a total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.55 births per woman. The advent of oral contraception then enabled higher parity women to more assuredly cease their childbearing and newly-weds to delay first births. The TFR consequently fell to 2.84 in 1967 where, as a final surge occurred in the post-war decline in ages at first marriage (Carmichael 1988, 2002) and pill take-up slowed (Lavis 1975), it plateaued for 4 years. Rapid descent then resumed, the TFR passing replacement level in 1976 to reach 1.89 in 1980 as couples increasingly resorted to voluntary sterilization as a terminal method of fertility control (Young and Ware 1979; Santow 1991) and a major shift to later childbearing commenced. The surge in early marriage reflected unmarried couples, seeking to reconcile peer pressure to be sexually active and parental exhortation to remain chaste, realizing that early marriage followed by pill-deferred parenthood offered them a solution to their dilemma. But it would only be a brief phase, for inevitably in the new contraceptive environment the need to marry to legitimize regular intercourse was challenged, cohabitation proliferated, the marriage boom consequently reversed emphatically, and childbearing was delayed.

Beyond 1980 the TFR was relatively stable, fluctuating either side of 1.90 until a slow, steady decline from 1.89 to 1.73 set in between 1992 and 2001. This stability, however, masked the aforementioned shift in the timing of childbearing (Fig. 1). Through the 1960s teenagers had limited access to the pill and fertility

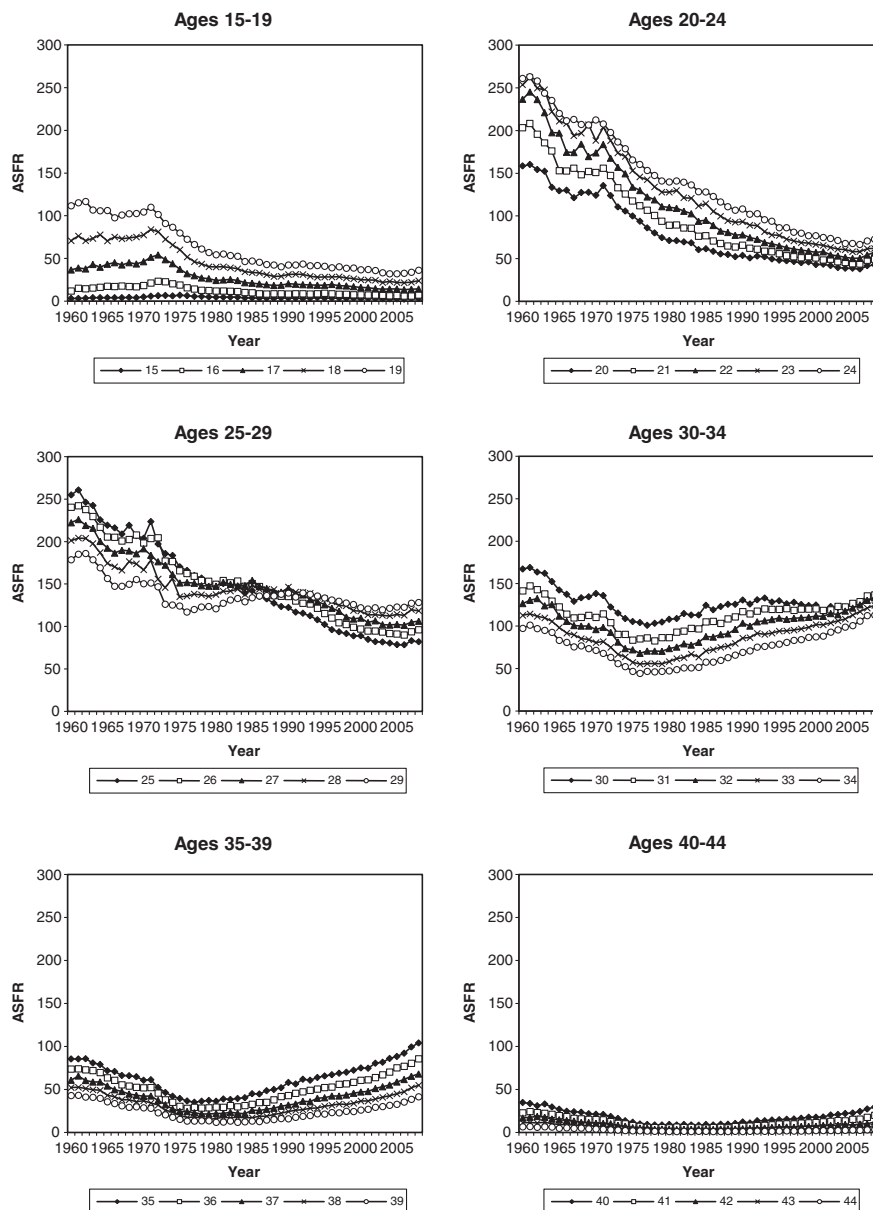


Fig. 1 Age-specific fertility rates—Australia 1960–2008

decline occurred at older ages among married women. Teenage fertility only fell after 1971, partly due to better contraception in cohabiting relationships but also after a landmark legal ruling improved access to abortion (Carmichael 1996). But from the early 1970s fertility fell relentlessly at ages 20–24, the trend reversing only after 2006 in the wake of, but not necessarily because of, ‘baby bonus’ maternity payments introduced in mid-2004 (Heard 2006, 2010; Jackson 2006; Anderson 2007; Read, Crockett, and Watson 2007; Lattimore and Pobke 2008; Drago et al. 2009; Lain et al. 2009; Risse 2010; Parr and Guest 2011).

Persistent fertility declines also occurred at younger ages in the range 25–29 years, but at older ones rates turned upward again from the mid-1970s. The result was a cross-over from the 1960s, when fertility was highest at age 25 and lowest at age 29, to the mid-1990s, when the reverse applied. The postponement of childbearing is also clear in rising fertility rates beyond age 30 after the mid-1970s. Thus, after 1980 when rapid decline in the TFR ceased, a marked further shift occurred in the timing of childbearing, fertility increase at older ages offsetting decline at younger ones.

Within this contextual framework, the qualitative data reported here are from couples and individuals who were making childbearing decisions through the 1990s and early 2000s. That is, they are from cohorts embedded in the trend to later childbearing that saw increased priority before age 30, especially for women, accorded to education, career, travel, and enjoying early adulthood. They had not yet been confronted by the temptation to modify family formation plans that the universal ‘baby bonus’ may have represented, although the term ‘baby bonus’ *was* already in use in respect of a more restricted tax concession for first-time mothers who stayed home with their babies introduced in 2001. Heard (2006:17), however, describes its take-up as “low”, and no informant in this study held it influential in their decision-making.

## The Qualitative Data

As already noted, the present study draws on in-depth interviews with 115 women, men and couples conducted in eastern Australia during 2002–2003 for the AFFD Project. The AFFD Project’s aim was to step back from aggregate family formation data and allow people for whom the process was a recent, current, or imminent future issue to relate their lived experience of it, and/or their future hopes for it. Interviews traversed relationship formation, decisions to have or not have children, and approaches to their care and upbringing.

Informants were recruited from respondents to the NLCS, a national longitudinal telephone survey of over 2,200 persons aged 18–54 when first interviewed in 1996–1997 who were re-interviewed in mid-2000. Decisions were made (i) to limit the study to eastern Australia between Southeast Queensland and Tasmania (to contain costs), (ii) cognizant of recommendations to incorporate men into fertility research (e.g., Goldscheider and Kaufman 1996; Meyer 1999), to interview a mixture of women, men and couples, (iii) to concentrate on people who were partnered (so likely to be actively forming families), but include a few of each

sex who were not, and (iv) to focus on women and single men aged under 40 (in mid-2000), and on partnered men and couples where the female partner was that age. Mindful, however, of trends to later childbearing (Carmichael and McDonald 2003) and more frequent childlessness (Merlo and Rowland 2000), a few women up to 5 years older who were childless or had first had children in their mid- to late-30s were also interviewed. The youngest informants were in their mid-20s.

Potential informants were contacted by letter, then follow-up phone call and asked to agree to face-to-face interviews. An initial systematic sample of 127 was drawn from NLCS respondents who were (i) in scope geographically and by age, and (ii) arranged into categories (based on sex, age, whether partnered or single, and whether targeted for individual or couple interview) for which interview quotas were set. Forty-two (one in three) were recruited. Alternates were approached to make up the shortfall, the aim being to replace non-recruits with people from the same broad geographic area and quota group. This did become an approximate exercise, as in areas remote from where interviewers lived it was necessary to anticipate alternates needed and mail to them and sample members simultaneously, so all fieldwork could be conducted in a single visit. All up, 348 potential informants were mailed to, of whom 33 % were recruited, 41 % could not be contacted by phone in three attempts, and 25 % declined an interview. The non-contact rate partly reflects contact details being 18 months to 3.5 years out of date during the 2-year fieldwork period, but the 1 in 3 recruitment rate compares favourably with that achieved by Rijken and Knijn (2009) (33 recruits from 101 letters), who also sampled from longitudinal survey respondents. Quota groups were fully subscribed, except that only three-quarters of a planned 40 interviews with partnered females aged 25–39 was achieved.

Fifty-one females (12 unpartnered), 35 males (10 unpartnered) and 29 couples were interviewed, so informants included 68 partnered females and 54 partnered males. Of the former, 40 % were aged 35–39 at interview and 10, 21, 28 and 1 % were 23–29, 30–34, 40–44 and 45 or older. The partnered males, often selected on the basis of partners' ages, were older—37 % were 40–44, and 9, 17, 24 and 13 % were 23–29, 30–34, 35–39 and 45 or older. Interviewees lived in metropolitan, regional and rural/country town (less than 15,000 population) locations—respectively 60, 30 and 10 %. They came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, although more articulate white collar persons may have been more at ease with being interviewed in-depth. Of 93 interviews with partnered individuals or couples, 22 % concerned currently childless relationships, and 14, 39, 17 and 9 % relationships that had produced one, two, three and four children respectively. Using age groups adopted by Rijken and Knijn (2009) to distinguish early, intermediate and late starters, 30 % of mothers in the 73 fertile relationships were 25 or younger, 47 % 26–32, and 23 % 33 or older at first birth. Four of the 22 unpartnered interviewees (two of each sex) also had two children each.

Interviews were taped and fully transcribed, and transcripts were thematically coded using The Ethnograph 6.0 into almost 130 discrete codes developed during the coding process. Discourse concerning fertility decisions was then isolated through selection of relevant codes and organized according to themes reported on below. All names used are pseudonyms. As childlessness has been separately investigated using these data (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007a), it is not discussed here.

## Contemplating Families

### *Early Thought About Having Children*

AFFD interviewees were routinely asked whether they had contemplated parenthood in their teens or early 20s. Many having grown up in ‘breadwinner’ families, it was common for females to recall marriage and motherhood featuring prominently in adolescent thoughts about the future, but through a period of transition in young adult women’s lives this had often not translated into early, sustained child-bearing. In her late teens Janine, a 43 year-old teacher, ‘was going to have four children, and ... live in the doll’s house or the fairy garden or something.’ She and two sisters had been ‘just smothered in’ assumed future roles as wives and mothers. She’d married in her early 20s—‘he asked, I said “Yes”, and off we went. The pretty white dress ... [it] was just so exciting.’ However, the marriage had ended, childless, after 2 years, and she hadn’t remarried and had children until in her mid-30s. Lucy, 30, had also had the breadwinner’s wife role ‘ingrained in me’. She’d married at 18—‘all I could see for ... my future was marrying this person and having his babies’—but come to realize she’d soon have time on her hands she didn’t wish to spend ‘baking cakes and making pickles’. She was now at university, demonstrating to her children, but especially her daughter, that ‘you can do whatever you want with your life.’

To Maureen, 34, marriage and children had been priorities. ‘I didn’t have a good strong family [so] I was going to prove to the world what a good family is.’ However, she and Ryan had ultimately required IVF to have their only son. Natasha, 35, ‘wasn’t career-oriented. I just wanted marriage, house, kids.’ She now had 10 and 12 year-olds. Jacinta, 39, recalled ‘always wanting to have children and thinking about ... wedding stuff.’ Engaged briefly at 19, relationship success had then eluded her for a decade, and she’d finally had three children in her 30s. Joanne, 34, had married at 19. ‘I was going to have six children ... being young you think, “I’ll have the whole Brady Bunch”.’ But the target fell to two as the reality dawned of what giving her children opportunities would entail.

Some younger women also conceded an early focus on marriage and babies. Megan, 27, had grown up daydreaming she’d marry ‘the cutest guy in the class’. ‘[T]hat’s always been the long-term goal, [to] get married and have kids.’ Friends thought her ‘weird’. Rebecca, a 26 year-old public relations consultant, had found early adulthood unlike what she’d anticipated.

[I]n high school ... I thought by the age of 24 I’d be married with kids. ... I’ve realized that is quite unrealistic and there’s no point putting a time frame on something like that, because if it happens it happens, if it doesn’t it doesn’t. ... I thought at the end of high school, three years at uni[versity], then a great career for a couple of years, get married, have kids and work part-time. But I finished high school and became a professional student.

Rebecca had twice refocused, and prolonged, her tertiary education, had spent a year overseas, was only now establishing a career, had a peer group in no hurry to have children, and had ended her only relationship because of unwelcome pressure to settle down. Children remained on the radar, but not now. Teresa, 27,



a radiographer, was similar. She'd 'always wanted children and ... the whole husband, family sort of thing', but a second relationship having just ended, had committed to more study. 'A child doesn't happen at the moment.'

Other female informants, typically professional women, had imagined parenthood as part of their future lives, but been in no hurry to embrace it. Amanda, 36, mother of 6 and 3 year-olds, had been 'very academic' at school, and although 'I did know that I would eventually get married', university had been her early focus. Gail, 31, a doctor, always expected to marry and have children, but was 'pre-occupied with ... sport and study' in her teens and early 20s. Recently married, she was only now contemplating the 'when' and 'how many' of family formation. Justine, 39, mother of 8 and 5 year-olds, 'always wanted to have them', but had had a target age of 30 for the first so she could 'do a lot of other things ... with my career and experiencing life.' For Karen, 35, mother of 5 and 2 year-olds, motherhood had been 'just one of those taken-for-granted things ... I would do in the future.' Angela, 39, her second child due shortly, had been 'determined I was going to be independent.' Children 'would happen later ... first you'd actually do some interesting stuff with careers and work.'

Still other women claimed not to have thought about having families as adolescents, or had rejected the idea outright. Susan, 35, a mother of two, had had no interest as a teenager—'no, never get married ... wanted a career'. Carol, 37, a divorced mother of two, had also had no family vision in her late teens—'you just wanna go out and get drunk and party ... I don't think I even thought about it.' For Louise, 42, also a mother of two, marriage and children had similarly been 'The furthest thought from my mind. ... I just enjoyed life and took silly risks and partied.' Isobel, 35, three children, was another 'social butterfly' in adolescence. 'I can't recall ever discussing [marriage and children]. ... It wasn't a big issue.'

Suzy, 42 and in an 18-year same-sex relationship, had sworn off marriage and family early.

I don't like children. ... children bore me very quickly. ... I was never going to get married. ... Always, nup. No desire. ... I could probably go back to my primary school days. No. Not getting married. ... Too selfish. Definitely wouldn't have kids because I too much want to do my own thing.

Likewise Miranda, at 43 childless following two abortions, 'would have been more interested in a dog or a cat' when young than a child. 'I've never had that maternal, "Oh, isn't he gorgeous?" I don't see or feel that in a child.' And from age 10 or 11 'There was no way known' Simone, 46, her childhood one of 'incessant' screaming and shouting, would have a family. She'd also had an abortion, and in her 20s had 'hated [the lack of] intellectual conversation. It was always about children and nappies.' Determinedly childless Deyna, 39, too, had 'not a drop of maternal instinct', and had 'never really had a connection with babies.'

Male informants had rarely been anxious to begin family formation. A typical male response was that children had been anticipated, but in no particular timeframe. So public servant Graham, 42, father of three aged 2–8, observed: 'I certainly knew I wanted children and ... thought I'd get married at some stage. But ... it wasn't



something that preoccupied me.’ Similarly civil engineer Jeffrey, 37—‘I wasn’t terribly fussed about ... the distant future of marriage and kids. It was probably there on the horizon’; marketing executive Joe, 39—‘I think most people carry a sense of inevitability that it will happen. It’s just not right now. ... I don’t think I thought about it much at all’; computer consultant Grant, 43—‘I always thought it would be part of something I’d do—eventually’.

Other males had simply never contemplated future family life or, like some females, rejected it. Accountant Duncan, 39—‘I was pretty blank. ... I was just having fun’; computer programmer Joel, 41—‘I wouldn’t have even thought [about children] as a teenager. ... it’d be the last thing on my mind’; farmer Jake, 34—‘[I was] just running amuck ... [and] pretty well gassed up’; public servant Doug, 32—‘I didn’t even have a rough idea what I was gonna do’; trades assistant Nick, 42—‘too busy drinking.’ Easygoing truck driver Ben, 45, now living with his fourth partner, had ‘always never ever wanted to get married ... [and] never been motivated to have children’, routinely opting out if pressure to do either was applied—‘you see the wolves coming’. Retailer Trevor, 43, when younger had been ‘fairly intolerant to ... people having to change their lives to accommodate children’ and ‘in no hurry to form a family.’ And while air traffic controller Oscar, 38, now had infant twins, he

really didn’t have any desire to have kids [in my] late teens, early 20s ... people you went to school with were starting to have families. And I’m driving a fancy car ... going away ... going sailing .... They’re at home and can’t afford that because “We’ve gotta buy this for the kids”. That doesn’t increase your motivation to join them.

So adolescent thinking about family formation ran the gamut for females, from those keen to start early to those determined never to, although circumstances and a newly emerging model of early adult life stimulated by feminism and the contraceptive revolution had often conspired to prevent early enthusiasm from becoming early real life experience. Males differed in that early enthusiasm was rare.

### *Discussion of Children During Courtship*

The other dimension of preparing for parenthood is the degree to which children are discussed during courtship. This process has blurred as cohabitation has become a common precursor to marriage, because the ambiguous commitment that is one of its attractions (Carmichael 1995; Carmichael and Whittaker 2007c) has created some uncertainty over when it is appropriate to talk about children. Experiences were again mixed. The word ‘assumed’, implying implicit decision-making, was often used. So Susan, 35, observed: ‘I don’t think we ever had to really have a discussion. It was always just assumed [as in] “When we have kids.”’ Likewise Derek, a 43 year-old academic: ‘we just assumed it would happen. ... didn’t really talk about it [until] after we got married.’ Liz, 39: ‘I just always assumed you’d have children after you got married.’ And Amanda, 36, before

her childless first marriage had ‘just assumed [having children] was a given’. She’d raised the topic more overtly with her second husband, but again, ‘we just assumed that when you’re married, children ... cement the whole thing together.’

Others had ‘assumed’ they’d have children without using the word. For Bernie, 40, prior to marrying Naomi ‘it was probably too far in the future. ... it wasn’t ... talked about in depth.’ Annette, 37, claimed she and Bruce ‘didn’t talk about children until 2 years after we married.’ But (Bruce), ‘We always knew we’d have kids.’ Martin, 43, ‘hadn’t thought about having a child’ when Hannah’s first pregnancy occurred, unplanned, overseas. There had just been an expectation that ‘children would be part of the future at some point.’ Mohammed, 39, had an arranged marriage. Children were automatic. Trevor had been ‘indifferent’ to having a family through 7 years of courtship then six of marriage, but ‘I think we both thought we probably would end up having children.’

Quite commonly the ‘whether’ of having children had been broached, but not the ‘when’. Emma and Ethan ‘did talk about [children] before we were married [but not] in terms of *when* we’d have them.’ Upon considering marriage Amelia, married 6 years before having a first child at 30, ‘did think I would eventually want children ... [so] just made sure he did too.’ Jeffrey and Maria ‘knew we both wanted kids. Not at any set time, we just talked about it in general.’ Krystal, 26, had only recently commenced her first cohabiting relationship. There’d been ‘chatter, not discussion’ about children—‘at some stage and how many we’d like, but not when.’

Some couples had discussed family formation in detail, but failed to implement their plans. Stella, 30, and Guy had agreed on 3–4 children, but with a 6 year-old daughter were now having trouble committing even to number two because of the economic implications of giving it the same ‘life experience’ (private schooling, etc.) and Stella’s desire to breastfeed it for 12 months. ‘There’s no way we could lose a second income.’ Ivan and Gretel, having cohabited after she followed him to London, had planned to delay children for 3 years until after they returned to Australia, but unintended pregnancy had intervened. Hazel, 33, and Lionel ‘were always going to have three in my early 20s and three in my 40s’, but had only been able to have one. And Cecilia, 25, had discussed children with fiancé Quentin, who’d concluded “Yeah, I think I want it.” However, now, having married, it was, “Nup, changed my mind.”

Others had implemented their plans successfully, or were trying to do so. Norman, 32, and Heidi, 34, recently married after 4 years cohabiting, had just had their first child. Their decision to marry had been a decision to have children, and they’d ‘discussed a lot of that, and ... what religion they’d be baptized, and how many kids we wanted.’ Graham and Jacinta had agreed on ‘three or four’ before they married, and settled on the lower figure. Charles and Andrea had planned to have a family immediately they married after travelling together for 3 years—‘we decided ... [to] just let nature take its course’—and now had a 13 and a 10 year-old.

Some of the most intense, explicit courtship discussions about children had involved older couples, driven by impending menopause and/or the prospect of the male being or becoming ‘too old’. When Janine had married in her early 20s, ‘none of the life issues were ever talked about ... owning a house, having a career, having children.’

But before her second marriage, still childless, at 34, 'we were eyes open ... knew the questions to ask ... and actively, positively discussed what we were looking for, and found it.' Grant had travelled widely when younger, avoiding serious relationships, but in his late 30s had returned to Australia to 'settle down'.

I wanted kids, I always did. ... I was seeking ... someone else that would like to have kids as well. ... [P]art of [the] evaluation ... was that she wanted kids as well. Being not that young we didn't want to muck around ... if kids weren't gonna be part of the relationship ... I wasn't probably interested.

When Jenny, who at 34 had long satisfied a love of children through teaching, and divorced Barry, 6 years older with two adopted daughters, had contemplated marriage, 'Whether we'd have children was a fairly big issue ... coz I did [want them] and he didn't.' Following counseling, 'Barry compromised'. And when Amber, then 30, had met Dean, 11 years older and divorced, 'we talked about children. Dean preferred not to have [any], but if I wanted to he would.' Dean was concerned he'd be nearing retirement when a child reached tertiary education age, and 'I just wondered how I was going to keep the cash flow going.' Amber had 'got to a point in my life [where] I was happy being single' and (Dean) 'there was not a great drive on either part to pursue it.'

Some informants had deliberately avoided discussing children until after marrying. Tax consultant Greg, 43, a failed marriage and two other relationships behind him, had been intent on getting the relationship right first. 'Once I decided I could marry Tracey ... only then did the issue of whether we would have children [arise].' Brett, 30, proprietor of an IT company similarly, asked if children had been discussed before marriage, replied: 'Not really. It's become more of an issue since we married.' Hairdresser Sharon's relationship with Daniel had been interrupted by two and a half years apart while he studied. Talk of children had been deferred by the effort needed to keep the relationship alive, her wish to re-establish it without that complication once they were reunited, and Daniel's feeling he 'couldn't take on that commitment' without a job. They'd married 'to celebrate surviving really', and only thereafter had children become an issue. Avowedly childless Miranda had met her husband aged 33 after advertising in a newspaper. '[I]n a hurry to get a partner' out of 'loneliness and fear of being alone', family 'wasn't heavily discussed' until 'when I was about 36 or 37 he really put the hard word on.' Divorce had been threatened, but hadn't eventuated. During courtship, he'd assumed, and she hadn't sought to disabuse him.

Others had simply never thought about children. Ian, a 45 year-old sailing junkie with a 7 month-old daughter after 8 years married, confessed that children 'was sort of one of those things we never really got round to discussing' before he and Taylor married. Lilian, 37, a mother of four observed: 'I don't know if I'd ever've planned to have kids if [the first] hadn't've sort of happened.' And Lyn, 38, a sole parent of two sons by different fathers spoke of the first of those relationships:

[I was 21 and] we were away on our honeymoon ... and I'd never thought about kids before this. He said to me "Um, you know I'm older than you (by 14 years), and I'd like to have a baby." ... I came home from my honeymoon pregnant, as you do. I had no idea what I was doing.

Premarital experiences of planning families were thus disparate and ranged from highly explicit through clearly implicit to non-existent. Some had gone into considerable detail, but not always managed to implement their plans. Others had simply assumed they'd have children, and still others with no immediate intention to do so had at least checked in passing that their partners wanted them at some stage. Some of the most intense, explicit premarital discussions had involved older couples, for whom the 'when' of family formation had to be 'soon' if the 'whether' was 'yes'. There were also examples where children had only been a post-marriage topic of conversation, and others where, even then, they hadn't been discussed at all or for long periods. Informants had had the contraceptive technology to delay parenthood indefinitely beyond moving in or marriage, so children hadn't necessarily been a pressing issue when either event took place.

## Determining Family Size

### *How Meaningful are Early 'Expected' Family Sizes?*

Using 1996 census data, McDonald (1998) estimated that 38 % of Australian women aged 30 would ultimately have no children (22 %) or one child (16 %). Yet the first wave of the NLCS (conducted around the same time) found that only 14.3 % of female respondents aged 20–24 anticipated ending up in those categories, and their mean expected family size was 2.3 children, well above the prevailing TFR of 1.8 (Carmichael and McDonald 2003). This suggested achieved fertility lagged well behind what women anticipated in early adulthood, a finding also observed for other developed countries (Quesnel-Vallée and Morgan 2003; Testa and Toulemon 2006; Liefbroer 2009; Morgan and Rackin 2010; Iacovou and Patricio Tavares 2011). AFFD informants being also NLCS respondents, an opportunity existed to inquire of those who'd been asked in their late teens or early 20s 'How many children do you think you will have in the future?' how they might have reacted to that question, and how they would now respond to it.

Reminded she'd nominated two as her expected family size aged 22, Paula, now 29, laughing, responded 'Did I? Right! ... I probably just gave a standard answer.' She wouldn't have thought about the issue in depth, but 'probably [knew] that I would like to eventually have children.' Her current thought was 'two, three', the third hinging on her and fiancé Simon's ability to provide the lifestyle they wanted to give children. Likewise Teresa, 27, told she'd wanted three children at her first NLCS interview (aged 21) then one at her second (aged 25), also laughed. 'I don't know where the three would have come from. ... I think I was just plucking a number out of the air.' As for the drop to one child: 'I probably would've just started working and realized how expensive everything is.' And now? 'Two, yeah. Depending. I guess someone else would have a say in that as well. ... Yeah two, or three. I'm gonna say three again. ... Oh my God, not three!' Krystal, 26, asked about a drop from three to two in her expected number of children between NLCS waves 1 and 2 wasn't conscious

of it—‘at 19 you don’t have much clue. I hadn’t been in a serious relationship. ... [I]t’s a guesstimation. Not much thought involved.’ Her current expected family size was ‘Probably two. ... If I had two boys I’d probably try for three, so I could have a girl.’ Gail, a recently married doctor, had pared the three children she’d expected at NLCS wave 1 (aged 24) back to two. Life had unfolded more slowly than she’d imagined. ‘I’m nearly 32. ... Ideally I’d have thought I’d have had kids at 27 or 28. Now time is ticking away ... I’m probably more realistic because of that.’

So younger women, asked their expected family sizes out of the blue over the phone often, it would seem, blurted out hurried answers with little thought. Even now, years later, they could still be very uncertain how many children they’d have. A further pointer to early disengagement with family size was indications that, far from overstating their ultimate fertility, quite a few younger women professed desires to remain childless. Julia, a 26 year-old accountant, asserted that ‘all my friends don’t want to have children ... they’re happy living with their parents’, while Liz, 39, claimed that among co-workers in the hospitality industry, ‘none of the girls want children.’ Joni, 33, a kindergarten director, however, commented that ‘a lot of my friends used to say, “Oh, I’m never having kids” when they were 18, 19. ... they’ve all got kids now.’ So not infrequently these declarations may reflect a determination to avoid *early* parenthood. Marketing manager Roberta, 29, married for a year and anticipating a family in five, was a case in point. She’d been stridently childless in her late teens and early 20s as part of a ‘drive for independence’, and because she’d found a boyfriend’s talk of marriage and children ‘very uncomfortable’.

He wasn’t putting any pressure on, but he was talking about it. And I wasn’t ready to talk about it *at all*, because I was, like, 21, 22, and there was *no way in hell* that I was going anywhere near those topics at that time.

Louise, 42, also indicated that, had she been asked how many children she’d have in her early 20s, ‘It would’ve been none.’ At that age other responses were ‘Wishful thinking ... or insanity’, not goals. Gloria, 41, mother of two: ‘When I was 20 I was never having kids. ... I didn’t want to ... be a man’s slave.’ Grace, 39, also a mother of two: ‘Everyone when they’re young, unless they’re very maternal, says they’re not having kids.’ Carol, 37, put her early 20s family size aspiration this way: ‘I knew it was ... more than one ... and no more than five.’ It was a ‘hypothetical’ question at that time of life. Researchers who assume modern young women in their late teens and early twenties widely have any clear idea how many children they will have are disengaged from reality. Many, when the issue is raised in a survey, simply haven’t yet given the matter serious thought.

## ***The Process***

Reality for a lot of women (and men) is that arriving at ultimate family size is not a product of pursuing a pre-determined target (Evans et al. 2009). It is a fluid process that depends on meeting an appropriate partner, life-stage when this occurs, the fact that one usually negotiates family formation with that partner, how the two

of you respond to the experience of conception, pregnancy, birth and parenthood, adjusting to any medical issues that arise, and dealing with circumstances within relationships that often see decisions about children made sequentially. The process may, of course, be further complicated by relationship breakdown and repartnering.

Several AFFD informants hadn't yet met appropriate partners. Linda, a nurse, had expected three children at NLCS waves 1, aged 28, and 2, aged 33. Was three still the target? 'Oh, who knows? I'm getting older though. Dunno. Depends. ... Just gotta find the right man. ... I'm 35 and still haven't found anyone.' Her prospects were dimming. Megan, 27, also wanted three children at both NLCS interviews, but being in her own estimation physically unattractive was having difficulty finding a partner, so now just hoped to be 'lucky enough to have one'. Males, too, were in this situation. Teacher Roger, 32, had no recollection of expecting no children at NLCS wave 1 then three at wave 2, and now wanted two. But immersed in his career he'd never had a relationship, and wasn't optimistic of establishing one. 'I've been living by myself for quite some time, and getting used to it I suppose.' Retailer Anton, 38, was 'not in a hurry to rush into' a relationship, but 'I still want to get married and have kids.' A non-drinker, he found socializing difficult.

Other informants had had smaller families than they might have because finding a partner had taken time. Still others were similarly placed after planning to remain childless, then changing their minds. Greg had had a childless failed marriage and two other relationships before marrying Tracey, also divorced and childless. They now had two children, but 'I think we'd have had more if we'd met ... younger.' Similarly Janine, remarried at 34 after a brief childless marriage in her early 20s: 'I was going to have four children ... then I got too old ... and settled for two.' Janice, 39, mother of two in a long-term cohabiting union after childless marriages for both parties—'for him two is plenty, for me it's inadequate. ... [At one time] I thought I'd really like another child ... what stopped me was that Evan ... was approaching 50.' And Fred, 40, and Carla, 38, expecting their second child, were unlikely to have the third Fred had anticipated at NLCS wave 1. Carla: 'I don't think we can afford it. ... [A]lso the age factor has something to do with it.'

The scenario of avowedly childless couples reconsidering is, of course, in one sense the antithesis of those whose achieved fertility falls below earlier expectation, but such couples do constrain their family size options. Their changes of heart occur as attractions of a childless lifestyle wear thin, biological clocks are activated, and peer experiences expose them to the joys of parenthood. Grace and Chad had for 10 years sworn off children.

We were having a really good time and partying. ... As you get older you realize you are mortal .... A friend of mine had a baby .... We both watched this kid grow up. ... She was beautiful. We saw how much enjoyment they got ... out of her .... We thought, "We want one of them, and maybe ... two." ... [I]f we'd started earlier, I probably would've had four. ... We ran out of time.

Tyler and April had spent 17 childless years together, addicted to sailing and ocean racing. Their conversion had been precipitated by the movie *Forrest Gump*. Tyler: 'that silly movie ... had a message in it. You can have everything ... but you don't really have anything until you have children.' They'd had two. Oscar, 38, and



Barbara, 36, had just had IVF twins, but had originally not wanted children, he for lifestyle reasons and she after witnessing peers' experiences.

And then ... as time went on we said, "Oh, maybe we will" and [then] "Yes, we think we will." And then it became, "Yes, OK, we definitely will, and we better do something about it." ... [Y]ou get older and your motivations change. ... Barbara went from being a school teacher saying, "God no ... I have to put up with kids at school" to "Yeah, maybe, one day" to "Yes, definitely, I think I'd like to have a child." And I'm going, "Well, we're not getting any younger. If we're going to do this, we're going to have to do it right now." ... We'd been to Europe twice .... This is the third house we've renovated ... it was like, "Well what's next on the evolutionary process? I suppose it's children." ... [I]t just seemed the natural flow of things. ... I didn't want to give up the lifestyle. But everything gets stale. ... It's time to do something different.

Many couples had embarked on family formation with different family size ideals, necessitating negotiation. Norman, 32, and Heidi, 34, had just had their first child. 'I always said four. ... [She wants] two. ... I don't want a middle child. ... [M]inimum of two, and negotiations after that.' Kim, 37, had had three children—'Jeremy didn't want three. ... [After the second] I bribed him [to have the third quickly, by] saying "Two later. ... I'll have two then, because ... there's gonna be a big gap."' Jeremy capitulated. Bruce, 36, wanted six children, but Annette wasn't keen—'we came to a compromise. ... we had four kids'. Academic Frances would 'like to have two', but Preston was a one-at-a-time man. "Let's have the first and see how we go" he'd said, and was now 'not keen for a second'. Cecilia, 25, wanted 'about two, three. Not just one, but not heaps.' Quentin, however, having agreed to have children had changed his mind. Cecilia had some convincing to do. 'I do want children. [But I don't want to] have them and have their father resent them.' Amanda, 36, had always wanted four children, but Alan blamed having three siblings for his having struggled through university unsupported. He was firm on two—'he doesn't want [our children] to have to struggle the way he did. ... [E]ventually I changed my mind.'

Newman (2008) has examined for a South Australian sample how experiences of conception, pregnancy, birth and early parenthood modify family size ideals. She concludes (p. 22) that:

the physical and emotional experiences of the individual and/or couple in the Baby Stage of parenthood play a significant role [in determining family size] which has hitherto remained relatively overlooked in demographic research. ... [P]arenthood experiences can be as influential on fertility as issues of work-family compatibility, the desire to return to work, and the financial costs of raising children.

In several AFFD cases the reality of parenthood had led to a downward revision of expected/desired family size, although this was not a universal response to stressful early experiences having and raising children. Joanne found breastfeeding 'really horrible' and had weaned both her children at 3 months. Her 'I don't like [young] babies' attitude had been a factor in her family size target falling from six to two, although she primarily attributed it to recognizing the commitment needed to give her children developmental opportunities. John noted that the impact of his and Martine's first child on 'your free time and your independence'



and its creation of 'a dependency between the two of you' had delayed their second and extinguished all thought of a third. Ivan's wife Gretel had originally wanted 'four to five' to his 'two to three', but had 'changed her mind after the first one. ... too much hard work ... we both have careers.' They'd waited 7 years to have number two and were still prevaricating over a third. Brenda, 39, observed that 'we were going to have five.' But after one of each sex Eli had said "let's [just] have a third", to which she'd replied "we've got two healthy children. What would you want number three for?" Brenda disliked the early baby stage, 'when you want to pull the arsenic out because this kid screams from 5 to 9 o'clock.' Preston was resisting Frances's desire for a second child.

[Our son's] an absolute handful. ... [W]e finally get him to bed. He's clean, he's dry, he's fed, he goes to sleep. Hooray, we collapse on the couch. And Preston looks at me and says, "OK, imagine now we have a one month-old baby that needs to be breastfed every three hours and is screaming constantly and needs a nappy changed every couple of hours." And I go, "Yeah, good point."

Sarah and Denis were similarly uncertain about having the planned sibling for their 2 year-old. For Sarah:

[S]taying home was a big shock. ... I had her in April. By December I was starting to go a little bit cab[in] fever ... breastfeeding ... chained me to her ... I couldn't not be with her for any time. ... I found that difficult. ... It's [also] probably put a lot more strain [on our relationship].

Other informants had revised their family sizes down on the basis of later rather than early experiences as parents. As already noted, Stella and Guy wanted 3–4 children before they married, but with their daughter now six were 'battling about having a second' because of the financial implications. Andrea's plan had been two soon after marriage and two more in her later 30s. Her first pregnancy and birth had been 'pretty easy' and early parenthood 'better than I expected', but she'd waited 3 years to have her second ('I didn't wanna have two quickly'), and 'after [that] I didn't want any more. ... Money, juggling, everything.' She had one of each sex. Lyn, 38, had grown up wanting 'Four boys'. She'd had two, 7 years apart by different fathers, but after struggling to raise them alone had resisted a third partner's plea to have his child. 'I couldn't take the risk [of being deserted again]. ... Forget it. ... I'm kidded out!'

There were, of course, other couples whose preferred family sizes had been exceeded through "fertility overshoots" (Newman 2008:5). Derek: 'We thought two, but we wouldn't be without three. Three was a little surprise, but he's just magic.' Donald, 41 year-old leading hand, and Abigail had 'wanted two or three, but the [fourth] one sort of came along', prompting a vasectomy. Jane, 36, 'was never going to give [my kids] five brothers and sisters [like I had]. ... [Ideally] I wouldn't have had as many.' Her third of three had been unplanned. Michelle, 31, and Darren, after having 'our pigeon pair' 'sold everything'. 'Then, as nothing permanent was done, we sort of, um, had a blessing.' Irish Catholics Lilian and Liam had planned only the third of four children, the fourth, especially, 'a huge shock ... emotionally, financially, everything. ... [B]y the time you divide yourself up between everyone, there just isn't enough of you.'

For still other informants medical issues had prevented realization of desired family sizes. Country girl Aisha had wanted five children, but after having one at 20 after 'taking off' with a boyfriend then two more in her mid-30s, 'a bad back' had ruled out further pregnancies. 'The original target' of Hazel and Lionel 'was six'. But after the first, infertility had intervened. Maureen and Ryan would have had 'at least two, maybe the third', but owed their only son to IVF. For Jake, 34, and Brie, 'two probably would've pulled us up.' But again, infertility had left their son an only child. Natasha's plan to have a third 5 years after her first two had been scrapped following postnatal depression. 'I just got too loopy.' Other medical issues concerned children. Georgia, 40, 'was always gonna have three', but had stopped at two after both were diagnosed with renal reflux and she was told a third child would likely have it too. And Laura, 36, 'was happy to have four', but her second suffering major disability related to birth trauma 'soon changed that.'

Other descriptions of family formation experiences or plans told of a decidedly fluid process, with ultimate family size the cumulative product of a sequence of decisions. Duncan had expected three children at both NLCS interviews, but now said the two he and Susan had was it—'we're committed to substantial renovations. ... it's difficult to unlink children and financial commitments.' Jason and Mia had initially thought two, maybe three children, but now had four. After two they'd 'talked about [Mia's desire for a third] a lot.' Based on 'the delight of the first two' they'd decided to proceed, and Jason had then been 'hoodwinked a bit' by Mia arguing 'you've gotta have two pairs'. For Andrew, 44, and Eliza, having their second son had been 'pretty straightforward' once the first requested 'someone to talk to'. However:

We didn't know whether to have the third or not. ... [W]e got to the decision that we should have a third child. And then we had to work through whether it was we just wanted a girl, or a third child. And that took a couple of years to work through, and we finally decided we just want another child, boy or girl.

All three fertility decisions had been highly explicit, economic issues to the fore. '[It] sometimes got a bit clinical looking at the bank balance, and how long it would take to pay off the house, how much children cost and where they'd go to school.' Katrina, 36, and Gavin had four children. Two had been automatic. The third hadn't been planned, but once it came, 6 years later, 'she planned to have a fourth' to avoid the third being (Katrina) 'just sort of like an only child.' Lydia and Julian had initially 'decided we would only have one because [we had] a two-bedroom house.' Then, 'one of the girls at work had a baby. We both looked at each other that night and said, "Yeah, let's have another one."'

Several couples yet to start families were also planning incremental approaches. Joe, 39, was keen to have children with Phoebe, 32. Asked how many he replied, 'The proper answer is two ... but I want a boy, and if I had two girls ... we could afford three. It's whether ... we found [parenthood] fun.' Jenna, 33, and Seb had married only 4 months ago after 12 years cohabiting—'Let me get through one first, but maybe two.' Clive, a 25 year-old furniture assembler, had lived with Kristin for 6 years. Marriage was 'an unaffordable luxury' and he'd only warmed to children after interacting with those of mates. But he'd have them 'one at a time'—see how he got on with a first, then consider a second, which

would be his limit. Kitty, 34, and Damian were expecting their first, and if all went well ‘we definitely want to have another.’ The decision on a third would come later, after she evaluated ‘how I’m going to manage’.

The process by which family size is determined is clearly complex and littered with obstacles. It is little wonder that fertility expectations expressed in early adulthood, often with limited thought when answering a survey the respondent is probably keen to be done with, are in aggregate, and also frequently individually, poor predictors of later life experience.

## The First Child

For a significant proportion of AFFD informants the first birth was not the result of a clear decision to have a child now—it had been unplanned. Unplanned first conceptions were most common among those who had become mothers younger. Using Rijken and Knijn’s (2009) age groups, almost two-fifths of the 26 first births to mothers aged 25 or younger and a fifth of the 34 to women aged 26–32 were in this category, but only two of 17 to mothers aged 33 or older (and one of those was to a woman who’d thought she was infertile). For some the experience had been confronting.

Alice, 38, mother of four, had had her elder daughter at 15.

There’s no way ... a 14 or 15 year-old can make that decision to become pregnant .... At the time it was exciting, [but I regret missing out on] ... [t]he development of my own personality ... [f]inding out about [my]self. ... [A]t 15 ... I wasn’t thinking about [becoming a mother]. ... [I assumed that was] years down the track.

Jeffrey’s wife Maria had been 25 when their first was born.

[It] just came along. ... I was a bit shocked ... it was the difference between something that’s gonna happen ... down the track and something that’s happening in seven months. ... [I]t [was] sort of like the death of a close friend ... life’s just going along at its normal pace, and then, bang, this massive change occurs. ... [I]f you planned things you’d buy a house and get the mortgage paid off a bit and ... have some dollars in the piggy bank [against loss of the second income for a time, but] ... it just didn’t happen that way. ... We hadn’t talked about it and made a decision ... next thing you know the line turns blue and you think, “Oh shit”.

Doug and Penny had been travelling around Australia when their elder daughter was conceived. ‘[N]o, it wasn’t expected. ... [L]ots of trepidation. ... I just had nothing.’ Maurice and Samantha, married for 6 years, had ironically just moved interstate to escape family pressure to have a child.

And then all of a sudden, I think both of us being relaxed and laid back on the beach ... this little thing (now 10 weeks old) was conceived. ... [W]e went from ... party time to, “Oh my God, my wife’s pregnant, and we now have to ... [g]et ourselves organized for the arrival of a child.” And that sort of turned our whole lives around. We went from ... we did like a drink at a party ... to, “Crikey, we’ve gotta start getting our affairs in order—getting rid of our debt”, that sort of thing. ... We tried to put [parenthood] off until we paid our [credit card and other] bills off. But with Sam pregnant it was irrelevant. ...

You just deal with it as it happens, and I mean, you survive. ... [H]e's come along and our lives have just turned upside down, completely.

At the other end of the spectrum were those who hadn't planned pregnancy, but were in 'if it happens it happens' mode. Melissa had had her first child at 23, and asked if it was planned, husband Nick answered: 'Oh, sort of, but it wasn't. Kind of planned, but it wasn't planned. ... [W]e were going to have kids, but she ended up getting pregnant earlier than expected.' Likewise, Sally had become a mother at 20.

I fell pregnant [shortly] after I was engaged. ... So I was seven months pregnant when I got married. ... [We were] over the moon ... it wasn't planned, but it was. Because if it happened, it happened. It didn't matter.

In between were others who were a bit more blasé about their experience. Martin's wife Hannah had had their first at 32.

[It] was sort of unplanned really. ... [W]hen you're sort of going with the flow and everything seems to be going well. ... [J]ust one of those surprises ... hadn't thought about having a child. ... I think it was a change of contraceptive pill brand.

Abigail had been 18 when conceiving the first of her four children. Donald: 'It was an accident. ... It just brought things forward. We always planned on getting married.' By how much had everything been advanced? 'I'd say a couple of years.'

Among those whose first children *had* been planned, a range of issues had dictated when the pregnancy occurred. A sizeable group had sought to become pregnant quite quickly after marrying or moving in together. Thus Stella, married at 22, commented:

There wasn't a second thought to it. I was ready to have a child. Yep, we're ready. Let's not worry how it's gonna affect anything else. ... [T]hat element of, it's the next step in your relationship ... you get married, you buy the house. Oh, gotta have a baby now, you know? ... [W]e didn't really talk much about it.

Lucy was 18 when she married Terry, and they'd decided 9 months later to start their family.

We'd talked about it ... [a]nd then just decided, oh hang it, let's just try ... and see what happens. ... [A]nd it happened [very quickly]. ... It was just do it, quick, quick, quick. Get out of home, get married, have babies. ... [I]t was never a question of whether or not. It was just a matter of when. And that kind of happened with not much thought.

Stella and Lucy were young when making their somewhat implicit decisions, but a common factor in rapid progressions to parenthood was couples being older when establishing their relationships, this giving rise to a perceived biological and/or social imperative to get on with having children. Grant and Virginia had met aged 38 and 33, and married a year later.

[O]nce we were married we thought, "Well, we're not gonna mess around too long. ... [Y]ou don't know how easy or difficult it's gonna be to conceive." ... [W]aited a couple of months after we came back from the honeymoon [then] said, "OK, let's start trying, see what happens." And it happened pretty quickly.

Janice had been 30 and Evan 42 when they began cohabiting. He'd been through IVF unsuccessfully with his ex-wife. '[W]e started talking about

having children ... after a couple of months [and] I thought, well, you'd better start if we're gonna do it.' No contraception was used, and eventually 'I just fell pregnant'. Janine, married to Brad at age 34:

I'd already thought ... I wouldn't have children. So we didn't waste any time starting our family. ... I was already pregnant when we married. We threw caution to the wind. ... [H]aving children was highly integral to our getting married.

In other cases rapid conception following marriage reflected decisions to formalize cohabiting unions having been decisions to become parents. Charles and Andrea, and Norman and Heidi were cases in point, and respectively really belonged to the second and third categories of decision-makers. Charles and Andrea had met skiing, then travelled, worked and lived together for over 3 years. Aged 30 and 29 they'd had their fun, and 'the time was right'. Andrea: 'We didn't wanna wait 5 years, then find it doesn't work.' Also in the 'time was right' category were John and Martine.

[W]e'd gone overseas a couple of times ... [gone] out a lot ... been there, done that ... felt the right time to move on to the next stage. ... [T]here were financial considerations ... [but] probably the lifestyle considerations were greater. ... Martine wanted kids. ... [S]he was in a job which ... wasn't a career for her. ... [I]t just got to the point where we'd done a few things ... didn't want to leave it too late.

Norman and Heidi had 'always said after we got married we'd like to fall pregnant fairly quickly', and had done so. But they'd first cohabited for 4 years and really belonged to the third category of decision-makers, another sizeable one in which issues of establishing a stable economic foundation, acquiring a home and stable employment, perhaps making progress paying off a mortgage, and in some cases completing educational qualifications had been prerequisites to starting a family. Not infrequently, too, this type of argument was advanced especially by the man, so a strong element of the woman having had to wait until he was 'ready' had been present (although not with Norman and Heidi).

We'd done the travelling, succeeded well in our careers. Financially we were settled. From a life position we were very settled. So yeah, now was the time to start talking about kids.

Amelia and Aaron had been married six years before having their first child.

[We were] in a [one-bedroom] flat for a few years. So [children were] out of the question then. ... [After we bought a house] Aaron was keen to ... try to get the mortgage paid so we [could] get another mortgage, to make [the house] bigger. ... [W]hen I got close to 30 I said, "Well, we better start sooner or later." ... [W]e sort of waited until he was ready. ... [Aaron's] big concern [was] being able to provide for us. Coz he always said he'd like it if I didn't have to work when we had kids.

For Turkish-Australian Rustu and his wife, 'Our main priority was to have our own house. ... We didn't want our [child] to grow up in ... housing commission places. ... [So] we waited 3 years.' In the case of engineer Jerry:

[E]conomically we had to be established. ... We wanted to have a house that ... we could afford to live [in] on one wage. ... Molly worked in the ... Bank ... and got an interest rate reduction. ... [O]nce she [qualified for] the reduction ... we started buying a home. ... [W]e paid off the \$10,000 deposit over two and a half years. So then we were back to just one loan. ... Molly was [then] ready to have a family.

Angela and academic Barney had become parents when she was 32.

We were married over 10 years before we had [our first]. ... I was ready to have a baby a little earlier. ... [B]ut Barney ... was still doing his post-doc [and] didn't want to commit to a family until he had a job he was happy with. ... [W]e didn't buy a house ... when we got married. [When eventually we did] we didn't buy an expensive place ... to be able to pay it off fairly quickly. Then we could have kids. We didn't want kids and a mortgage. ... [W]e'd more or less paid it off when we had [our first]. ... So we could afford ... not to have [one] income for a while.

A fourth category of informants, usually couples who'd married without cohabiting, had been intent on spending time as a couple before children intruded. Accountant Duncan had wanted to wait a year or so before starting a family with Susan. 'That's comfortable. Have a bit of fun. ... I thought it was a nice time [for us] to get to know each other further before we had to change lifestyle dramatically.' Similarly Jason, when he'd married Mia: '[W]e agreed we wanted to have a bit of time to ourselves before we started a family.' When music teacher Sarah married solicitor Denis they 'weren't really contemplating children, just sort of gonna get married, and that was that for a while.' Ann and Victor had married in their early 20s, intent on postponing parenthood for 5 years. 'We always said we wouldn't have children straight away. We wanted to still live our lives.' Joanne, married at 19, had similarly agreed with Blair to 'have 5 years together and then have kids'. And Sharon had insisted on childless time with Daniel after they reunited following their extended separation while he studied.

I wanted to recreate that time we'd had apart together, solidly. ... I was 33 and I thought, "Well, that's the way it is. It's gonna have to happen later, coz I want to have this time for us together." ... I knew it could be damaging to go straight into it. ... Dan didn't have a job. He was not prepared. ... And I was patient. ... [W]e waited until I was nearly 36 [to conceive]. ... [H]e got that job [and] I just said, "Right, that's it. Now we start." And he was happy with that.

Other forces that had impacted decisions to have first children were women's career considerations; the need to convince a reluctant husband to agree to start a family; and the time taken to discard earlier intentions to remain permanently childless. There was also a group of informants for whom difficulties conceiving, miscarriages or stillbirths had delayed first (live) births, if not the decisions to have them.

Issues around women's careers were chiefly a white collar concern raised by both informants who'd had children and some who anticipated doing so in future. Fred and Carla had married late, and he acknowledged having 'pushed a bit more' than her to have a child, 'because [her] career's gotta be on the back burner ... and it's not an easy decision to make. ... [T]here's resentments.' Norman likewise recognized he'd been keener than Heidi to start a family, 'purely because she could see that kids would slow her down.' Justine, a TV producer, loved her job:

It was never going to be a good time really [in a] career sense, but at a crossroads [between jobs] it seemed as good a time to do it as we'd get. ... Maybe do it now rather than get offered that job and then go, "Oh, sorry, but I'm pregnant."

Academic Frances was also 'passionate' about her career, and several relationships had imploded because of it. 'It's not a job, it's a vocation. ... I love my work ... I really do.' She'd finally married and had a child, but the birth wasn't planned and she was now wrestling with whether and when to give her son a sibling.

Advertising executive Joe, 39, was anxious to have a family with partner Phoebe, 32, but conceded that the decision would be

more driven by Phoebe than me, and her ability to feel strongly confident that she has established herself in her current [career] role. ... I would've liked to have had them a little while ago, but we probably weren't ready. ... Women always play the lead role. ... Men can want, but women actually make the decision. We can lead ... ask ... cajole ... bribe. ... But it isn't our decision.

Elle, 29, a finance manager engaged to partner Vince, gave a young woman's perspective. '[C]hildren will come eventually. ... [F]rom my point of view [the issues are] the work type of issues. ... [Y]ou have to find a balance between career and a family.' Likewise Rebecca, 26:

[M]y girlfriends ... don't even think about families. They still want to go out, have fun, build their career, work hard, party hard, that type of thing. ... I don't envisage having children until I've completely established myself in a career where I'd be so valued that they'd be begging me to come back.

It was noted above that male resistance to starting families was often embedded in arguments about the need to first establish a firm economic foundation. The case of Angela and Barney was recounted. She, too, had wanted to delay their first child, but eventually had said, "Well, you know, I'm ready", only for Barney to allegedly reply, "Oh, need to wait a bit longer. ... [W]e'll wait 'til we've paid off the mortgage." Reluctant fathers were frequently painted (or painted themselves) as 'not ready' for the role, often for lifestyle reasons. Isobel had been 'desperate to have children', but 'like the marriage decision I think the baby decision for him was, like, "I don't want to be pushed into it".' She'd waited 4 years for Tony to come round. Karen and Brian had argued over his 'idea that he would like to have the house paid off before we had children', which she considered 'ridiculous', and when finally, 'out of the middle of nowhere', he'd announced "I'm ready", she'd 'freaked out ... my God ... it might actually happen.' Retail manager Trevor, through 13 years of courtship then marriage, hadn't been keen on children compromising his freedom. But his wife's patience had ultimately been rewarded.

I was never really ready to form a family. Probably if it was up to me, we'd still be childless. ... And if we hadn't had children ... it wouldn't have bothered me. ... [But] the time sort of came that it was logical, given my wife's age, that if we were going to have a family ... we'd have to start. ... She was very keen. And I thought, "Well, OK, now's as good a time as any."

James, 30, married to Kerrie, 30, for the last year of an 11-year relationship was similar to Trevor, but yet to relinquish his childless lifestyle. 'Children are like a handbrake on fun basically. ... I can't see myself ever *wanting* to have kids.' Kerrie was conscious of her biological clock, but had a successful nursing career and also enjoyed their 'cruisy' lifestyle. She thought a child would happen, but time would tell.



The belated conversions of Grace and Chad, April and Tyler, and Barbara and Oscar from determinedly childless to doting parents were described earlier. Cases where impaired fertility had delayed a first child have also been noted in passing (e.g., Maureen and Ryan). Ann and Victor, after delaying a first child for 5 years had had a stillbirth, then waited five further years for a successful IVF pregnancy. Louise had been 'told I would never have children', and 'actually gave Isaac the option to get out of the marriage.' She'd eventually had two, but had waited 7 years for the first. Public servants Richard, 45, and Jemma, 37, knew he had a low sperm count from his previous marriage, but had taken time to seek the IVF treatment that had ultimately yielded their 6 month-old son.

I was 32 [when we married], and there'd been no sign of me getting pregnant [through five years of non-contracepting cohabitation]. ... [A] work colleague ... [who'd] already been on IVF ... said, "Well, don't dilly-dally. Your biological clock's ticking and it could take a long time." ... I'd been in denial ... too hard basket. ... I'm not ready to get serious yet. ... [I]t took at least a year of trying ... before I actually ... started feeling ... an urgency, and a need, and a desire. ... [F]rom when we started seriously trying to have children it probably took over three years before I conceived. ... [F]or probably half that time my heart wasn't fully in it .... I didn't want to get desperate. ... And I did get desperate. ... [I]t became really a crisis. ... [W]e withdrew from each other.

So, decision-making processes leading to first births were varied. For a good few informants, mostly younger at conception, there was no process, explicit or implicit, as far as timing was concerned. The pregnancy had been unplanned, variously creating consternation or being embraced with little fuss and even joy. The two largest groups who'd planned the first pregnancy were those intent on starting their families quickly after marrying or moving in together, and those who'd delayed starting to establish what they, and especially prospective fathers, deemed suitable foundations. The former group spanned a wide age range, but older couples exhibiting very explicit decision-making were prominent within it, time to realize parental aspirations being perceived to be short. Male resistance to starting families was not only embedded in concerns about acquiring houses, reducing mortgages, pursuing careers and finishing education. There was also appreciable emphasis on needing to feel 'ready' for parenthood, on a related reluctance to embrace lifestyle change, and sometimes on self-doubt over parenting ability. Jared, for example, according to Sophie, had long been 'scared' of fatherhood, fearful he'd be as inept as his own father, and only now, after 7 years married, did she think she had finally convinced him otherwise.

Several couples, who generally hadn't cohabited premaritally, had prioritized spending time as a couple before having children. A need to respect implications of parenthood for the prospective mother's career also weighed heavily for some, while others' decisions had been delayed by intentions to remain childless, until boredom with that lifestyle, biological clocks and/or observing peer enjoyment of parenthood had swept them away. The final group identified was those whose decisions may not have been delayed, but whose implementation of them certainly had been, by fertility impairment, miscarriage and/or stillbirth.

## The 'Obligatory' Second Child

Of 77 AFFD informant individuals/couples who had had a first child, all but 12 had also had a second, and only Bernie and Naomi had deliberately ceased child-bearing at parity one (Naomi: "I'm not having any more kids, full stop."). Three had stopped due to fertility impairment; five had only just become parents and wanted a second; and three were undecided about stopping. Thus, for those who'd had a first child, a second was well-nigh automatic, as implied by Newman's (2008) finding that second children were rarely deemed fertility 'overshoots'. While negative first conception, pregnancy, birth and early parenthood experiences had sometimes led to downward revisions of desired family size, these had usually entailed truncation beyond the second child.

Having an only child by choice was widely frowned on. Fred, for example, commented, 'I think we both, when having our first ... immediately thought, "Oh, we've gotta have another one as well."' Likewise Will: 'It's not fair on the other child just to have one'; Liz: 'We thought one's a bit lonely'; James: 'You've gotta have at least two.' There was almost a sense of obligation to provide the first child with a sibling and playmate.

This sense of obligation, coupled with a view that children were more likely to be good playmates if similar in age and frequently also with a feeling that it made sense to 'get on with it' while 'on a roll' and 'in baby mode', meant that most second birth decisions had been highly implicit and most second birth intervals quite short. Among 65 progressions to parity two, seven had occurred after intervals longer than 6 years; three because of transitions between relationships, two because of impaired fertility, one through choosing to prioritize careers following an unplanned first birth, and one because the impact of an early first birth on social life had been confronting (Judy: '[T]he first one cramped our style ... we were still young. Our friends were still going out a lot, so we felt we were missing out.'). If two zero birth intervals attributable to first pregnancies yielding twins are also ignored, the remaining 56 progressions to parity two averaged 27.5 months (median 27 months), and only four exceeded 36 months. The norm after a first birth was to have had a second, well within 3 years.

The following quotes illustrate most informants' approach to having second children. Janine: 'we're on a roll, I'm still in baby mode ... so we'll have two, then see what we think after that.' Lucy: 'we'd got the ball rolling. May as well keep going.' Amanda: 'I was desperate to have another baby ... I didn't want ... an only child.' Amelia: 'I knew I wanted another baby [and] thought, "Do it now". ... [I]t would be awful just to have one child, because they wouldn't have a playmate.' Gavin: 'Katrina ... was concerned if she waited too long ... it'd be a real shock again. ... [D]o it while you can still cope with it.' Jane: 'If we're gonna do it, go and do it. Why prolong it?'

A 2–3 year second birth interval, or having the first two 'close together', was widely considered ideal. Fred: 'we thought between 2 and 3 years would be ideal.' Jenny: 'I had it in my mind that 2 years is the optimum interval before allowing a child to ... think [it's] the centre of the universe.' Bill: 'We made the

decision to have two children close together ... so that they would be close to each other.' Martin: '[T]he oldest two are less than 2 years apart. So they would play together.' Norman (first child newly born): 'I'd like maybe a year and a half, 2 year gap. ... I'd like our kids to be friends, and able to ... play with one another.'

Some were, however, wary of having the second child *too* close to the first. Samantha felt a need to shore up the family's economic situation before she and Maurice had their second. Their 10 week-old had been unplanned.

I need to work for 12 months really to get back on our feet. And then the next nine months we'll see how we go. ... [B]ecause I'm turning 32 soon, I feel I need to do it fairly quickly. ... I'd have [another] one tomorrow .... But I don't wanna be in [our present] financial situation.

Carol had had a 4-year second birth interval. '[I]t wasn't conscious .... We sort of settled into the house ... [acquired] what we wanted for the house first.' For Kim, a 3 year gap was ideal. 'I thought 3 years was a fair time for one child to have [its] parents to [itself]. ... [A]ny younger they seemed jealous.' Andrea 'knew I didn't wanna have two quickly. ... I wanted to be able to enjoy one for a while'; a 3 year gap had been 'comfortable'. Gordon's wife Sonia 'always said that she wanted [our son] to ... be toilet trained, and up and running' before having a second. Informants with these 'close, but not too close' spacing ideals typically seemed focused on a second birth interval around 3 years.

There was, though, a small group of informants for whom progression to parity two had proved, or was proving, troublesome, and whose decision-making was far more explicit. The economic dilemma that had so far prevented Stella and Guy giving their 6 year-old a sibling has been recounted. They'd set a material standard they couldn't see themselves maintaining, and Stella's lack of paid maternity leave was also a problem. Frances, a 35 year-old academic, first child unplanned, had several balls in the air.

I'm quite keen to have a second child, mainly because I want [our son] to have a sibling. ... [But my husband's] not keen ... [and] I certainly don't know how I'd fit it in with my career .... In terms of [my husband's] age (40) it would be preferable to have it sooner ... rather than later. ... [But] in terms of my career progression ... it would be better to leave it a few more years. ... I can't even get childcare at the moment one day a week. ... I feel if I go back to work for two, three or four years, then I'll actually have achieved things in my career [and] can take another bit of time out. ... I don't believe there are economies of scale in having children. ... [A]nother kid's pretty much double the work of the first one. So I think there are a number of elements to this decision ... you can think about it cognitively and make a rational decision. But to some extent it's an emotional decision ... I get a feeling deep inside me that I just want another baby. ... [And my husband's said,] "Look, ultimately it's your decision."

Ivan and Gretel had taken 7 years to have a second child after their first was born, unplanned, before they'd married.

[W]e talked about it a lot, and kept on putting it off, maybe next year .... Gretel had just gone ... back into her career, and we knew that ... her career gets put on hold again. ... [Eventually] we both decided ... we needed to do it. ... We were getting conscious of the age gap [and] didn't want [our first] to be an only child.

Music teacher Sarah and solicitor Denis, their daughter aged two, were also grappling with progression to parity two, with multiple issues in play.

People keep asking us that question, and we looked at each other at a dinner party the other night and I said, "Are we going to have another one?" And Denis said, "Mm, I don't think so." But I think that might've been in jest. ... I think we might have another child. ... [I]f we do we should do it soon, before I get ... too close to 40. So I suppose I'm thinking, "Will we or won't we?" ... It's more that I've gone back teaching two days a week, and just doing a bit of casual work on weekends, and it's OK to juggle with one. ... [W]ith two it's gonna be really hard. ... You're up for double childcare. ... [A]ll those school holidays I'm not working, but still paying childcare. ... I think we probably will, it's just a matter of ... whether I actually get back to any sort of continuous work. I've found I really did need the break away from [daughter]. ... When you haven't got extended family [to help] I think the pressures are a bit greater. ... [T]here's always that stigma around the only child, and ... I think it would be nice if [daughter] could have a brother or sister. ... It's just how expensive, well, there's a lot of things involved. ... [I]t's a bit uncertain. ... I think perhaps having another baby might limit what I can do long term. It just takes you out of the scene and people stop ringing because they know you're otherwise occupied. ... [W]ill my measly income cover two children at childcare? ... As difficult as it may seem, I think the joys of being a parent definitely outweigh the [difficulties]. ... [Y]ou can't help feeling a little bit "just wouldn't mind another go at it".

Sharon, despite being 36 when her first was born, had delayed her second for almost 4 years.

I felt I wouldn't be dictated by my age and have them two years apart. I remember thinking I couldn't bear the thought of another child. I just enjoyed having one so much. ... I certainly wasn't ready to try [again] at two years [or] even three years. ... I didn't feel ready to push this one off. ... If you're only gonna have two and you have them close together, I think it's very hard to remember the details later ... it really does become a blur. ... I just wasn't ready.

## The Discretionary Third Child

If second children were more or less obligatory, thirds were decidedly discretionary. Nationally, they have become more so over time, although not to the same extent as in 'very low' fertility countries. The proportion of women having three or more children is what has stopped Australia falling into this bracket (McDonald 1998), Kippen et al. (2005) noting that while 36 % of Australian women born in 1960 reached parity three, just 16 % of the equivalent Italian cohort did. Nevertheless, 2006 census data show Australian progression to parity three falling from 64.8 % for women aged 65–69 to 46.0 % for those aged 40–44. In the AFFD data, whereas of 77 informant individuals/couples who'd had a first child only one had then voluntarily ceased childbearing (three more still might), of 65 who'd had a second child 35 considered their families now complete. Only 26 had progressed to parity three; one more intended doing so and three were undecided. Discounting four of the 26 parity three cases because the second or third birth interval was abnormally long due to repartnering, or zero due to multiple births, across the other 22, (i) third birth intervals averaged 41 months compared to 28 months for

second birth intervals, (ii) 17 third birth intervals exceeded preceding second birth intervals, and (iii) five third birth intervals (only one second birth interval) exceeded 5 years. The discretionary nature of third children was thus reflected not only in their being less common, but in longer periods having elapsed before couples had them. It was further reflected in the comment of Annette, mother of four, that ‘family’ tickets to sporting etc. attractions assumed two children—‘anything “family” they stipulate is two [adults] and two [children] ... fine ... but don’t call it a “family”, because that’s *not my family*.’

Compared to decisions to have second children, with the imperative of avoiding ‘only child’ status removed, decisions whether or not to have third children had been, or would be, subject to greater reflection, discretion and scrutiny—more explicit. Xavier and Joni, for example, had just had their second child, and while Joni was ‘still pretty keen to have three’ as anticipated at both NLCS interviews, a final decision would be deferred until their newborn was a year old.

I don’t want to have another one if it’s too draining, physically, financially or mentally, or we aren’t getting any time together. We’ve got two healthy, happy children, and we don’t want to keep going if it doesn’t feel right.

In another Australian study focused on decisions about third children only, Evans et al. (2009) placed reasons for not having them under three headings: feeling that age or health considerations made it imprudent to continue; concern over strain on family finances; and concern over parenting capacity. Reasons for *having* third children were (p. 447) ‘often poorly articulated’, but again three broad headings were identified: the gender effect (seeking the missing sex); valuing the family and sibling relationships larger families offer; and ‘the urge’, an intense desire for another child.

AFFD data broadly agree with Evans et al. on reasons for not progressing beyond two children. Economic considerations were often important, and social-psychological factors arising out of initial parental experiences also shaped how some felt about ‘doing it again’. The workload with larger families and the level of support available from fathers and extended family were sometimes factored in as well, and having left it relatively late to commence childbearing was also an important reason for some couples stopping at two children. On the reasons *for* having a third child, seeking gender diversity was less often acknowledged as a driving force than anticipated, while it was clear that considerable *indecision*, hence reluctance to close off the option of a third child through sterilization, had been in play. Inevitably this had seen accidental conception play a key role in some progressions to parity three, and in generating some of the longer third birth intervals observed. This indecision is perhaps consistent with the difficulty some couples have articulating reasons for having third children, and with the somewhat amorphous explanations others offer (Evans et al. 2009). AFFD interviews also offered insight into perceptions of others’ decisions to have third children, and of others’ reactions to own decisions to do so, revealing subtle social pressures against larger families from those subscribing to a two-child norm.

Many informants considered it financially unwise to have more than two children, and in existing children's best interests not to. Protracted loss of a second income together with mortgage and education costs, especially if private schooling was aspired to, were widely cited disincentives. Duncan and Susan had stopped at two after opting for substantial home renovations and anticipating private school fees. Duncan: '[I]t's a case of what we've got I'd rather spread around two than three.' Bill and Natasha had two children. 'You can't have too many kids because you just can't afford it.' Charles: 'Three were gonna be a financial drain. I'd rather do well for two than spread it over three.' Doug: 'Two's it. ... That's what we can afford.' Joanne, reflecting on deciding to stop at two instead of having six: '[I]t's so expensive ... [if] you ... want them to go to a private school.' Having two also made travel and sport more affordable and easier—'there's one each to look after'. Sally's Micah had had a vasectomy at 22. Parenting on an apprentice electrician's wage, supplemented by shared evening cleaning work with the children in tow, had been hard. 'We realized how expensive it was, and thought we'd like to send these two to a good school.' Frances, yet to convince Preston to have a second child, saw private education as essential, and thus a third child as out of the question.

[D]espite the fact, ideologically, I might be opposed to private education, [our son] is going to have the best chance of doing whatever he wants if he goes to a private school. Therefore ... we will need to afford private school fees for one child, two children, [but] certainly not three children.

Several examples of how negative early childbearing and rearing experiences had truncated or might truncate fertility were recounted earlier. The phenomenon typically kicked in beyond the second child. Sometimes, as with John and Martine, there was a definite, early decision to stop at two children. Grant and Virginia, by contrast, were playing it by ear. They planned a third child, but having just had their second, 'If [this one] wears us out we might just say "That's enough. That's all we can cope with."' A further scenario saw procrastination over third children resulting, over time, in mounting reluctance to return to 'baby mode', with its attendant (for mothers) workload, tiredness, lifestyle restriction and lack of stimulation. Susan, for example, since having her second child 5 years ago had built a thriving home-based business. A third now would mean 'going back [to the baby stage] just when you're starting to feel like your life's establishing some sort of order again.' Her business 'would have to go by the wayside for a while.' Likewise Karen, her youngest aged three:

[L]ife is pretty settled and easy now ... pretty much anything is possible. ... [W]e can go anywhere and pretty much do anything. And there's two of us and two of them. ... I've a feeling a third one might just [create] a bit of strain and stress. ... I'm pretty definite we won't have [another].

Justine had once been keen to have a third, but Marty had resisted, and with their two now of an age to be taken camping, 'to go back to [the baby stage]' was no longer attractive.

Issues of workload and lack of support were primarily concerns for women. Jenny was 'quite content with two. Enough hard work.' Sonia had resisted having a third. Gordon: 'She doesn't have the tolerance anymore.' Angela was currently

pregnant with her second child, but 'There's no way I'd have another .... It's just too tiring.' Louise: 'I sent Isaac off for the big snip. Coz two at 30-odd was more than enough.' Emma: 'I found [our second] really draining physically. ... [I realized] how hard it is to be a parent.' John ascribed his and Martine's decision to stop at two to an aversion to 'the sheer amount of work' parenting involved, and Ivan reported 'too much hard work', and it's interfering with Gretel's career, as the reason they'd taken 7 years to have a second child. Concerning support, Joanne had resisted Blair's pressure to have a third child partly because his job now involved regular overseas travel. 'I say, "No way". ... [I]f I had another child he's not going to be here the same way to help me.' And single mother Lyn, as previously reported, had baulked at having a third child by a third partner after being left to raise her first two alone. An interesting issue was raised by Greg, who with Tracey had just had a second child in their early 40s. He suggested grandparental support was less readily available when couples started families late. Grandparents were older, so more likely to be supporting one another. Healthy retiree grandparents, moreover, were 'off playing tennis and travelling', and unavailable for routine daily support.

As previously noted, however, Greg and Tracey's primary reason for not having a third child was their being older when they met. Janine likewise had pared a desire for four children back to two because she'd been 35 when finally becoming a mother; Janice had suppressed her desire for a third child because Evan was 12 years older; and AFFD couples who'd renounced childlessness typically had done so well into their thirties, leaving little time for more than two children. AFFD data yielded little overt concern over the elevated risk of birth defects among women choosing not to have third children because of their age, but this could have been an unarticulated underlying consideration in some cases. Evans et al. (2009) combine in one of their categories concern over the mother's health with concern over her and/or the father's age. These 'health' concerns, though, in reality seem largely subsumed under their 'parental capacity' category—concern over tiredness, lack of energy and physical coping ability.

Quite a body of research in low fertility countries has linked progression to parity three to the gender mix of the first two children (Freedman et al. 1960; McDougall et al. 1999; Hank and Kohler 2000; Pollard and Morgan 2002; Hank 2007), and the topic has received attention in Australia too (Young 1977; Gray and Evans 2005; Kippen et al. 2005, 2007; Gray et al. 2007). Typically progression has been greater where the first two children were one sex, and this has been interpreted as evidencing a preference for mixed-sex families. The Australian evidence is of a 25 % higher rate of progression where the first two children were one sex rather than mixed-sex (Kippen et al. 2005, 2007), and the tendency seems to have strengthened as fertility fell (Gray and Evans 2005). Progression to parity four also evidences a desire for mixed-sex families (Kippen et al. 2005, 2007), with the most likely to have progressed again being women whose earlier children were one sex. The least likely were those who'd had two of one sex then the opposite sex—i.e., those who'd achieved mixed-sex families at parity three.



Against this backdrop, surprisingly little emphasis was placed by AFFD informants on the gender composition of previous children in explaining third child decisions. This echoes Young (1977) from the 1971 Melbourne Family Survey. Despite clear evidence of higher progression to parities three and four when existing children were one sex, she observed (p. 93) that “relatively few women admit that the sex structure of [previous] children was the main factor in [their] decision”. It is, though, possible to have exaggerated expectations in this matter. If progression to parity three rises 25 % for women whose first two children are the same sex, arguably 80 % of those progressions would have occurred anyway, to match the progression rate where children were of different sex. Only the additional 20 %, a minority, might be significantly driven by gender composition.

There *were* AFFD informants for whom gender composition had played, or might play, a role in progression to parity three. Martin observed that ‘Hannah was keen on trying to have a girl ... I thought two was enough.’ Hannah had got her daughter at the third attempt, which was ‘very lucky, because she wanted to keep going until she got a girl.’ Amelia had wanted a third child regardless, but thought she’d have had trouble convincing Aaron had their first two been a boy and a girl—‘he probably would’ve wanted to stop.’ Ivan and Gretel were still prevaricating over a third child after two daughters, with desire for a son ‘a little bit’ of a factor. And as noted earlier, Krystal and Joe, both in currently childless relationships, saw thirds as possible if their first two didn’t include the daughter and son, respectively that they craved.

But others made it clear that gender mix had not been or would not be a major factor in decisions about third children, despite outsiders often assuming otherwise. Brenda described negative reactions to her and Eli’s decision to have their third. “What? You’re having another one? ... Why the hell would you do that? ... You’ve got one of each.” Graham and Jacinta had encountered similar reactions to having a third child after a boy and a girl—‘some people thought we lost the marbles. ... “You’ve got your boy and girl.”’ Annette and Bruce’s decision to have a third child after twin boys hadn’t been in quest of a daughter, but others had assumed otherwise ‘Constantly’, and when they’d had another son Annette had regularly encountered “Oh, another boy. You poor thing.” Kim likewise observed that when she and Jeremy had their third after two daughters ‘a lot of people thought we were trying for a son, but it had nothing to do with it’, and as noted earlier, Andrew and Eliza had agonized over whether to have a third child after two sons, to be sure they *weren’t* simply chasing a daughter. Liz probably spoke for many when explaining why she and Dave had resisted the temptation to have a third child in quest of a daughter: ‘I’d’ve liked a little girl, but that wouldn’t have been guaranteed.’ Odds of around fifty percent weren’t sufficiently attractive. Finally, both Will and Larissa, and Joni and Xavier, had recently had second sons, but neither couple mentioned desire for a daughter as a major factor in whether they’d ‘go again’. For Will the decision would be ‘Partly financial’, but more based on whether ‘we are ready for it’. Larissa and Joni were intent on evaluating their capacities to cope with another child.

There was, though, evidence that being fortunate enough to have two children of opposite sex made stopping at two easier, and could help fathers keen to limit their families resist having more children. Bill described he and Natasha as ‘lucky ... we got a girl and a boy’—it had removed all pressure to have a third child after she had severe postnatal depression. Duncan likewise noted that ‘one of each made me more comfortable ... stopping now’ for economic reasons. Tyler and April had never considered progressing beyond two: ‘We were lucky enough to have one of each sex.’ Thus, part of the relationship between gender composition and progression to parity three, and quite conceivably a large part, may be down to couples with ‘pigeon pairs’ opting out, as distinct from those with two of one sex opting in (they don’t opt in, so much as fail to opt out—there’s perhaps a reluctance to be seen to be openly relying on an outcome that has only a 50 % probability of actually eventuating).

Justine, after her second child, had gone through a period of wanting a third, but having had a son and a daughter Marty had put his foot down. ‘[He] made it very clear after number two ... “[T]hat’s it.”’ Clearly, though, many couples these days, and perhaps in particular many fathers, are fixed on having two children regardless of sex. Alan, as noted earlier, was determined to limit his and Amanda’s family to their two daughters, so he could provide them with a quality upbringing. Doug also had two daughters: ‘[Two’s] what we can afford. It’s about the state that your children [grow] up in.’ Privately educated Jason saw former schoolmates similarly focused on quality.

[A]ll have two children, and two only. And almost all have either two boys or two girls. So the temptation [to have a third] has got to be there. ... But they’ve resisted ... they didn’t want to compromise on being able to give their children the best they could. And maybe also ... to be able to give themselves the best they could.

He and Mia had deliberated long and hard before deciding *not* to follow this model. They’d recognized that progression to parity three was pivotal. ‘We talked about it a lot, about balance and the practicalities and the emotions.’ The ‘practicalities’ entailed ‘letting go of the ... desire for private education’, and accepting that they’d be unable to ‘provide the opportunities to [our] children that my parents did for me.’

Their decision made and implemented, Jason had concluded that, except in a church environment, it was ‘almost taboo to have more than two children. ... [I]t had so much overtones of being low class and plebian ... breeding ... I don’t think it had any respectability.’ He felt old friends ‘look at me [and] think I’ve lowered my standards.’ Mother of four Judy agreed. ‘Reactions [to pregnancies] change when you get past two.’ From “Oh, it’s time to have another one” after one it quickly became “When are you going to stop?” beyond two. Brenda likewise recalled ‘a lot of people’ being ‘shocked’ and ‘very negative’ over her third pregnancy, while Bruce described the reaction to Annette’s third: ‘They thought we were nuts.’ Becky had been confronted by her mother-in-law on announcing her third pregnancy: ‘How dare you ruin [my son’s] life. He’s already got two children and you to support.’ She and Clem were Catholic, and several informants,

like Jason, who'd resurrected a childhood church affiliation because of it, spoke of church communities supporting larger families in ways wider society didn't. Indeed Meyer (1999) found from NLCS data that religious belief (men) and Catholic affiliation (women) significantly raised the odds of having a third child compared to those who were not strongly religious and non-Catholics.

Quite a few third children had been unplanned after indecision over progression to that parity and/or procrastination over permanent contraception. Jeffrey 'wouldn't have had a third ... financially', but Maria 'was never fully persuaded she'd never want a third', which had duly arrived as 'a huge shock' 5 years after their second—'poor Maria ... was frightened to tell me.' Katrina had been in 'maybe another one' mode for over 6 years when her third was born—it wasn't as if we were really trying—but a decision to 'have a break' from oral contraception hadn't been backed by an effective alternative. Jane and Harry had 'decided as [we] got older ... we wouldn't have any more children.' He'd have a vasectomy. 'And he did. But it was all too late.' And Trevor's wife was expecting their third following contraceptive failure, their second already aged five. He'd always said two was 'enough', but she 'would've liked another'. It had come as 'a bit of a shock' that they'd be 'back at square one' again, but with the birth imminent, he was 'sort of acclimatized.'

Longer third birth intervals that had been planned had varied explanations. Alice and Bob had waited six and a half years because she'd been young (15 and 16) when their first two were born, and it took that long to acquire suitable housing. Andrew and Eliza's 6 year interval reflected the time taken to be comfortable they wanted number three, not just a daughter. For Martin and Hannah a 4 year third birth interval had resulted from disagreement over having a third child, and a need to return to Australia to a larger house before he relented. Kim and Jeremy's 44 month interval was also because 'he took a little while to talk into it'. And Elaine and Lawrence attributed their 45 month interval to wanting to first complete renovations and get their financial affairs in order.

## **Fourth Children: Negative Reactions, Practical Issues**

Discounting two couples who had replaced deceased children, eight AFFD couples or individuals had had fourth children. For Lilian and Liam, Donald and Abigail, and Becky and Clem the pregnancies hadn't been planned. Lilian had been distraught. She'd been longing to cut back on weekend and night work as her other children reached school age to 'get back to life again. ... [T]hen here I was starting all over again.' She'd had to stop night work anyway because 'I just couldn't stay awake that long', and plans to send her eldest to a private school had evaporated. Donald was less traumatized, but 'going from job to job' and with Abigail unable to work had had a vasectomy to avoid further surprises. Becky was only 29 at interview and her fourth child was already nearly five. She'd married pregnant and claimed 'if our first hadn't happened along that early, I don't think we'd even have children yet.' That was somewhat doubtful, given she described

numbers three and four as “oops” and used natural family planning. She’d planned four children with a 2 year break after her second. It hadn’t eventuated, leaving her at one point pregnant with three pre-schoolers.

For Katrina, the rationale for a fourth child was to give her belated, unplanned third a playmate. ‘You’ve sort of got like an only child again. ... [S]o it sort of made sense.’ She denied her first three all being girls was a factor. Mia’s arguing to Jason that they should have ‘two pairs’ didn’t carry the same logic, because their children were all 2 years apart. Her theory was that if you had three children, two would gang up on one, and Jason’s inquiring why three wouldn’t gang up on one if you had four was ignored. Mia wanted a vocation as a mother, and Jason put their decision this way:

When they’re about a year old and they start tottering around, they’re very cute. And we found ourselves every single time saying, “Isn’t that gorgeous? Let’s have another one.” And it’s kind of as simple as that.

Bruce and Annette, having had twin boys then a third son, had just decided (Bruce) ‘it was going along all right’ and (Annette) ‘It’d be nice to have one more.’ Again they denied seeking the missing sex, as did Judy and Lester, who had four daughters—a 7 year second birth interval had made caring for the younger ones easier. Alice called her and Bob’s fourth child their ‘luxury’ child. Having had two at 15 and 16, then a third aged 23 on moving from a flat to a house, it had been 8 years later, and Bob was keen:

I remember I sat on the end of my bed and I thought, “I’m 31 years old. Am I going to have this fourth or am I going to go and do something with my life?” ... And it was a decision financially. We could afford it. We now had the room.

Isobel and Tony were currently playing the Russian roulette over a fourth child other couples had played over thirds. Theirs was another family embedded in church life and another relationship not using reliable contraception. A fourth ‘wouldn’t be a crisis’, but Isobel was clearly diffident about a return to baby mode.

Part of me thinks, “Oh, it’d be nice.” But then the other part thinks, “We’re out of nappies, we’ve got two at school now, and the homework, and the soccer, and the gymnastics, and the swimming, and this and that.” ... [W]e’re comfortable now.

Negative and patronizing reactions were reported to fourth children as they were to third children, as people commiserated, assumed attempts to achieve the missing sex, or implied a lack of restraint. Annette commented:

When we had the fourth boy it was even worse. People, just a lot of little old ladies in the street. “Oh you poor thing.” “Oh what a shame.” “Is that a little pink one in the pram there?” Coz they’d see me walking with three boys, you know?

And Becky spoke of her experiences when pregnant with her fourth and pushing two others in a pram with only her eldest walking:

I remember one woman saying, “Oh my God, if I found out I was having a fourth child I’d kill myself.” ... I was getting the “Oh my God, I feel sorry for you” looks ... I was getting “You brave woman”, “You poor thing” ... “Don’t you have a television?” “You must be Catholics.” And we do have a television, and we know how to turn it on, and we are Catholics. We wanted a large family, and people can be rude.

There were also commonly identified practical issues that arose with fourth children. Almost invariably fathers of four mentioned a need to change cars or buy a second car, given that standard vehicles seat five. Some had also needed to upgrade housing, while comment on a quantum increase in workload was also frequent. Gavin explained the impact of his and Katrina's fourth child:

[W]e paid our house off ... [and] had the five-seater car. Suddenly you've got six. So we had our two cars. Suddenly the house didn't seem big enough, so ... we sold that and bought this [one] and had a mortgage again. It sort of seemed to have a much bigger financial impact than what you'd imagine. ... [W]e went from really doing it easy to suddenly doing it pretty tough. ... [Also,] there's an awful lot of running around ... [and] very little time to do anything.

Jason and Mia had had to buy a bigger car and extend their house to accommodate their fourth, but in addition Jason observed that 'the step from three to four has been the most demanding in terms of the organizational load. ... [I]t really seems twice as much work.' Annette felt the same. '[Y]ou had to change the car. ... [But also] you're just running around a lot more. ... [It's a] big difference between three and four.' Echoing Jason, Lilian described her progression to four as 'like multiplying by two, not adding one. ... [Y]ou've just gotta keep going all the time, and not forget things. ... It's just hectic.' Part of her problem was 'the age gap'—from a teenager to a 3 year-old. All had different needs, and it was hard not to feel none of them were getting enough individual attention. Judy commented: 'We had to buy a new car when we had number four. ... [A]nd we're running out of room.' Their house was currently on the market. Becky hadn't had to change the car. Knowing they wanted a large family she and Clem had bought an eight-seater van, about which she had sometimes joked that they 'may as well fill it up.' She'd originally wanted six children, but not now. '[L]ife was pretty hard with all four children home. ... My life is important now. ... I don't want to put myself out again.'

## Discussion

Rijken and Knijn (2009) note that while the literature frequently assumes childbearing to be a product of conscious decision-making, and the decision-making process to have become more careful and drawn-out as concern for personal autonomy and the demands of parenthood have increased, the process (p. 766) "has not received much attention in empirical studies on fertility yet." Their conclusion, from an in-depth study of 17 Dutch couples who had first births 'young' and 16 who had them 'relatively old', was that decisions were (p. 792) "generally quite implicit ... not much thinking, reflection, long-term planning or communication involved." Older couples had often explicitly ascertained a partner's desire for children early in their relationships before leaving open the timing of the first birth, but typically even these initiatives had not involved protracted discussion or negotiation.

This study has ranged more widely, probing second, third and fourth births as well as first births, and prior to that adolescent contemplation of parenthood, its

discussion during courtship, and the process by which family size is determined as well. Growing up in breadwinner families had led some females to anticipate futures conforming to that model, but most had either failed to establish enduring relationships in their early twenties or been absorbed into the then emerging young adult female lifestyle dominated by tertiary education, career establishment, travel and social activity. The dominant model, for both sexes, was to have anticipated parenthood, but in no particular timeframe. There were also, however, many males, and some females, for whom family formation had never received serious thought in adolescence—their social lives had been too engaging. A few others, of both sexes, had decided quite early against parenthood, and had doggedly resisted it.

Discussing children during courtship may not have been encouraged by the post-1970 trend to couples cohabiting before marriage, as the commitment associated with cohabitation is often ambiguous and talk of children within that institution is therefore potentially presumptuous. To some young women especially, raising the topic may have risked scaring a partner off, but plenty had themselves been happy enough to defer it. Clearly decision-making during courtship had often been highly implicit, informants frequently stating or implying that they had just ‘assumed’ children eventually would enliven their relationships. Others had been only slightly less implicit, establishing mutual intentions to have children in passing, but not addressing when they might be acted on. Probably the most explicit decision-makers when courting were older couples, one or both often repartnering, for whom perceived age-related biological and/or social imperatives frequently gave parenthood some urgency. Other couples had discussed their family aspirations in some detail when courting, but not always succeeded in implementing them. Still others had either deliberately deferred discussion until sure relationships were secure, or had never thought about parenthood.

A unique opportunity afforded by AFFD data to follow up family size expectations expressed by young women in late adolescence or early adulthood suggested that they had typically been proffered hurriedly with little thought, so that in aggregate it was no wonder they bore little relationship to likely subsequent behaviour. Ultimate family size was frequently not a case of individuals pursuing pre-determined targets. Informants had sometimes had difficulty meeting suitable partners; others had met them later in life than expected and so had fewer children than once anticipated. On the other side of the ledger were couples converted from avowed childlessness as the attractions of that lifestyle waned, biological clocks engaged and parent peers were observed, but as late starters they had rarely progressed beyond two children. Negotiation had often been central to determining family size, because spouses’ and partners’ preferences did not always coincide, and the reality of conception, pregnancy, birth and early parenthood had sometimes sparked downward revision of expectations, chiefly beyond the second child. For a few informants later parental experiences had also seen childbearing curtailed. Unplanned pregnancies had, of course, sometimes boosted family size above expectation, but in other cases medical issues had had the opposite effect. A sequential, incremental approach to family formation was not uncommon, those

following such a child-by-child model sometimes very explicit in their decision-making, but not invariably so with indecision and procrastination over permanent contraception commonplace.

A significant proportion of first births, mostly to younger mothers, had not followed conscious timing decisions, albeit that some, usually implicit, agreement to have a family may have been in place. Reactions to such births ranged from shock and trepidation through fairly laid back acceptance to outright joy. Another sizeable group had sought to become pregnant quickly after marrying or moving in together. Decision-making by younger couples in this group seemed typically quite implicit—let's just do it, and worry about the consequences later. However, older couples often saw their window of opportunity for parenthood closing, so had openly discussed their desire for children then carried that more explicit decision-making into the coresident phases of their relationships. Also explicit, of necessity, were those who had abandoned plans never to have children. A further group had had first children because 'the time was right' after satisfying travel and other aspirations for early adult life experiences, but the other large group was those for whom the prerequisite to having a family had been establishing a stable economic foundation. Males, especially, stressed economic considerations, their arguments not infrequently intertwined with professed needs to be 'ready' before having children, whence the economic argument was used to defer lifestyle change. Among couples who'd married without cohabiting there had often been a negotiated child-free period to enjoy life together, and some white collar couples' decision-making had been, or was being, impacted by a consciousness of implications for the prospective mother's career. Then, of course, there was a group for whom fertility impairment had substantially delayed first births. They may not have been entirely deprived, as some less fortunate had been, of the joy of parenthood, but they had certainly been deprived of choosing *when* it was experienced.

Second children were widely perceived to be well-nigh obligatory. A few informants were still wrestling with progression to parity two and one had been told by his wife their son was it—no more—but the sentiment that one couldn't have an only child was pervasive. To do so would breach a duty to give it a sibling/playmate. Decision-making was consequently predominantly implicit and second birth intervals were mostly short. Because it was almost a 'no brainer' to have a second child, couples had tended to 'get on with it' while 'still in baby mode'. The timing of second pregnancies was not always meticulously planned, but they were virtually never deemed 'fertility overshoots'. Among the few informants for whom having number two was proving, or had proved, problematic, the heart seemed to say 'do it', but the head raised all sorts of doubts about affordability given the desired quality of upbringing, childcare, the mother's capacity to cope and/or to resume her career, lack of paternal enthusiasm, etc.

Decision-making became paramount again with third children. The sorts of issues just listed as exercising a minority of couples with one child were much more prominent in the thoughts of those who'd had two, and over half were intent on avoiding another. Third children were discretionary in a way second children were not, and this was reflected in distinctly longer third birth intervals and the



*indecision* that often prevailed in respect of them, as well as in fewer informants having had them. They were widely considered financially imprudent, the sentiment being commonly encountered that it was better to devote available economic (and parenting) resources to two children than to spread them more thinly, especially if private education was aspired to. In that circumstance the decision to stop at two or have a third could be pivotal to capacity to meet aspiration. If early childbearing and rearing experiences had been off-putting, it was through the decision over the third child that they usually had practical impact. Decisions were not always unequivocal. There was appreciable evidence of indecision and procrastination over whether to have number three or implement permanent contraception, with on the one hand several third births having occurred unplanned after lengthy birth intervals, and on the other several mothers commenting that as time passed the attraction of returning to 'baby mode' had waned. These scenarios grew out of 'play-it-by-ear' approaches to having third children such as were signaled by several informants currently at the crossroads of progression to parity three—they would defer final decisions pending how they coped with two children. Procrastination over third children seemed largely driven by women reluctant to close off the possibility they'd get an urge to add to their families. Some husbands had resisted, insisting on curtailment at two children, but others similarly disinclined to further expand their families had been more tolerant of their wives' indecision, sometimes to their cost.

Clear evidence for Australia that progression to parity three is 25 % higher if the first two children are one sex rather than opposite sex was not matched by wide informant acknowledgement of gender mix having been an important consideration in decisions to have third children. Eighty percent of progressions to parity three by couples with same-sex children were, however, needed to match the progression rate among couples with opposite-sex children, and the progression differential may also partly, or even substantially, have reflected decisions by couples with opposite-sex children to be satisfied with their 'pigeon pairs', as distinct from decisions by those with same-sex families to consciously pursue the missing sex. Conceivably some couples with same-sex children have sufficient interest in one of opposite sex to be indecisive about permanent contraception, but not enough to concede it as a primary motive for having a third child when the chance of success was only 50 %. There *was*, however, evidence of a broader *societal* perception that couples placed store in the gender composition of their families, and of negative societal reactions to decisions to have third children, especially where pursuit of a missing sex couldn't be argued. But there was obviously a core of couples, and perhaps particularly of professionally employed males, for whom two children was enough, regardless of gender mix.

How explicit or implicit was decision-making about third children? It was distinctly more explicit than that about first and second children (except for deliberate choices to avoid parenthood altogether (Carmichael and Whittaker 2007a)), partly because so many more decisions were to *not* have another child, partly because they were less often the 'no brainers' 'decisions' about second children were, and partly because the larger element of discretion involved meant there

were more often divergent views to resolve. Nevertheless there was still that element of procrastination and indecision that saw some couples drifting, women especially wanting to keep open the option of another child, men, one senses, often hopeful two *would* be the final tally, but with no initiative being taken to finalize matters one way or the other, and 'accidents' inevitable.

Fourth children had in three instances been unplanned, and in two of those Catholic contraceptive doctrine seemed implicated. Where definite decisions had been made, women seemed mostly to have taken the lead, and while in three of these five cases all previous children had been one sex, in all three pursuit of the missing sex was denied. Negative, patronizing attitudes to large families were commonly reported (some had also experienced this with third children, especially if already having a boy and a girl), and fourth children (1) had frequently created the need for a larger or additional vehicle and a larger house, and (2) were often perceived to have generated a quantum increase in parental workload. Some couples with four children had found solace from negative societal attitudes in religious communities.

If nothing else, this volume has demonstrated that decision-making concerning family formation within dyadic relationships in Australia is extremely varied, both within and across parities. The model advanced by proponents of reflexive modernization that sees couples today intently negotiating their dyadic lives with personal autonomy uppermost in their minds may well have considerable merit so far as the relationship establishment dimension of family formation is concerned, but in late twentieth and early twenty-first century Australia it was far from having universal applicability in relation to decisions about having children.

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