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**Childfree couples' experiences of stereotyping,
harassment and pressure**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is about New Zealand couples who, by choice, do not have children. Strong social norms exist for couples to have children, and those who express a desire to do otherwise have been disbelieved, pressured, and stereotyped. Womanhood has continued to be associated with motherhood, and a maternal instinct is expected to drive women to have children. The aim of this research was to add to knowledge and awareness of how childfree people have experienced being stereotyped, pressured and harassed for being childfree. For this research, I conjointly interviewed ten heterosexual, childfree couples residing in the city of Hamilton. Participants self-identified as childfree, and ranged in age from 23 to 56 years old. Five of the couples also participated in a focus group. Participants related the ways in which they perceived that the wider social context played a role in the negative responses they experienced. Participants revealed how they felt less socially valued through: an idealization of parenthood, exclusion from work benefits, and an expectation that women should manage both employment and motherhood. Stereotyping was found to still occur, with participants reporting that they were labelled as selfish, immature, and anti-children. Stereotypes of being destined for loneliness in later life, and of their pets being substitutes for children were common. Some evidence was found in participants' comments that there were elements of truth in stereotypes of the childfree. The negative stereotyping appeared to have little, if any, impact on how participants viewed or felt about themselves. Participants reported feeling harassed by other people's disbelief in their choice, and assumptions, that despite what they said, everybody wanted children. The pressures experienced by participants took various forms, such as persistent questioning, and came from various sources, including siblings and acquaintances. Participants' reports of feeling pressured or harassed seem to reflect minor and fleeting feelings, rather than a continuing concern. How pressuring comments were perceived by the recipient was very context-dependent. Participants tolerated and coped with people's negative responses by various methods, such as confronting, ignoring, and avoiding the topic of children with certain people. I recommend that further research be done, and that work is needed to promote both acceptance of the childfree option, and freedom of women's identification from association with childbearing.

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Until recently, childbirth has been something that has for the most part happened to women, rather than something being chosen by women.

--Virginia Held (1989)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE

Although the majority of adults in New Zealand/Aotearoa produce one or more children, a minority do not; for some this is a conscious choice. While the pressures and difficulties faced by parents have been well-researched, those faced by childfree adults, who choose not to experience parenthood, have been largely ignored (Moore & Moore, 2000). This is evidenced by the dearth of Australian and New Zealand research, and therefore, this review relies heavily on literature from other Western, industrialized countries. Whilst not universally true, the majority of Western people face the decision of whether to enter parenthood or not, and are likely to share the pressure of a social norm to have children. This research is intended to investigate the social experiences of the childfree, who consciously do not conform to the norm of having children. My aim is to discover what some childfree couples have experienced in the form of stereotyping, pressure and harassment, so that understanding and acceptance may be fostered.

In researching this topic, I acknowledge that I am influenced by my own position and values. It is important that a researcher's perspective be made explicit to aid researcher reflexivity and transparency, and to maximize understanding of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I am a Christian feminist Pakeha female in my late 20's, and childfree. My interest in this topic developed after I realized that I identified with childfree people, and because I had begun to experience what I felt to be pressure and stigma when my lack of desire for children became known to others. I wanted to know if my experience was shared by others without children, or if there was another explanation for how I felt. Chapter five will include my reflections on how my perspective has influenced this research.

The first section of this chapter discusses who the childfree are. The second section provides the background context to issues relevant to the focus of this research. Literature relating to stereotyping, harassment, and pressuring of childfree people will then be reviewed. The chapter concludes with an introduction to my research.

Saying ‘no’ to parenthood

Who are this group of people that I refer to as being childfree? This section provides my rationale for using the term childfree, and explains who the people are to which I am referring when using the term. A discussion of the decision involved in being childfree is also included.

Defining the childfree

Several terms have been created in attempts to identify the group of people who, by choice, do not have children. The terminology used in literature is a useful signifier of the underlying values of the writer. Several authors of books, media articles, and research have used the term ‘childless’ to refer to all adults without children (see Abma & Martinez, 2006; Barnett & Macdonald, 1986; Boddington & Didham, 2007; Theil, 2006). However, an all-inclusive use of the term ‘childless’ does not differentiate between people who are without children for different reasons, and assumes that children are lacked (Morell, 1994). Some researchers (see Calhoun & Selby, 1980; Gillespie, 2000; Heaton, Jacobson, & Holland, 1999) attempted to differentiate by describing infertile people as ‘involuntarily childless’, and the people who chose to not have children as ‘voluntarily childless’. I maintain that whilst this use of terminology

acknowledges choice, it perpetuates the idea that the person is lacking children. Another term that has been used in literature (Letherby, 1999; Ramsay & Letherby, 2006) is 'non-mother', I find the use of the term 'non-mother' problematic because it perpetuates the association of womanhood with motherhood through identifying all women in relation to their reproductive status.

More commonly, the term childfree has been used in research (Ciaccio, 2002; Rowlands & Lee, 2006; Seccombe, 1991), as it indicates that a positive choice to not have children has been made, and does not have the implication of deficit that is attached to the word childless (Moore & Moore, 2000). The term childfree is not without connotations itself, but, to my knowledge, there is no completely neutral term to refer to adults who, by choice, do not have children. Throughout this thesis, participants in research who chose to not have children will be referred to as childfree.

Little is known about childfree people in New Zealand. There has been no survey of women without children in New Zealand, as there has been in some Western countries. What is known, is the Total Fertility Ratio, which at 2.17 in 2007 (Statistics New Zealand, 2008), is just above the accepted population replacement level of 2.1, and higher than the ratios in many other nations in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), such as Australia, and the United Kingdom. The median age of women giving birth in New Zealand has risen to 30, with the highest fertility rate in the 30-34 age bracket (Statistics New Zealand, 2008), which indicates that the age span in which a woman is considered to be in potential childbearing mode is extending later into life than ever before. Whilst the birth rate is known, and the Census can inform us of the

number of women who report that they have not given birth to any children, the actual number of women and men who do not want to have children remains unknown.

Not only can the childfree be hard to identify as individuals, but the childfree, themselves, may struggle with how to identify themselves. The term ‘childfree’ has been described by Hird and Abshoff (2000) as an oxymoron because, despite it being a positive choice for themselves, the childfree are still being described in terms of what they are not (parents), and what they do not have (children).

Literature (Haussegger, 2005; Letherby, 1999) has described childfree women as ‘other’ in relation to the social norm of a woman being a mother.

Of particular importance is that most previous studies have focused solely on women (see Abma & Martinez, 2006; Gillespie, 1999; Jeffries & Konnert, 2002; Maher & Saugeres, 2007; Morell, 1994). Less is known about how men experience being childfree, what the contributing factors are in their decision, and what being childfree means for their identity and in their everyday life. My research helps to fill that gap by exploring the experiences of both sexes.

The childfree decision

The decision to be childfree has often been questioned in literature (see Cameron, 1997; Cassidy, 2006; Heaton et al., 1999; Keogh, 2005; Morell, 1994; Movius, 1976; Parker & Alexander, 2004; Somers, 1993). Reasons offered for not having children include concerns for the environmental impact of a growing human population (Ciaccio, 2002; Mollen, 2006; Movius, 1976; Park, 2005), a rejection of motherhood (Gillespie, 1999), concern about being unable to balance family life with career goals (Park, 2005), concern about passing on genetically inherited

illnesses (Mollen, 2006), and feeling that having children would prevent people doing other things they value such as freedom to travel, do sports or other activities (Park, 2005; Parker & Alexander, 2004). An Australian researcher (Weston, 2004), who appears to assume that every woman desires to have children, suggests that people without children may have jobs which would not allow them the time, finances or stability to parent as they would want to if given support.

Weston's colleagues at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Parker and Alexander (2004), researched reasons for not having children, and concluded that fear of not providing good parenting was, in itself, a primary reason of both men and women for not having children. Despite being identified by Cameron (1997) as an important factor in the decision, the presence or lack of desire for children was not included as a factor item in the questionnaire-based study reported by Parker and Alexander. This omission suggests that these, and perhaps other, researchers continue to assume that children are desired. Assumed reasons for being childfree on the basis of feelings appear to gravitate to the extremes of either being in denial of wanting children, or hating children. The reality is often less extreme, as some childfree people may actually not especially like children, and be childfree as a result, because they feel that they could be a bad parent (Moore & Moore, 2000; Park, 2005). However, stereotypical assumptions that other people are childfree because they dislike or hate children, which may be a misinterpretation of the childfree not wanting children, will be discussed further in the section on stereotypes.

The reasons given or suggested as to why a couple are childfree have been reinterpreted to support stereotypes, such as being selfish and immature (Hird & Abshoff, 2000), as well as reinforcing the idea that they are abnormal (Park, 2005). This is despite the acknowledgement from researchers that the decision to be childfree is highly complex (Hird & Abshoff), and that each individual will have her or his own particular considerations (Movius, 1976). Therefore, because the decision involves individual and complex factors, efforts to simplify and categorise the reasons for the decision become an almost pointless exercise. That the majority continue to question and seek explanation as to why some couples choose to be childfree may benefit from analysis as an issue itself.

Having a child has many implications for a person's life, and one of these, according to Coughlin (1995), is how the childbearing decision impacts on a woman's identity. Some researchers (see Gillespie, 1999; Maher & Saugeres, 2007) have studied the decision-making process of women who are childfree, but, as noted by Somers (1993), there is a lack of research into the decision-making processes of men and of couples. Considerably less literature is available on the implications for the self and interpersonal relations, particularly from the view of the childfree.

Macro context

This background section aims to provide the reader with a general understanding of the complex and broad range of issues relevant to the social experiences of childfree men and women in New Zealand. In this section I will be discussing the social context, including social values, norms and policy. Whilst much of the research is from outside New Zealand, the findings and arguments made in other

industrialized Western societies are important to consider. The following sections in this chapter review stereotyping, and pressures as they relate to being childfree.

Social relevance of the childfree decision

How is society involved in the personal decision of whether or not to produce one's own children? Society influences its members through the values that are upheld, through socialization into behavioural norms, and through policies which reinforce and support desired behaviours. Hollingworth (1916/2000) identified that at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, a norm of women as desiring many children was established jointly by the medical profession and psychologists as a form of social control. Liss (2006, p27) asks 'Why do we care if people don't want children?' and suggests that a choice not to have children is perceived as an attack on the idea of what adulthood entails, particularly on the currently revered experience of motherhood. Stereotyping, for example, the association of adulthood with parenthood, and social myths apparent in personal conversation, need to be contextualised. The wider context includes fields of study such as population studies and feminism, which can only be briefly discussed here.

Some analyses of the childfree and birth rates, take into consideration the social, economic and political factors that influence the birthrate throughout history, such as: the 'waves' of the women's liberation movement (Dally, 1982), changes in the construction of feminine identity (Gillespie, 1999), female paid employment, international wars, availability of contraception (Lisle, 1996), cultural changes, economics (Longman, 2006; Weston, 2004), and health (Heaton et al., 1999; Morgan & King, 2001). At a national level, there are several factors that influence a person's decision whether to have children or not, and those already mentioned

have been common to many Western countries. Some people, such as demographers, are concerned about the growing rate of the adult population not producing children, and what this might mean.

What does the growing preference for this choice mean for society and for those choosing it? Conservative American authors such as Popenoe (1993) claim that couples not having children are a serious social problem because they are rejecting their social purpose of rearing children and are thereby contributing to a decline of family values. According to Longman (2006) the dire warnings of population decline reflect a concern that a smaller population would result in diminishing a nation's international power (population = power), and that the population would become more patriarchal as those who are reproducing are the traditionalists. Such a concern could create focused pressure on non-traditionalist members of society, such as the childfree, to produce more children.

There are also gender-related issues of power that can influence childbearing decisions or desires. Seccombe (1991) stated that men have very little to lose, but much status to gain from having a child, as the 'family man' label increases their perceived stability and reliability, in addition to having increased economic power in relation to his partner if he is the only income earner. Seccombe proposed that in comparison, a woman's status does not reap the same benefit when entering parenthood. So why do women desire something that appears to support traditional, unequal imbalances of power? Perhaps women believe that they are simply following their alleged 'natural' instincts, or they may believe that they would benefit from increased power within the family as a mother.

Feminism and choice

Over the last two centuries, the choices available to women in the Western world, such as employment, abortion and contraception, have dramatically increased (Gillespie, 2000). Whilst the number of such personal choices now available to women has grown over the last hundred years in New Zealand, the social constraints on these choices are not always obvious. Feminists have called for freedom of choice for women, including the freedom to choose to work (Hirshman, 2005).

The feminist movement resulted in a popular “Girls can do anything” message during the 1980’s, which was originally interpreted to mean that women should be able to choose any career they wished (Haussegger, 2005). Later, this was reinterpreted into the idea that women could expect to manage not just anything, but everything they wanted (Haussegger, 2005). The unintended consequence of this idea has been pressure for women to engage and excel in both paid employment and motherhood, whether this pressure is from herself or from others (Haussegger, 2005; Twyford, 2008). Park (2005) also discusses the ‘superwoman’ ideal, and suggests that it makes any motive for being childfree socially unacceptable.

If women are truly free to choose, then shouldn’t the women who choose to be childfree be accepted, and not criticised because they choose to not mother? Feminism fought to make it acceptable for women to choose to work (Hirshman, 2005), and to break taboos surrounding women’s experiences and desires (Snitow, 1992). Morell (2000) argues that feminism has unwittingly given more attention to, and thereby normalized, women’s experiences of motherhood whilst

neglecting, and thereby 'othering', experiences of non-motherhood. According to Gillespie (2000), feminism did not achieve the goal of making employment as equally acceptable as motherhood for women in the United Kingdom because, Gillespie claims, women continue to be viewed negatively for appearing to choose a career over motherhood. Woollett (1991) claimed that having career goals was viewed positively for mothers, but not for women without children. This is not to forget that employed mothers are also viewed negatively and discriminated against by employers (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008).

However, Movius (1976) and Haussegger (2005) argue that a belief in women being able to satisfactorily manage both a career and motherhood is a fallacy. Hirshman (2005) views feminism as failing women in the United States because, despite the success at increasing acceptance of women going to work, the majority of women do not resist the new tradition of leaving work to raise children. The 'opt-out' trend in the United States, in reference to a decrease in new mothers returning to employment, was suggested by Still (2006) to be a result of the difficulty in combining a career with motherhood. Hirshman believes that when a woman gives up her career for motherhood, she supports patriarchy and gender role expectations, and on this basis argues that such a sacrifice cannot be independent of social pressure.

In New Zealand, during 2001, 47% of mothers with pre-school children were in employment (Brewerton, 2004). Hollingworth (1916/2000), whose assertion was supported by Hirshman (2005), argues that women do not have true freedom to choose, and states that pronatalist norms act as social coercion. Women should have the freedom to choose to have children or not, whether to combine

motherhood with employment or not, and to change their mind, without the pressure of expectations or worrying about other people's responses.

Societal values and norms

People learn through socialization the importance and value of following behavioural rules and norms that allow us to comfortably live within a given society. Western social mores lead us to take for granted that most, if not everyone, will follow the life stage of young adulthood to marriage, and then to parenthood (Ory, 1978; Veevers, 1973). Remez (2000) identified entering or being married, as the most positively correlated factor that preceded the birth of a child. However, despite growing acceptance of alternative family forms such as solo-parenting and having children without being married, these may serve to maintain the prevailing belief in a need or desire to parent. The production of children is a societal expectation, seen as normative and predominant in marriage, resulting from an innate parental urge within us (Gold, 2002). When this is not followed, it is commonly seen as requiring an explanation. Mollen (2006) believes that the gender role expectation of women to have children is the basis for negative responses to childfree women. The common enquiries asked of childfree people have been collated into a 'bingo' card published online by West (2006) as a way to view unwanted responses with amusement (Appendix A).

If the childfree are pressured, criticized and stereotyped by people in their social networks, then how does the decision to not have children affect a childfree person's relationships? What has been written suggests that the childfree may experience some social difficulties due to either exclusion based on their lack of parenting experience (Letherby & Williams, 1999) or the inability of mothers and childfree women to relate to each other (Morell, 1994). No literature could be

found that included the family and friends of childfree couples to ascertain their views. Whilst this is beyond the scope of my research, these scenarios are worthy of attention, especially so if the context is one in which there is pressure and stereotyping of those who are childfree. Talking to the people who stereotype and pressure the childfree would be of great interest, particularly with investigation into the social norms and expectations of having children, but is outside the scope of this research. Social norms and expected behaviours from women will be discussed further in the section on myths and socialization.

Deciding whether to have children or not is, or appears to be, a personal choice that has social implications. What has been recognised for a long time, and was first identified by Hollingworth (1916/2000), is that the power of public opinion to influence a woman's behaviour should not be underestimated. The political and economic climate/context of society influences the forces and types of pressures and behaviours that are accepted of a person (Morell, 1994). Childfree couples are stuck in a tough position. Modern society has provided the means by which pregnancy can be prevented, and there is no longer an economic incentive to have children as a source of free labour. Additional factors to consider before having a child include the expenses associated with compulsory schooling, costs associated with Western consumerism, and pressure for both men and women to be in the workforce.

With these factors in mind, the choice to forgo parenthood appears to be a logical one. Despite this, pressures remain that serve to condemn the childfree. Meyers (2001) argues that the choice to be childfree is neither autonomous, nor real, but that “the concept of family planning does not include refusing to have children,

for that would amount to family prevention, which sounds like blasphemy in an era of pietistic pronouncements about ‘family values’” (p.736). McAllister and Clarke (2000) suggest that being childfree is more rational than intending to have children, but that the wider context of social status and values are persuasive factors to have children. National policies in regards to reproduction, which will be discussed shortly, are based upon societal values and ideology (Longman, 2006). One of these is the false, yet dominant, pronatalist ideology of parenthood as the only recognized and valuable means to be fulfilled, thereby invalidating the childfree lifestyle (Klepfisz, 1999).

Pronatalism

According to Heitlinger (1991), discourse in pronatalist societies ascribes nationalistic values to children and maintains the idea that having children is natural, personally fulfilling, and desirable. Despite progress in employment, non-traditional activities of women are still construed as misappropriated or substitutions for women's 'real' source of fulfilment (Ireland, 1993). However, belief in the importance and centrality of parenthood to one's life is not an issue just for women, according to Seccombe (1991, p. 192), who stated that “It is assumed that all individuals, especially women, need children in order to fulfil their desire for love, companionship, and immortality”. Klepfisz (1999) suggests that seeking such a fulfilment from parenthood as this can be unhealthy if the woman's (or man's) need is to receive the caring, unconditional love, which producing a child cannot guarantee. Jones and Brayfield (1997) suggest that a pronatalist emphasis on emotional benefits from parenthood arose because industrialisation removed economic benefits from parenthood, which had previously acted as the incentive to have children.

Another definition of pronatalism is that it is a mechanism by which children and childrearing are valorised and desired (Jones & Brayfield, 1997). Meyers (2001) believes that the romanticised and valorised image of parenthood, which is projected by pronatalism, discounts the theory that women have true choice or are informed about motherhood prior to entering it. Pronatalist discourse will be experienced by some mothers as affirmation of their choice, whilst for non-mothers, pronatalist discourse will more likely be experienced as sanctioning. The international study in Europe of perceived value of children by Jones and Brayfield, found that the degree of centrality of children in women's lives varied according to national context, though this variation was not found with men.

According to one feminist perspective (Snitow, 1992), pronatalism is present in both American culture in general, and feminism in particular, and that it needs to be critiqued. However, Snitow believes that this critique is not happening because mothers fear upsetting their children, the childless do not want to be interpreted as being resentful, and that childfree women are inhibited by guilt from evading the difficulties of motherhood. Jones and Brayfield (1997) add to this, saying that European mother's increased economic independence resulting from pronatalist policies such as provision of child/family allowances, work to reduce feminist criticism of pronatalism. Snitow also argues that increasing social acceptance and support for childfree women is an important goal for feminism. Snitow's arguments have good ideas, but they need to be substantiated by research.

Longman (2006) believes that the values and discourse that form pronatalism have a strong association with patriarchy, and furthermore, argues that children predominantly adopt and follow the same values and beliefs that prompted their

parents to have children. Longman's argument assumes that the perceived value of children remains static over a person's lifetime. Whilst there are some methodological reasons to be hesitant about the results, Gerson and Berman (1991) found that the perceived value of having children amongst adults without children, was lower in participants in their 30's than was found in participants in their 20's. This suggests that, as a person ages, they are less likely to subscribe to idealistic views of parenting.

Parenthood has been given a higher status than being childfree in some respects. In keeping with theory regarding pronatalism (see Jones & Brayfield, 1997), Park (2005) talks about how, in the United States, parenthood has been idealized as a virtuous status. A recent survey in Australia (Mitchell & Gray, 2007) found that 65% of participants who indicated that they planned to have children, and 38% of participants who had no plans to have children, believed that a life without children was incomplete. Whitehead (2006) claims that the values of sacrifice, stability, dependability, and maturity are the domain of parents, and that the values of childfree people are the exact opposite. This pronatalist idealization of parenthood, according to Jones and Brayfield (1997), though affected by the economic costs experienced by mothers, continues to offer a form of social status and approval.

Some societal values place almost contradictory obligations on women, such as valuing contributions to society as mothers, but also placing value on them as paid workers (Brewerton, 2004; Movius, 1976). The efforts to raise the social esteem and prestige of parenthood, by deeming child-rearing to be of great importance, may also have served to lower the status of non-parents (Movius, 1976; Postrel,

2000). Postrel argues that this is evident by the support and acknowledgement that parenthood receives in comparison to the lack of acknowledgement for the social contributions of the childfree. The belief that raising a child automatically gives one skills and experiences (that, of course, cannot be developed otherwise), creates a new qualification that deems non-parents as deficient.

Despite the pressure of pronatalism, childfree women choose to not fulfill the role of mother. It is clear that the role of mother is important for women (Coughlin, 1995), but it should not be the only means of a woman's contribution to society (Cahill, 2003), or identification (Cassidy, 2006). One of the participants in Gillespie's (2000) study pointed out that the childfree are not seen for what they do, but for what they do not do. The descriptor 'childfree woman' is categorised as an oxymoron by Hird and Abshoff (2000), as it defines a woman by what she is not, arguing that the identity of 'woman' has been, for too long, associated with 'mother', 'maternity' and sexual reproduction. Hird and Abshoff propose that society should stop trying to categorise and define how and why childfree people are different from parents. One important demographic difference must be acknowledged. Statistics show that there is a significant difference in New Zealand between the average number of children born to the main ethnic groups; European (1.83), Maori (2.79), Pacific (2.84) and Asian (1.88) (Didham, 2004). These statistics suggest that there are cultural influences upon fertility, and, perhaps, the acceptability of being childfree.

Policy and population

One area of relevant policy is that of employment. Employers have difficulty in distinguishing women of childbearing age who will have children from those who will not. Because the social norm for women is to have children, with

consequential impacts on their employer, childfree women of childbearing age can be falsely and unfairly treated because of an expectation that they will follow this social norm (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991). Currently, being work-focused may serve as an excuse for some childfree women as to why they are not having children, if they do not wish to be explicit about not wanting to have children.

Childfree employees in academia within Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, are not given the same allowances for personal demands and responsibilities, such as caring for elderly parents or hobby commitments, as parents receive for child-related needs (Cummins, 2005; Moore & Moore, 2000; Ramsay & Letherby, 2006). Some people may, with good reason, argue that the childfree are unfairly treated as employees because they are excluded from many benefits and policies enjoyed by working parents in New Zealand, such as flexible schedules, paid leave and childcare provisions (Haar & Spell, 2003). Postrel (2000) argues that the childfree should not complain of benefits for working parents and she is more concerned that a government, referring to the United States, neglects to value the contributions made by the childfree, as if they do not matter as citizens. Whilst individual company policies do differ, it appears that there are childfree people in New Zealand, and throughout the Western world, who feel that they are being discriminated against in workplace policies.

An inequality also exists in the level of governmental support for sterilisation procedures in comparison to fertility treatment. In 2004, the New Zealand Minister of Health announced that in a bid to increase services and accessibility, extra fertility treatment and a funding boost were being made available for infertile couples (King, 2004). No such announcements have been made for public

funding of voluntary sterilisation. Currently, a woman must score at least the threshold of 65 points before being considered eligible for public assistance towards an elective sterilisation (Fertility Associates, 2008). The criteria for sterilisation (see Appendix B) is restrictive and unsupportive of young childfree women who, unlike women wanting children, must resort to paying for private treatment in order to have their choice supported.

According to the set criteria, a childfree woman under 31 years old, who has successfully avoided pregnancy, is prevented from receiving publicly funded sterilisation, even if she develops serious problems with contraceptives and her health would be at risk if she did become pregnant. One such New Zealand woman has published the story of her recent struggle to get a tubal ligation as an unmarried woman under the age of 32 (Culver, 2007). Culver tells how she had to pay for having the procedure done privately, after being required by her doctor to be appraised by a psychiatrist before he would provide the necessary referral. The choice to be childfree appears to lack support within the public health system of New Zealand.

Demographers in New Zealand, such as Boddington and Didham (2007), have expressed concern about the increasing numbers of adults without children.

Without a clear reason given by Boddington and Didham, one could presume their concern is related to the aging of the national population. This concern has been used to place pressure on people to have children through the promotion of pronatalist beliefs in media. The effect of pronatalism in the American media has been well-researched by Sass (2004), who found it to contribute to stereotyping of the childfree. Newspaper stories on research, such as that produced by

Boddington and Didham (2007) have heralded the 'need' for policies to either assist or encourage an increase in birth rates, without giving an explanation as to why this is important. A contrasting perspective is given by an American demographer, Morgan (2003), who argues that after the effort to fight against crises attributed to the rising world population and the baby boom, the decrease occurring throughout the Western world now is much less of a concern and more related to good news. Morgan (2003) also suggests that the global effect of decreasing fertility rates, primarily in Europe and United States, will result in a decrease in the 'white' population which could be good news for populations who are struggling under oppression or domination by 'white' people.

Interest in fertility and birth rates appears to be growing, and is likely to prompt further research, both overseas and in New Zealand, including investigations into reasons for being childfree. Such research is intended to assist the development of relevant policies. Research investigating women without children, such as that by Kemkes-Grottenthaler (2003) on female academic faculty in Germany, assumes that women are simply in need of support to have the children they want. Perhaps the assumptions are based on an expectation for members of a society to responsibly contribute children for the continuance of the society. In the face of pressure stemming from the fact that a nation needs children in order to continue (Hollingworth, 1916/2000), demographers worried about population decrease (see Boddington & Didham, 2007), and research being produced in the United States (Longman, 2006; Popenoe, 1993), it may be hard for the childfree to not internalize the view that they are being selfish in resisting this call to contribute to the population base of their country . A number of such stereotypes exist, and will be discussed in the following section.

Stereotyping of the childfree

With a proud feminist history, New Zealanders may claim to be accepting of diversity and to be forward-thinking. An example of this is the unreferenced statement made by a New Zealand demographer: 'The stigmatising of childless women as selfish and unpatriotic, characteristic of the 1930s, has long vanished, as has, almost, the view that these women are somehow deficient' (Didham, 2004, p10). Such a claim is contradicted by the continued prevalence of traditional, stereotypical, gender norms and portrayals of men and women. An example of this is the television advertising in New Zealand, which continues to place women in the home, whilst men are significantly more likely to be portrayed as autonomous (Furnham & Farragher, 2000). How gender roles are portrayed in the media is of importance because, as long as women continue to be primarily associated with domesticity, those who do not fulfil the stereotype will be candidates for negative stereotyping. Furthermore, the persistence of such stereotyping is a potential barrier to women feeling free to make the choice to not be a mother (Seid, 2000).

Stigmatisation occurs when an out-group is identified, and responded to negatively, and is not restricted to people in a low social status position (Campbell & Deacon, 2006). It is not particularly difficult to find research studies revealing that voluntarily childfree couples are stereotyped, stigmatised, and generally disliked. As noted by Australian psychologists Rowlands and Lee (2006), research studies over time, and in various countries throughout the world, have produced findings that consistently report the same stereotypes of childfree people. Drawing upon research from Western countries including Australia, Canada & New Zealand, Hird and Abshoff (2000) found that the childfree were seen as suffering

from faulty socialisation; that is, that they were maladjusted, incomplete, unloving, irresponsible, unnatural, immature, materialistic, individualistic, too career-oriented, lonely, child-haters, and psychologically unstable. According to Hird and Abshoff's findings, the number of negative perceptions held about childfree people have increased in comparison to those listed by Veevers (1974), which did not include mention of the childfree as disliking children, or being lonely. Similarly, Seid (2000) lists negative stigma attached to being childfree as; disliking children, having had an unhappy childhood, and immature. Seid also refers to voluntary childlessness as the only stigmatised reproductive choice in the United States.

The stereotype of the childfree as having pets to substitute for children has been accepted as at least partly true for some (Moore & Moore, 2000; Serpell, 1996) and denied by others as ridiculous (Battersby, 2005; Hankins, 2003). The perception of activities undertaken by the childfree, such as caring for animals, as compensating for a lack of children places pressure on the childfree to cover for, or defend, their decision and choices (DeOllos & Kapinus, 2002; Moore & Moore, 2000). Anxiety may then result from the dilemma to conceal or reveal the childfree state and potentially face negative consequences (Pachankis, 2007).

Research has investigated the perceptions of American university students, who appear to have already adopted negatively biased views. Jamison, Franzini, and Kaplan (1979) found that students perceived a sterilised childfree woman as less sensitive, and loving, more likely to be active in women's lib, as less happy and well-adjusted, less likely to have good relationship with her parents, and less likely to be happy or satisfied in old age. Jamison et al. specifically noted that

childfree men were at least equally subject to negative stereotyping, as research participants rated a childfree man more negatively than a childfree woman. More recently, Mueller and Yoder (1997) found that of all the family size options, women who chose to not have children were evaluated the least favourably by a mixed-gender group of 400 American college undergraduates. LaMastro (2001) confirmed previous research in the United States, with a finding that naïve participants (psychology undergraduates) judged both childfree men and women to be significantly less interpersonally 'warm', no matter how their child-free/-less situation was judged by participants.

The idea that childfree people are not 'nice' and 'warm' people may stem from the stereotyping of childfree people as child-haters. The child-hater stereotype is both negated and accepted by researchers and the childfree. Some people talk about how unfair it is to assume the childfree do not like children (Cahill, 2003; Morell, 1994), whilst others appear to embrace it as true for some (see Ciaccio, 2002; Moore & Moore, 2000).

Nichols and Pace-Nichols (2000, p. 176) state that there is "little room for doubting...those who remain childless-whether voluntary or involuntary -are often stigmatized and treated as if something were wrong with them.". Yet, these American therapists limit their consideration of the need for support to the involuntary childless, and make no effort to support the childfree or refute stereotypes that they admit knowledge of. This negligence is equivalent to maintaining such negative perceptions based on role expectations. Viewing the issue as similar to the need for cultural competency, Gold (2002) calls for counsellors to recognise and legitimate the position of being voluntarily childless,

recognise and critically examine their own beliefs and assumptions, and be ready to help the 'voluntarily childless' in a supportive way. Whilst the need for support heralded by Gold's is commendable, his choice to use the term childless is not legitimating for those who identify themselves as childfree.

Stereotyping can be quite subtle, as well as obvious. An example of this is how An alternative perspective is that of Park (2002), who believes that American society needs to classify childfree women negatively in order to maintain the social norms, in keeping with Durkheim's 19th century social theory. Another explanation, not found in literature, is that the stereotyping of the childfree may be due to group bias. Group membership determines how a person views themselves and others (Hogg, 2003), and could explain the intergroup discrimination and stereotyping experienced by those who identify with the minority group of childfree.

Unfulfilled womanhood

According to Morell (1994), and Hird & Abshoff (2000), there is a widespread belief that to become a woman, one must acknowledge and attempt to follow the socially accepted life pattern, which is to find a partner and seek to have children with him. Ulrich and Weatherall (2000) found that, in New Zealand, there is an expectation that all women will feel fulfilled and satisfied through the bearing and raising of children. A self-described childless woman, Australian author, Haussegger (2005), claims that herself and many other women have become resentful and hurt after spending so long distracted by building their careers that they were past their childbearing years before they really thought about their choices, and realised how empty and pointless their lives were without children. Haussegger goes on to contradict this idea by quoting many mothers who were

disappointed that they did not experience motherhood as fulfilling. The apparently controversial concept that children provide meaning and a sense of immortality was suggested by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (1982) as a legitimate reason for women to have children.

According to Mollen (2006), psychologists and counsellors have, in the past, contributed to the stigma by equating healthy womanhood with mothering. Being a mother, or the desire to be a mother, should not be perceived as an essential aspect of being feminine, or of being a woman. Rather, it is an individual experience, and should not be assumed to be the only means by which a woman can be fulfilled, feel complete, or further develop selflessness (Coughlin, 1995). The expectation of fulfilment through following the norm of having children is described by Hausegger (2005) as being potentially dangerous to all women because of the idealistic expectations it creates of motherhood, and because she believes it discourages women from being ambitious in her career.

Selfishness and materialism

A lot of past research (Callan, 1982; Ciaccio, 2002; Gold, 2002; Klepfisz, 1999; Letherby, 2002) and writing (King, 1986) has referred to the perceived selfishness of a decision to not have children. The generally accepted view is that the childfree are selfish, whilst parents are selfless. The basis for this is that the childfree are seen as unwilling to give up their freedom and comforts in order to make children their priority. A particularly clear example of this stereotyping is that of Gilbert (2005), who describes those without children as being *childless*, selfish, individualistic career-obsessed people who are only out to earn money to support unnecessarily consumerist lifestyles. Despite attempts at using international research to explain the diversity amongst women and their lifestyle

preferences (see Hakim, 2003a), both Australian and American media (see Arndt, 2003; Gilbert, 2005) continue to interpret the results according to, and thereby falsely supporting, stereotypes of childfree people as being materialistic and excessively career-focussed.

Immaturity

Stigmatisation of childfree people as not being fully responsible adults still occurs, with one example being Whitehead (2006), who attributes the qualities of stability, maturity, and dependability to child-rearing adults, and explicitly states that childfree people are the exact opposite. Similarly, Bradley (1999) described childfree people as lacking the confidence and/or being reluctant to commit to both relationship and parental responsibilities that were previously not considered an optional element of adulthood. There are a number of implicit messages and assumptions embedded within this. Hird (2003) suggests that common stereotypical beliefs underlying stigma of voluntarily childfree women may stem from Freudian psychoanalytical theory, which attempts to explain a woman's refusal to accept the role of motherhood as a lack of maturity and inability to accept herself as a female without a penis. Newspaper articles such as that by Cone (2007) provide some support for this suggestion, as childfree women in New Zealand are described as trying to be masculine and refusing their femininity. Literature specifically condemning childfree men as being immature (Callan, 1982) is not as numerous as that for women.

The disregard of childfree women's decision to not have children was seen by Gillespie (2000) as a sign that the current discourse in the United Kingdom describes childfree women as immature. The basis for this stereotype is explained as viewing childfree women as not yet having reached the mature adult decision

(to have children), but that such a decision would be inevitable. Fisher (1992)

says:

The belief that women cannot truly choose to remain childless, that we do not know what we are doing, reveals a deep-seated misogyny. The voice that says childless women will regret their decision is the same voice that questions women's capacity to choose in any area. (p. 50)

Daniluk (1999) also said that mature womanhood was strongly associated with maternity, and argued that maternity was viewed as a woman's destiny. Somers (1993) noted that, in the United States, constructs such as the importance of parenthood as crucial to healthy adult development, and the expectation of regret in later life, were popularly believed and in need of refuting. These two constructs appear related, as poor decision-making that leads to regret is more expected from a person seen to lack maturity.

Lonely and regretful

One reason why the childfree are expected to regret their decision is because of the assumption that, when old, a childfree person will be lonely. Many fables written for children include an old spinster who wants for human company, such as *The Three Spinsters* by The Brothers Grimm, which may provide the basis for a stereotype of elderly childfree women as being lonely. Threats of being lonely in old age, which have been directed at people without children (see Cohen, 2006), were researched in the United States (Wenger, Dykstra, Melkas, & Knipscheer, 2007), and discovered to be unfounded. DeOllos and Kapinus (2002) suggested that the childfree may come to regret their decision as a result of internalising the negative majority view, as opposed to previous suggestions from other researchers (Nason & Poloma, 1976), who believed that being childfree would cause regret due to loneliness.

According to common belief in the United States, childfree couples are expected to suffer regret as a result of not following the natural path to parenthood (DeOllos & Kapinus, 2002; DePaulo & Morris, 2005), which for some, involves sterilization. However, Campbell (2003) found no evidence from her study of childfree women that they regretted being sterilized. Participants in Mawson's (2006) study acknowledged that they would never know for sure if the childfree decision was the best, which was different from feeling regret, but believed that dwelling on such thoughts was not beneficial. Jeffries and Konnert (2002) found that 22 of the 23 voluntarily childless Canadian women interviewed did not regret their decision to not have children. The one participant who indicated regret alluded to her life as not being important, which is a separate issue from specifically regretting not having children. Morell (1994) asks why Western society assigns emotions such as regret to the childless, and then expects compensatory behaviour (evidence of lack). Her participants rejected the social expectation of 'regret' as being inaccurately ascribed to them.

Harassment and pressure

Responses to childfree people are not limited to stereotyping. In this section, I will review literature discussing the sources and forms of harassment and pressure to have children felt by childfree people. Some forms of harassment and pressure can directly relate to stereotypes. Harassment is not as explicitly pressuring, for example, comments that the childfree person would regret their decision.

There is no shortage of pressuring messages warning childfree women of what they are risking: being alone in their old age with no one to support and look out for them, being filled with regret for the lost opportunity to experience the love of

one's child, of leaving this world and not being remembered or having achieved something that will outlive oneself (Moore & Moore, 2000). Such comments are so commonly occurring that they have been gathered into a 'Bingo card' produced by an artist (Appendix A).

Sources

Whilst a range of people may have opinions regarding the choice to parent or be childfree, whether they share this view may depend, at least partly, on how well they know the person or couple. Couples identified by Nason and Poloma (1976) as 'reasonably committed' to being childfree reported that there was no difference in perceived pressure between the husband and wife, although wives were found to be more aware of pressure from their parents than the husbands. Nason and Poloma's participants also reported that most pressure came from acquaintances, whose relationship to the couple was not considered to be of significance, and, therefore, their view did not have an effect. Similar findings were reported by Somers' (1993).

Cameron's (1997) New Zealand study found a more extensive variety of sources. Participants reported to Cameron that, whilst men were the most common source of negative response or pressure, other sources included strangers, immediate and extended family, friends, colleagues, and the media. Such a variety of sources of pressure and/or harassment to have children could be experienced by a childfree person as a constant and intrusive bugbear. With negative responses being felt from a multitude of sources, how do childfree people respond? Responses from Cameron's participants varied from feeling that the person was rude, jealous, or well-meaning. Vissing's (2002) participants reported that they found it easier to

respond to pressuring comments from strangers than from family or friends, as they could either walk away, which was their preferred option, or confront them.

Disbelief

Expressions of disbelief of the decision to be childfree may be experienced by some childfree people as a frustration, and for others, disbelief can be interpreted as a form of social pressure to change the decision. An example of disbelief from my own experience was being told by a family member that I could not make such a decision about what I wanted independently, and that the decision regarding how many children I wanted to have should not be made before I fell in love with a man and consulted with him. Zabin, Huggins, Emerson, and Cullins (2000) argue that, whilst it is rational to suppose that a woman's partner and her perception of her fertility desires will potentially influence her fertility behaviour, to then void her stated fertility desires on the premise that she cannot know is absurd and offensive. Whilst women who intend to remain childless are commonly disbelieved, Remez (2000) found in her longitudinal follow-up of 2,812 non-hispanic American adults, that expressed intentions did predict the birth rate of each woman.

A longitudinal American study (Heaton et al., 1999), using male and female participants aged between 19-39 years, from the National Survey of Families and Households, found at the six-year follow-up that very few childfree participants had changed their mind. Heaton et al.'s claim that childbearing intentions were unstable was based on the higher-than-expected proportion of participants who, intended to, but did not have children. However, this study has been referred to as evidence that a woman's childbearing intentions, particularly when not wanting to have children, need not be believed (see Morgan, 2001). The continued belief in

such ideas as a maternal instinct shared by all women is one way to account for disbelief of the childfree decision.

Maternal instinct and motherhood

There is clear potential for the popular belief in a maternal instinct to produce social pressure on women to produce children. According to Boyle (1997), Western theorising of the maternal instinct began in the late 19th century with the development of both biological and psychological theories that sought to persuade French women, in contradiction to many of their experiences, that not only did a maternal drive exist, but also that it was an innate, natural, and psychologically fulfilling. Boyle explains that it was the use of psychoanalytic theories of Foucault and the instinct theory of McDougall, which were presented as scientific facts, as the reason why the arguments were very persuasive. Through either neglect or prevention, psychological theories shaped a social construction of non-motherhood as neither a positive, nor a mature decision (Boyle, 1997). By inducing women to believe in the maternal instinct as essential proof of their womanliness, social control of women was established (Hollingworth, 1916/2000).

If one is to adopt the view that women have a biologically-based drive to reproduce, as proposed by Foster (2000), then it could be reasoned that if a woman is without this, then the lack of a maternal drive is either the result of denial (Cameron, 1990), insufficient development (Gillespie, 2000; Hird, 2003), or a fundamental pathology (Gold, 2002; Klepfisz, 1999; Peterson, 1983).

According to research by Wilson (2005), the attraction to and love that one person develops for another person is the result of a biological drive towards the best reproductive match, thereby rationalising the view that those couples not having

children must be either biologically faulty or unsuitable. Another example of fault-finding is the research by Corcos (2003), which pathologises mothers who do not exhibit a keen maternal instinct, and says that this pathology is a contributing factor to the development of eating disorders in their children. The perspective adopted by Corcos serves to blame mothers who are already under much pressure, inhibits women considering motherhood, and continues to maintain the stigma of childfree women, and mothers who do not fit the traditional, motherly stereotype, as somehow faulty and dangerous to be let around children.

The pervasiveness of the belief that motherhood is an important contributor to the maturation of an adult woman needs to be considered for its potential impact on how a childfree woman views herself and is viewed by others (Daniluk, 1999). Furthermore, assumptions that motherhood is 'natural' or 'instinctual', directly determines that mother-related behaviours of women are to be rewarded, and prevention or rejection of motherhood is to be punished (Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Meyers, 2001). Despite the maternal instinct being a social construct (Boyle, 1997), research that refers to a maternal instinct often assumes (see Corcos, 2003; Kinsley & Lorberbaum, 2004; Park, 2005), instead of questions (Movius, 1976), its existence. An assumption or belief in the existence of a universal maternal instinct that drives every woman to desire motherhood, as described by Boyle (1997), is void (Cameron, 1997; Hollingworth, 1916/2000; Vissing, 2002).

Criticism of the maternal instinct construct is not new. Movius (1976) argued that the maternal instinct is a simplistic myth, on which it overlooks the number of

women going to great lengths to terminate pregnancies, the occurrence of child abuse and infanticide, and a lack of distress in those who choose childlessness. According to Nicolson (1999), belief in a maternal instinct subscribes to a biological determinism that discounts the possibility of diversity amongst life goals and skills of women, and serves to pathologise women who struggle with the realities of motherhood. In a similar vein, Klepfisz (1999) criticises the maternal instinct myth as misleading in the belief that the benefits of parenting cannot be found elsewhere, and that it is unfair to describe motherhood as providing a level of meaning attainable by no other means. After doing attitudinal research with undergraduate students in both Australia and the United States, Peterson (1983) concluded that some people believe that nothing a woman can do is able to make her happier than the mother role, even if she was certain that she did not want children.

Fatherhood

Is there societal pressure on a man to become a father? Research that reveals men to be more pronatalistic than women (see Seccombe, 1991), is evidence that men may be pressured to have children. Seccombe found that American men were more likely to want children than women, and also rated the goal of having children as more important than women did. That some males describe having a strong desire to nurture a child of their own (Galvin, 1999), should also serve to indicate that such a parental urge or 'instinct' is not restricted to women, though the origins of this desire for paternity are unknown.

There is considerably less literature and research regarding the social aspects and pressure surrounding paternity and childfree men than there is about maternity and childfree women. Does the ability to impregnate a woman somehow prove a

man's virility, and is this an important concern? King (1986) believes that men have an ego-related urge to recreate, to help continue the human race, and to have someone live on after them. Of note is that neither Galvin (1999), nor King make reference to social pressure. For men, as well as women, numerous aspects of life are interrelated with reproductive decisions and behaviour (Weston, 2004).

Australian men who participated in King's (1986) research expected to have children, but also that their partner would instigate the timing. Appearing to follow the modern shift in thinking that fathers are also important for a child's development, ideas are emerging in regards to how fatherhood plays a maturational function. King also found stereotyping of childfree men as selfish and in need of fatherhood to help them become mature and responsible. Diamond (1997), a psychoanalyst, agreed with the immature stereotype, and suggested that fatherhood facilitated healthy development in males by giving them the opportunity to express their protective instinct. It appears that whilst women were expected to desire to have and care for their children, men were expected to want to protect them.

Limited evidence of an expectation of men to father can be found. Cullen and Grossman (2007) used the term 'men' in place of 'fathers' in several places, indicating that they strongly associated manhood with fatherhood. This use of terminology, according to Cullen and Grossman, is the result of changes in the United States to the social construct of masculinity that they suggested now encompassed more family-oriented behaviours. Seccombe (1991) stated that men in the United States had very little to lose, but much status to gain, from having a child, as the 'family man' label could increase their perceived stability and

reliability, in addition to increasing his economic power in relation to his partner, if she left work. Smith (2004) argued that the importance of family in Western society places pressure upon men to produce children, as men have the responsibility to carry on the family name. Men may now also feel pressure to decide for themselves whether they want children or not, as they can no longer be as certain that a woman they meet will want them (Smith, 2004).

Research aims

This literature review has shown the complex, subtle, and problematic nature of being childfree. There is pressure on childfree people to behave according to socially prescribed 'instincts'. Living as a member of a norm-defying minority without children in a pronatalist society can be a challenge. Common discourse and beliefs found in overseas research regularly invalidate the childfree experience through negative stereotyping and pressuring the childfree to conform to social expectations. The majority of research has been conducted overseas, and therefore cannot be assumed to represent the childfree in New Zealand. However, there are a few reasons to expect that, as in other countries, childfree people in New Zealand are likely to have experienced stereotyping, harassment and pressure to have children: evidence of stereotyping and pressure found by Cameron (1997), discourse in New Zealand of motherhood as an essential element of womanhood (Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000), the fact of New Zealand's fertility rate being higher than other countries (Statistics New Zealand, 2008) in which childfree people have been found to be stereotyped, and the implementation of pronatalist policies in New Zealand (Haar & Spell, 2003).

Because a decade has lapsed since Cameron (1997) published her research about the childfree in New Zealand, I felt it was important to find out whether her findings still held true. In this research I aim to answer the following questions about how childfree people in New Zealand feel they are responded to as a result of their decision:

- In what ways, if any, they feel pressure is on them to have children?
- What stereotyping, if any, do they experience as a childfree person?
- By whom do they feel pressured and stereotyped?
- How have they responded and coped?

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

In order to answer the research aims, this research involved interviewing ten childfree couples, which were followed-up with a focus group consisting of five of the same couples. The design of this study was based on research by Cameron (1997), and researchers in other countries (Gillespie, 2003; Mawson, 2006; Morell, 1994; Vissing, 2002), using interviews to study various aspects of the childfree. This chapter discusses the rationale for the use of this method, detailing the process of participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis.

Rationale

Integral to qualitative methodology is the interpretation of the phenomena being studied by the researcher, beginning with the data sought, and how it is collected (Ezzy, 2002). I wanted to investigate the nature and form of both pressure and stereotyping in New Zealand, from the perspective of childfree people.

Qualitative methods are best suited for doing investigative research, such as exploring people's experiences and attitudes, because they enable the collection of in-depth participant responses (Alice, 2001). To varying degrees, qualitative and feminist research often involves participants in the research process, as a way to recognize and give power to the participants who are sharing their knowledge with the researcher (Ezzy, 2002). Whilst I did not have childfree couples with whom to consult about planning the research, I believe that my own identification as a childfree person provided me with the confidence that I would choose a method that was sufficiently sensitive to their needs.

Because very little information was available about my topic in the New Zealand context, I needed to use a method appropriate for exploratory research, such as in-

depth interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). Face-to-face interviews are a commonly used qualitative method particularly suitable to asking participants about personal experiences (Davidson & Tolich, 2001), which I was aiming to do. Ezzy (2002) argues that the understanding of issues is more sophisticated when the researcher has spent time carefully listening to participants 'voices' during interviews. In-depth interviews recognize the authority of interviewees when talking about their perspective, and are an appropriate means by which individuals, who are assumed to have unique information of value to the research, are invited to share their perspective and experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). In-depth interviews were also reasoned to be suitable as a method because I did not expect to locate many participants.

I sought and obtained ethical approval from the Department of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee acting under the delegated authority of the University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to beginning recruitment of participants. An interview schedule (Appendix F) was developed prior to beginning interviews, to serve as a checklist during interviews of what I sought to know from each couple, and was based upon my research goals and questions approved by the Ethics committee.

Participants

I chose to focus the study on couples because of the social norm and expectation that heterosexual couples who are married, or in a de facto relationship, will have children (Gold, 2002; Ory, 1978). Whilst adults who are single, or in a homosexual relationship, may also experience pressure and stereotyping, including these groups would introduce further layers of complexity which are

unnecessary for this research. Additional differences such as these could have detracted from the exploratory focus on the experiences of heterosexual couples whose primary difference from traditional couples was that they were childfree. I also wanted to find out whether males and females had very different experiences.

I reasoned that deciding to be a childfree couple was something that a couple would discuss and experience together. Enquiry into a shared experience and perspective such as this is regarded by Arksey (1996) as suited to the conjoint interview method. Interviewing couples conjointly has been identified as beneficial as this method can produce data that is more comprehensive, as partners can prompt and fill in gaps left by the other, and the similarities and differences between the understandings of each partner can be revealed (Arksey, 1996). However, seeking clarification of comments during conjoint interviews can be more difficult (Tolich & Davidson, 1999).

Eligibility

In contrast to previous research (Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2003; Morell, 1994; Park, 2005; Somers, 1993), which only acknowledged as childfree those who were no longer able to change their mind and have children, I did not restrict participant eligibility on the basis of age. This research fits with the view of Rovi (1994), that the intention of a person to be childfree, even if they are under 40 years of age, should be sufficient to regard a person as childfree. The age of a childfree person was not expected to determine whether they experienced stereotyping or harassment, though pressure to have children would likely change during the course of one's life. Neither did I limit participation to married couples because marriage is no longer the only recognized or accepted form of committed relationship and the basis for 'family' in New Zealand (Brewerton, 2004). I

reasoned that a childfree couple would not need to be married before experiencing stereotyping or pressure to have children. I excluded couples if either partner had biological children from either the current or past relationships. I expected that the existence of known progeny could potentially reduce the chances of pressures and stereotyping, on the basis that they have had children.

Recruitment

Seeking childfree couples as participants posed an initial difficulty, as there is no common service, network or meeting place for childfree couples in Hamilton, New Zealand. Despite the growth of the childless population, members of this group have been hard to locate (Cameron, 1997). The difficulty in identifying the childfree is that, unlike being able to spot the presence of children, it is not easy to identify whether a person is without children intentionally. While there are a number of settings where one could expect to find parents (e.g. crèches, schools), there are no such settings in which one would expect to find an assembly of the childfree. This limitation makes recruiting childfree participants a challenge, particularly when it has to be done quickly because of time constraints.

Because of this difficulty, I needed to make as much use of snowballing and personal networking as possible. The qualitative nature of this research meant that as I was not seeking to represent the childfree population, I could use non-probability sampling methods (Davidson & Tolich, 2001). The risk in sampling a few people who can provide in-depth responses is that people who contradict the developing theory may not be included as participants (Fife-Schaw, 2000). I posted approximately 20 recruitment flyers (Appendix B) on general and staff notice boards throughout the university campus. A local community newspaper printed an article about my research with my photograph and contact details

(Appendix C). The article was an edited version of a media release I produced for them.

Potential participants who contacted me were informed of the research particulars through an emailed Participant Information Sheet (Appendix D), which contained my contact details for them to respond if they were interested. No remuneration was offered as an incentive. Prior to sending the information sheet, I screened the potential participants to check they met the eligibility criteria I had set. To do this, I asked if they were in a heterosexual relationship, if either of them had had any children, and if they were without children by choice. Four contacts made by potential participants did not result in interviews. Reasons included either living outside of the Hamilton city area, an interview was unable to be scheduled, or they did not fit the criteria.

Ten couples in total were voluntarily recruited and interviewed. Of the ten couples, six contacted me in response to the article in the community newspaper. Three of the couples were recruited through snowballing. One interview was the result of word-of-mouth from the posters around university campus, when a member of staff contacted a friend to inform them of the research project. The recruitment method resulted in participants self-selecting themselves for this study through identifying themselves as having made the choice to not have children.

Demographics

Demographic questions have been examined as profile characteristics of the childfree in previous research, for example, participants socio-economic status (Seccombe, 1991) and educational level attained (Abma & Martinez, 2006; Gillespie, 2000). Whilst the characteristics of the childfree should be of interest

and perhaps useful for understanding more about the parents, through comparison and contrast (Veevers, 1973), they were judged to be irrelevant to the goals of this research. As discussed by Morell (2000), characterizing childfree women by their current status fails to acknowledge the possibility that being childfree facilitates an upward move in a woman's class status, as was claimed by the participants in Morell's research. However, basic demographic information of participants that does not seek to compare the childfree to parents is important to identify.

Participants varied in age, employment, socio-economic status, ethnicity, relationship status, and relationship length. They ranged in age from early 20's to 50's (see Table 1).

Table 1: Ages of participants by gender

Age bracket	Female	Male	Total
20-29	2	2	4
30-39	4	3	7
40-49	3	4	7
50-59	1	1	2

Most participants were NZ European by origin (see Table 2). This may be due to having my photo with the newspaper article (Appendix C), in which I appear to be of European descent. One couple said that my appearance was a consideration for them, suggesting that they perhaps might not have contacted me if I had looked to be of a different culture to them.

Table 2: Origins of participants by gender

Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
NZ Maori	1	-	1
NZ European/Pakeha	7	7	14
United Kingdom	1	2	3
South Africa	1	1	2

Most participants were employed in full-time work (see Table 3).

Table 3: Employment status of participants

Employment status	Number of participants
Student	1
Part-time	1
Full-time	17
Unemployed	1

Participants worked in a variety of occupational areas, with a quarter involved in education (see Table 4).

Table 4: Occupational areas of employed participants

Occupation	Female	Male	Total
Education	2	3	5
Health	1	1	2
Community	1	-	1
Self-employed	1	1	2
Other	3	5	8

More than half of the participating couples were married, and half of the couples had been together for at least ten years (see Table 5).

Table 5: Length of relationship of participating couples

Relationship length	Number of couples
< 2 years	1
2-10 years	4
Over 10 years	5

Data collection and analysis

Interviews

Interviews took place during the period August to October 2007. I organized to meet with each couple for their interview at a time and location to suit their needs, after I checked that both members of the couple were informed of the research specifics and were happy to participate. Interviews were held in either the participants' home, or in a meeting room on the university campus. Some occurred during business hours, some during evenings, and others during weekends. I conducted all interviews conjointly, and recorded them using an Olympus WS-100 digital voice recorder with an additional microphone attachment to reduce background noise. The primary disadvantages of joint interviews, as experienced by other researchers, are having difficulty in recruiting and organizing the couple, and potential for conflict to arise between the couple (Arksey, 1996). Neither of these was noted during the research.

Interviews began with an introduction; I explained my interest in the topic, sought permission to record the interview, reiterated the participants' right to withdraw as explained in the information sheet, and gave them an opportunity to ask questions prior to signing their informed consent (Appendix E). Participants were also given the opportunity to provide me with a pseudonym for themselves, which three couples took advantage of. I used an interview schedule (Appendix F) as a guide for open-ended questions to gently probe when needing clarification and to ensure I covered the topics as best I could. The participants were not given a definition of 'pressure' during the interview, but they were allowed to interpret and respond with examples as they understood it.

Couples were asked to recall and share occasions that they felt pressure to change their decision to not have children, what childfree stereotypes they were aware of, and to talk about how various people responded to their being childfree. When applicable, I prompted the participants by asking them to think about different relationships for examples of people's responses, such as siblings, workmates and friends. Participants were also asked to share their experiences of gender-specific or individual issues they experienced. During the interview participants were given the freedom to raise and explore issues that they found to be pertinent to their being childfree in New Zealand. Interview recordings ranged from one hour to one and a half hours in length. At the conclusion of each interview I asked participants if they were interested in participating in a focus group. Eight of the ten couples responded that they were. I did not request an explanation from the two couples who declined, as I sensed that this could be perceived as unethical pressuring and would put at risk the goodwill evidenced by their willingness to participate in the interview.

As soon as possible after each interview, I recorded personal notes of new ideas that had been raised, a summary of the couple's responses, and points of difference or similarity with my expectations. A verbatim transcription was produced from digital recordings of all but one interview, as after one interview I discovered that the equipment had failed. I transcribed four of the interviews myself, and the other five using a transcription service. Identifying information such as names and places mentioned during the interview, were deleted or changed. Transcripts that I had not done myself were checked against the recording and corrected. As each transcription was completed, it was electronically sent to the participants for them to add further comments or edit if they wished. Four couples chose to exercise this opportunity by changing words to clarify what they meant, fixing grammar, and deleting comments they did not wish to be quoted.

Focus Group

The focus group research method suits being used in conjunction with in-depth interviews, as it can help to clarify and explore ideas in depth, as participants have freedom to discuss and reflect upon issues (Waldegrave, 2001). The focus group method has been identified as a useful method when researching people's experiences and perspectives (Rice & Ezzy, 1999; Waldegrave, 2001). The combination of interviews and focus group allowed my research to investigate both the personal and the shared experiences (Rice & Ezzy, 1999) of pressure and stereotyping of the childfree.

I found very little research that had used the focus group method to discuss the childfree lifestyle (see Park 2005; Mollen 2006). Most researchers had used

individual interviews or questionnaires (see Gillespie, 2003; Maher & Saugeres, 2007; Morell, 1994; Nason & Poloma, 1976). Focus groups are described by Barbour (1999) as sometimes being appropriate for topics that would normally be taboo, as sensitivity to the topic is context-dependant. In this research, I expected that the context of having only childfree people present would remove any social mores preventing a person from critiquing idealisations about parenthood. I also expected to find that, by using participants that I had already interviewed, the rapport I had developed would help me to facilitate a focus group. I had an expectation, based on the ease with which participants shared during interviews and their willingness to volunteer to be in a focus group, that there would be no difficulties getting the interaction necessary for a successful focus group discussion.

The occasion of a childfree couple meeting another childfree couple is not a common experience in New Zealand in comparison to the regularity with which parents can meet other parents. Other countries have childfree organizations that arrange social activities, and there are online spaces, but there is nothing specific to childfree people in Hamilton or greater New Zealand. Of interest to me as a researcher was what topics and discourse would arise in a focus group meeting of childfree couples, and whether this would serve to validate and reinforce the childfree decision of the participants.

Once interviews and transcriptions were completed, I sent out emails to the interested participants asking if they were still interested in further participation as a focus group member. I informed potential focus group participants that although I wished to record the discussion, it would not be possible for them to

edit their contribution afterwards, and I would not identify their comments made during this session. No incentive or compensation was offered to participate. After a fortnight I made another attempt through email to try and establish a suitable date, which also had little response. The lack of response was found to be due to particularly busy schedules of participants at the time, as a few weeks later participants spontaneously replied to my previous email with eagerness and suitable dates. The date, location, and time of the focus group were participant-directed. The address of the meeting was emailed to attending participants two days prior to the focus group, with a brief outline of what I wanted them to discuss (Appendix G).

At the beginning of the focus group, two of the five participating couples identified that they had met other participants previously. However, in both of these cases, the couples had not had recent contact. The familiarity between the participants who knew each other is likely to have helped in creating the relaxed and friendly atmosphere. All five couples contributed refreshments to share with the group, as the hosting couple requested me to invite them to stay for a social BYO afterwards. The location was in the lounge room of a participant couple's home, which may also have facilitated a welcoming, relaxed atmosphere for the discussion. Focus group participants may have also benefited from having support through attending as couples, rather than as individuals. The heterogeneity of participants was expected to aid in the usefulness of the focus group, as a heterogeneous group will more likely produce differing perspectives and discussion between participants, according to Rice and Ezzy (1999).

All participants who agreed to participate in the focus group arrived on time, except for one couple who notified me earlier that day that they would not be attending. All participants consented to the focus group discussion being recorded. I began the meeting by sharing the preliminary findings I had from the interviews. This feedback was designed to give the participants recognition for their input already, and to help establish the discussion focus. The focus group discussion lasted for one hour and forty-five minutes. During this time, participants freely partook of the refreshments they had provided, which they placed beside the voice recorder on a central coffee table. My expectations that participants would feel free from social mores and would easily share experiences with each other, were met. Participants exercised free speech, which was evident in unguarded comments that participants entrusted would be treated in confidence by the group, and in the readiness of participants in sharing personal details and experiences with the group. Three days after the focus group I sent an email to the participants thanking them for their contribution and inviting them to contact me if they wished to share anything further.

Analysis

The data consisted of transcripts and notes made from the ten interviews, and the focus group. The initial analysis of the transcripts of the first two interviews occurred during data collection, and included both inductive and deductive analysis. As recommended by Ezzy (2002), analysis began with formation of ideas whilst I was immersed in the data as I transcribed the first interview. I began with a focus on participants' perceptions of how they were stereotyped and pressured, on account of their decision to be childfree. As I read, I coded comments that I recognised as relating to stereotyping, pressure to have children, who made

comments, how participants felt about people's responses to them, and how participants responded.

I initially attempted to develop a coding framework through relating comments of participants to themes found in literature. However, the framework changed during the analyses because I did not limit themes in the findings to those which were apparent in the literature. I took care to be open to themes as they were constructed by the participants, and thereby allowed the participants to determine the structure of the discussion as much as possible.

I did not feel a need to revise or rewrite the interview schedule (Appendix G) during the data collection, as the focus of the research did not change, and the open-ended questions I developed at the beginning continued to successfully draw answers from participants that were relevant to the aims of the research. Themes were reviewed and clarified as I produced, read, and re-read data from subsequent interviews.

A spreadsheet was produced as a summary of the stereotypes mentioned, and the sources of comments that participants identified as harassment or pressure. This spreadsheet was used as a tool for comparison between the couples, which enabled me to identify commonalities and differences. This greatly enhanced the analysis of the data, as participants' differing constructions of similar experiences enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the issues.

The reading of transcripts proved to be very challenging, as a dual analysis was required. Each interview transcript required to be understood in terms of the

participant couple whose experiences were constructed through the narrative produced during the interview. Additionally, the interview transcripts produced a collective set that needed to be understood as a whole, with both the similarities and differences drawn out.

Some themes included in the discussion, such as culture, though they were not discussed during many interviews, were felt to be of importance. Comments were copied from the transcripts and filed into the most appropriate theme. Whilst reviewing the transcripts and developing themes, I made notes on my reflections on how I was interpreting the information, and how my perspective informed my understanding of what the participants had said.

CHAPTER THREE: SOCIAL CONTEXT AND STEREOTYPES

This chapter will explore and discuss the experiences and views shared by the participants about being stereotyped for choosing to be childfree, and the social context in which this occurs. Discussion will be supported by the inclusion of quotes selected from the interviews and focus group. Participants experienced many similar responses to their not having children, ranging from questions and comments about their decision that were impolite and offensive to idealistic cheers for parenthood. Other responses included shock and disbelief, curiosity, envy, condescension, and disregard. The structure of this chapter is based on two of the four major themes that arose from the data. The first theme to be discussed is the context of the responses to the participants' childfree decision. The second theme is the stereotyping of the childfree.

Context of childfree experiences

Participants talked about aspects of society that they felt were important contextual influences on other people's responses to their decision. These included cultural ideas about family, work-family balance, and social exclusion. Pressure for women to succeed at both work and parenting, and the meaning of children for men, are gender-specific issues that will also be discussed. The final section discusses idealization of parenthood, which serves to portray the childfree as lacking what parents are promoted as having, whilst neglecting to promote the positives of the childfree experience.

Cultural ideas

The existence of stereotyping and harassment felt by childfree couples could be due to a form of cultural blindness. Just as members of the dominant Western

culture in New Zealand are often blind to their own culture (Huygens, 1999) and the privileges they enjoy (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001), the pronatalist aspect of New Zealand culture is often unacknowledged by the majority who perpetuate pronatalist beliefs and benefit from the dominance of pronatalism. For example, Jack described a couple who approached their 'childfree' booth at an expo who:

Couldn't comprehend that we were normal, or life without children... couldn't get their head around the fact that you can actually have a bloody good life without them. (Jack)

The existence of childfree couples who do not adopt the pronatalist ideas, such as Jack and Jill, can be a shocking discovery for some people. The childfree (and childless) are regularly reminded of their difference through the surprise of other people at encountering them, and rarely do they have their situation validated or acknowledged in a positive way. One participant talked about the poor reception she was given when they tried to talk about their choice to be childfree:

I think a lot of the times... if I am trying to have a conversation about why I don't want kids, then they'll see it as an attack on them, [be]cause maybe they had had kids or they want kids, but it is just like... well... actually, this is just my position. (Hannah)

Hannah found that some people took offence when pronatalist assumptions or social norms were challenged. Participants' suggestions about why offence was taken will be discussed later. Disapproval of the childfree choice is not limited to personal interaction, with the arguments for having children being spread through the media:

We have this economist saying (Zidane) '*We need more people to support the baby boomers*' (Zidane & Sara in unison)...

... '*and super-annuitants*' (Sara)

This message was evident in the literature, as demographers and statisticians have problematised people without children (Boddington & Didham, 2007; Weston, 2004).

There are also cultural influences on both the interpretation and importance of children and the term 'family'. In the focus group, the suggestion was made that the importance of family waned in individualist cultures:

A lot of the Pacific cultures have much bigger extended families, whereas Caucasian families have knocked down those [family numbers], getting smaller and smaller until you don't have extended family living together anymore, you don't have that connection between people. So perhaps in some cultures family doesn't mean quite as much' (Male focus group participant)

One participant mentioned that her cultural background impacted on the form and strength of pressures related to having children, and also on how open she felt she and her partner could be with her family about their decision to be childfree:

Being Maori, that's been really interesting. A lot of older Maori women will ask '*Do you have kids?*' And when I say no I've had about three of them put their arm around me and say '*Oh don't worry darling it'll happen*'. And they're automatically assuming that it's because I can't get pregnant or it hasn't happened yet and it's so interesting. I'll say to other people no, we've chosen not to have them, and I'm quite upfront about that. It's not an issue to tell people. But with Maori women it is. Actually Maori men don't ask, but older Maori women will. And I find myself not able to say no I don't want them. I'll just go "oh, yeah" because I don't want that pressure of '*You're Maori so you should want kids even more than Pakeha*'. It's just a different understanding or belief system there that I feel even more pressure from Maori people that there's something wrong with me if we've chosen not to have them, so I shut up. I won't say anything... I wouldn't turn around and go into the reasons why. And lots will ask, won't they? '*Oh, how come?*'. [I feel like telling them] '*It's none of your business*' But you can't say that. But yeah, with Maori people I don't want to get into it because I think [to myself] will I get the lecture '*What's wrong with you girl, you should be doing this*' or.. I don't know what they'd say, but I don't even want to open up that conversation with them. I just smile nicely. (Kelly)

Whilst she admitted that she did not know for certain what response she would get, she felt convinced enough that she would be lectured. Questions from non-Maori did not concern her, yet the expected response from Maori women seems to be a significant issue. She felt unable to tell Maori women that she did not want children, and that it was a private matter. Her inability to say 'It's none of your business' indicates that either Maori were perceived to have a right to enquire, or that cultural protocol prevented her from claiming the topic to be private. Cultural factors that contribute to pressure appear to be an importance of family, and

fulfilling expectations of both wanting and having children. Another participant couple, who migrated to New Zealand, spoke of how parents in their culture of origin reserved full adult status for other parents:

They refer to women who have children, as a 'big lady', meaning that you've only grown up once you have children.... They are definitely of the opinion that we're still kids because we don't have kids. (Andrea)

The influence of culture on pressure and stereotyping of the childfree is an area that needs focused attention in future research, and will therefore be discussed further in the conclusion.

Work

Childfree people can feel pressure at work to take on extra workload and thereby support both the stereotype of being money-oriented, which will be discussed later, and the idea that parenthood is more important and valuable than anything the childfree put their efforts into. This was explained by participants in relation to 'family-friendly' workplace policies, which allowed parents flexibility for childcare, but did not allow flexibility for situations that my participants felt were equally valid.

There's a lot of allowances made for families. For example they (parents)[phone to say they] can't come in [that day] or [parents at work] leave early because there's a problem with a babysitter at home, and no-one raises an eyebrow, and it's just seen as part and parcel of employing people with families and kids. A lot of flexibility and systems work around people with kids. It's less easy to apply or justify in different circumstances.... There are only a finite number of people at work, and some of those are off sick or there's problems with the kids. So it falls on those in the workforce that are still there. It happened just yesterday and it's not infrequent. (Rob)...

And that's irritating. Because I think we're never going to get those sorts of allowances. We couldn't say '*I've gotta finish at three because I'm picking up the kids*' or '*It's sports day so I want the afternoon off*'. We [as childfree people] don't have that. What can you do? (Kelly)

Childfree people can feel that there is a lack of consideration for their needs and wellbeing, and that managers expect them to work harder as the needs of parents

are given higher priority than their own. Stacey, who is self-employed, ruminated on what other childfree people experience:

[this is] what I imagine... if you are in a big organisation and it got to the point where a lot of people were taking time off for the kids, it would be really frustrating if you didn't have children and you are expected to actually cover for it so yeah. (Stacey)

This expectation that childfree people should work longer hours to compensate, whilst parents take care of children was also found by Mollen (2006). Participants believed that they are equally deserving of consideration for their relationships and the demands of having elderly parents, partners, and dependent animals, as parents are for their children. In contradiction to the stereotype of the childfree as focused on career and money, an attitude found by Hird and Abshoff (2000), participants were not wanting to spend a lot of their time at work. Most childfree people work fulltime and pay their taxes to support systems that are used by families with children, such as education, free healthcare for children, free childcare, family benefits and tax cuts. This was perceived by participants as a necessary inequality.

Ange described how the needs of childfree couples were overlooked in favour of parents:

We're seen as not being a family. I think that our relationship is just as important to spend time together, and the fact that we don't have child responsibilities doesn't mean...In other workplaces, expectations on childfree individuals has been really high... [the childfree are] expected to stay there til late, half-past six or seven at night, and yet the people with kids would go home at half-past four for their family. (Ange)

Childfree women have been stereotyped as preferring to put in long hours at work instead of having a family (Hakim, 2003b), whereas, according to Ange, if childfree women are working longer hours, it is not necessarily their choice. Both Ange and Stacey felt injustice in what they perceived as unequal recognition resulting in childfree couples having greater pressure and demands placed upon

childfree people at work in order to compensate for allowances made exclusively for parents. Many, and only, parents are entitled to what are known as ‘family-friendly’ benefits (Gupta, Smith, & Verner, 2008; Haar & Spell, 2003; Postrel, 2000), a fact which identifies that Western society defines family as consisting of a parenting adult/s with child/ren.

What constitutes a family?

It is important to note that previously (see page 54), the term family was used by Rob to refer to a unit comprising parents and children. Rob argues that the use of ‘family’ should not be limited to people with children:

I've a family, and I don't mean to sound trite...[family consists of] our relationship and our cats. That might sound totally ridiculous to people who have kids and that sort of thing, but they are the things that we take care of, and therefore they're family. I don't mean that to be disrespectful to people who have kids who obviously need a lot more responsibility. But when I come home from work this is the family that I come home to. (Rob)

Rob believed that his definition of family differed from the common definition of family:

Society takes a different view doesn't it? It's just historical isn't it? Most people are just used to the family unit being the norm of the wife and kids. (Rob)

As Rob shares, reference to having ‘a family’ is typically referring to having children. Max had a similar response, when I asked him what he understood as being a family:

It's a group. It is not two people. (Max)

Such is the expectation that couples form in order to have a ‘family’ that couples without children can struggle to feel they are recognized by others as a family (Ange, page 55). Ange’s comment also explains that, despite childfree couples feeling that they constitute a family, this is often not recognized as requiring time and energy, whilst families that do include children are recognized in this way.

Social exclusion

Pressure to have children can be indirect, and not necessarily the result, or intention, of one person. One form of this mentioned by participants was social exclusion. Previous research (Nason & Poloma, 1976) predicted that anticipated or potential pressure from parents for a couple to have children may serve to impair the relationship of parents to a childfree couple.

Participants commented that when friends became parents, this would often change the nature of the relationship between them:

There is a divide I think. A little bit of one, because obviously, because their lives change when they have children, they become different, priorities become different. The two aren't very compatible. (Theresa)

This quote from Theresa does show an understanding that a change in the relationship once a friend has a child is not always intentional. All participants raised as an issue the difficulty of maintaining friendships as their peers entered into parenthood. Amy explains:

The friends that we had that did get married, they had their kids [and then] their social life changes. You drift towards people who don't have kids....whereas, if you've got children you have to check with the babysitter. So, you establish for yourself a group of friends that don't have children....You still pick up with those people who do have kids, but it's different (Amy)

The participants understood that parents do not have the same freedom as the childfree, and have more in common with other parents:

It's changed. They (parents) don't do the things with us, because they're not at that space where they want to take the children camping or tramping, you know. Even though we used to do that together. Sometimes that does happen, that it effects your friendship when they have children. Obviously they look for networks who have children. We don't see each other as much as we used to, and that would happen because now they have other priorities. (Andrea)

Andrea was one of the participants who perceived that parents had more in common with other parents, and that having children provided a connection point

that assisted social networking. Even prior to parenthood, the differences between those wanting and those who don't want children can be problematic:

It's difficult for me to relate to someone who really wants to have a kid.....she (her sister) can't really relate to women not wanting kids, because she's so driven by that need to have kids that she finds it difficult to relate to that. You know, that somebody doesn't want kids. (Andrea)

Therefore, as Andrea explained, the childfree can find difficulty in social situations where the majority of that particular group do not relate to or understand them. This difficulty that mothers and the childfree had in trying to relate to each other was also found in previous research (Vissing, 2002). Childfree couples were aware that they needed to be creative and make special efforts in order to have a sense of community and inclusion. For example, Jack talks about how they have been proactive in order to maintain a full social life that includes a variety of people:

[We go to] dinner parties and drinks and whatever, and I mean our focus on life is actually doing that isn't it, in a sense of we like mixing a whole lot of different people together, and having a evening, meeting new people, inviting, you might meet somebody somewhere and you think oh they're nice so you invite them to a dinner party with two or three other people and go from there. (Jack)

Zidane talked about how he made adjustments in order to continue friendships with parents:

When I'm around them (parenting friends) as a family..like I was last weekend...I found myself having to very quickly talk, have a conversation before the kids interrupted. So it would be like..I've just thought of something amusing, [so I would try to] quickly tell it before [one of their children interrupts]...oh no, dammit! A couple of minutes have gone by [before I had their attention again], and it'd be like...'Getting back to what I was just saying, which was very witty and off-the-cuff [at the time]..but now it's all rehearsed so it doesn't count!' (Zidane)

As indicated by Zidane, there is potential for social segregation to occur between parents and the childfree:

I do have this sort of sense that people who have had kids.....they're sort of, like, in their own club. They have this shared body of experience that they can relate to other parents with. (Zidane)

Unlike parents, the childfree do not have children as a connection point with others, and there are no common meeting places specifically for childfree people to meet each other. However, childfree couples were not without people with whom they could socialize:

You hope that perhaps those that chose to [not have children] and those that can't [have children] at least you've got then some people that can actually get together. (Craig)

Friendships with couples who were unable to have children were valued by participants as they shared the commonality of not being parents. One participant related how she and her partner felt socially isolated before meeting another childfree couple through business:

It was quite isolating. Up until that point I thought – are we the only ones out there that don't want kids?' (Female focus group participant)

With little incentive for childfree people to disclose their status, and lack of respect for the childfree choice in pronatalist societies, it is understandable that they also may have trouble locating other childfree people. Childfree couples could benefit from knowing other childfree people.

Kelly talked about how parents have an advantage of social inclusion through their children:

There is immediately something there to connect with, and I've felt that pressure. But I've put it on myself from time to time. I work on my own, and I've thought it'd be so much easier to meet more people if we had kids. Because automatically there's this peer group that we [would] associate with. We've moved backwards and forwards between here and overseas, and times when I've been lonely and thought if we had kids there'd be times when I'd be at the school and there'd be other women there that I could start a relationship with because of the kids. It's handed to you on a plate. ... There's definitely that social thing, I thought from time to time...that'd be easy. A couple of friends of ours have chosen not to have kids, and as the group gets smaller we tend to spend more and more time with them. They start dropping off...and when they get back it's going to be all about the kids. ... It's much harder. They won't or can't come around for dinner. You know. They're busy. Their whole social life ..tends to do different things when you've got a family. So we hang more onto the ones who haven't got kids. We think...oh, we're going to end up with no friends who don't have kids. (Kelly)

Kelly believed that if they had children, their social network could improve, and that their friends who were parents would more likely to include them in social activities. Despite how a friendship changed once friends became parents, no participants suggested that parents were unjustified in shifting their focus towards their children. Some participants felt that friends who became parents sometimes lost the ability to relate to couples without children. As mentioned by Kelly, she placed pressure, or blame, upon herself for not having had children that she expected would have provided access to social relationships. Kelly believed that if she had had children, that they would have assured her of social networking opportunities, and she appears to blame herself for not having the social connections she felt she lacked as a childfree person. In the context of the interview, Kelly did also acknowledge that parenting did not provide any guarantee of social inclusion.

Stacey talked about the social conflict that occurred because her parenting friends had trouble fitting in with her having a childfree wedding:

We lost two good friends when we had our wedding..because we asked people not to bring children to the wedding. I thought it was quite a simple thing ...it was a very small wedding at a place where you didn't want to have kids running around...To me it was unnecessary [to make a fuss about a childfree wedding] and really struck home to me that some people were not going to accept those are the choices that you have made. We had the '*We're not going to get a babysitter*' [response] when we knew they could [get a babysitter]. The other person called us up the day before and said '*We are coming with a child*', and she said '*A wedding is a public ceremony and anyone can attend*'. But I thought that was a real power play...they did turn up with a fluey child and then left partway through...It was the power-play aspect of it that '*We're going to force you to*'...In certain situations, where children don't fit ... It is one thing that I find really frustrating is that people can't understand that. Everything has to fit around the kids. There are some situations where it's not safe or it's not appropriate or it's just not going to work. But there's the insistence that the child still has to be dragged along. (Stacey)

Stacey and Craig were offended that the parents she mentioned did not respect what she and Craig believed to be a reasonable request, and appropriate for their

wedding. As Stacey's story indicates, the childfree can experience great difficulty in trying to maintain friendships with others who are parents. This supports Cameron's (1997) finding that a person's access to social networks is determined by the presence or absence of children.

Childfree choice not recognized as a positive choice

Participants felt differences exist in how the childfree are treated, compared to people having children.

Parents do not always give the same respect to the childfree decision as they receive for theirs, and sometimes assume they are owed. (Female focus group participant)

This comment reveals that sometimes that person felt that they were not treated as respectfully as parents. Participants talked about how people did not show support to them or congratulate them when their decision to be childfree became known:

You get these persistent people [harassing you to have children] so you just bring out all guns [and say] we can't have children. That's great, it is brilliant you know, [but] it just shuts them up... (Michael)

And then (a sad) 'Ohhh' ...(Theresa)

It will either be the sympathy or the 'Oh well, you can always adopt kids then'. (Michael)

I've had that and I think it's irritating that there is a presumption ...I've had people in tears for me because I can't have children, really, it is just awful. No, it's okay you don't have to cry for me... (Theresa)

Those responses are just in line with the rest of the responses: 'You obviously are a woman, [therefore] you want children'. (Michael)

As this example shows, whilst announcements of pregnancy and childbirth are applauded, announcements of sterilization are not. Rather than congratulations, Theresa received sympathy as the recipients of the news of the sterilization could not understand that Theresa and Michael did not want to have children, and that Theresa was happy to be sterilized. As Michael indicated, an assumption that all women want children may contribute to the inappropriate response of sympathy, and a lack of recognition that sterilization can be a positive choice.

Hannah was so convinced that medical practitioners would respond with disbelief or concern, rather than support, that she did not attempt to get the sterilization she wanted:

Hello I would have my tubes tied if you would let me. But I just know that there is not even any point in asking because they won't take me seriously... I know that it would be really, really hard for me [to get the procedure]. I was just reading about this woman [in New Zealand] that really, really needed to have one for like much more medical reasons and she was in like her mid 30's or something like that and they still wouldn't give her one because she hadn't had kids and really didn't want kids and they wouldn't put her on the waiting list. (Hannah)

Reading the account of one woman in New Zealand who had been denied a tubal ligation through the public system, despite the reason being that the ligation was sought to facilitate treatment for abnormal cervical cells (see Culver, 2007), was distressing and irritating for Hannah. A copy of the magazine containing Culver's article was given to me by Hannah. She felt that the struggle experienced by Culver was an example of how society refuses to accept and support women who do not want to have children. The criteria (see Appendix B) used as the reason for refusal was perceived by Hannah to stem from insistence that all women want children, whether they know it or not. This perception is supported by literature (Cameron, 1997; Hollingworth, 1916/2000; Vissing, 2002).

Superwoman and feminism

One common assumption is that, often after marriage, a couple will have children. The female partners of the couples I interviewed were aware that they were being watched at work for signs of pregnancy, as Stacey told of what happened to her:

I still had recently, a bit of a nasty shock when I downgraded, well not downgraded but cut down my hours at my work a bit and going off a few things I was doing voluntarily, positions and that. All of a sudden the rumour started flying that I was pregnant. Then I had to go into damage control, because, like, I am on contracts ... and people just couldn't cope with the fact that you had just decided

to slow down a bit... I never realised how damaging that could actually be someone saying something like that.... Oh I was furious, but yeah that was a really strange one it was like everyone was just watching and waiting a long time and yea especially when you get to a certain age it is like, you know, '*What's the story behind this?*' For God's sake get a life. (Stacey)

Stacey's work depended on winning contracts, and she felt that she would be less likely to win contracts if potential clients thought she was pregnant or planning to be pregnant. In her situation, parenting would not bring the same benefits as those she believed were enjoyed by parents working within an organization (see page 55). Stacey feels there was a stereotypical idea that the childfree did not have the same need as parents for time away from work and to achieve work-life balance.

Ange was even assured by her boss that there was support available by way of allowance for children at work, in case that made a difference to her decision whether to have children or not:

My boss actually said 'If you want to have children you can bring them in here'.
(Ange)

This comment by Ange's employer could be interpreted as disbelief of the decision, which will be discussed further. Stacey believed that there was pressure for women to juggle both children and a career, described by Haussegger (2005) as an impossible task, and Stacey talked about how she perceived the situation as unfair to women and to feminism:

I hate hearing when it is blamed on feminism, feminism was all about sharing the workload. I think there is a lot of woman who are discovering they can't do both [motherhood and employment], and can't do [both] without burning themselves out. It is just not possible. I honestly don't know how they could cope, when they are trying to do both. I think that a lot of really hard decisions have to be made about childcare. I've seen my friends go through the whole thing about '*Oh you are putting your child in childcare, six months old, how dare you*' ..everything they do is judged..probably they get judged just as much as we do but they're in the thick of it. (Stacey)

Whilst Stacey felt the pressure, she felt sorry for mothers who she viewed as struggling or unable to cope with the pressure and judgments of other people.

Theresa also talked about how she felt that feminism was misconstrued, and that some women failed to recognise the choice they had, to do what they really wanted with their life, instead of conforming to gendered roles:

Women are coming home from work, but they are still expected to cook dinner and do the housework... It just amazes me that there are women out there with those (anti-feminist or old-fashioned) attitudes, cause all feminism is, is about choice. That's all feminism is, just having the choice to do what we want and not fitting into that role that was already designed for us. Surely as a feminist you would realize that you choose to have [children or]... you choose not to. (Theresa)

Whether women in New Zealand do hold anti-feminist ideas as Kelly believes, or blame feminism for feeling pressured, as Stacey believes, are topics that require further research. Stacey and Kelly may be right about women holding anti-feminist views, if Haussegger (2005) is correct that instead of feminism increasing choices for women, it increased the expectations of women, which could then lead to women feeling cheated and blaming feminism for the added pressure.

In harmony with Hirshman (2005) and Gillespie (2000), female participants viewed being childfree as simply using one choice that feminism stood for, and found it strange that other women had trouble accepting the choice they made to be childfree, as if it was wrong to not follow mainstream tradition. This perspective held by participants supports the theorizing of Meyers (2001) that the majority of women do not know or understand the reproductive choice they have. Most participants were not critical of those who followed norms, but of those who did not accept other people's decision to not follow the norm of having children. What participants perceived as anti-feminist attitudes, may have been a product of socialisation.

Legacy and paternal desire

Some men in New Zealand do place importance and value on having children as their family legacy, which can lead to pressure on their sons:

A big priority for my uncle too, [it] was important for his son to have a son, to carry on the name, cause he's the only boy in the family on that side. It was very important that he have a boy. (Theresa)

For men who do feel pressure from their family, there are few other childfree men for them to talk with:

Just from the whole wanting kids, point of view you mean, yea, well for me it was just a case of I just don't want them, it is not a case of not liking them, I just don't want them so, yes. For me it is just a pretty clear cut thing but I don't actually know very many guys who are sharing that.. I mean there is just such a small percentage of people that don't want them so you don't get to talk to many guys about other people's versions or ideas on it. (Craig)

Craig believed that childfree men have varied ideas about and reasons for being childfree just as childfree women do. His comment also suggests that he would appreciate having other childfree men for him to talk to about the childfree decision.

With a lot of focus on women in regards to having children, men may find it hard to discuss the decision amongst each other and find support. However, it is important to note that men do think about the decision independently of their partner. Most childfree men rarely initiate talk about the decision amongst other men or to women that are not their partners:

(talking to Michael) You don't have discussions with men about these topics generally, I mean how often have you talked to another guy about wanting kids or when is it a guy asked you '*How come you haven't got any kids?*' I mean I've been asked a lot but it is always women who bring it up, not men. Or a man will say make a comment like that and you just say 'I don't want it' [or] 'I want to..', [and they'll say] '*Fine*', and they'll leave it. (Theresa)

It is true it does get like that, if another guy brings it up it's often yeah..., but I mean I've talked about it with my friends but we're not, I wouldn't call it the standard circle of friends in our society. (Michael)

According to Michael and Theresa, men do not discuss wanting or not wanting children as often as women do. When I asked Peter if he had discussions with other men, and he replied:

Actually, not at all. (Peter)

They always ask me (Andrea)

(Talking to Andrea) They always ask you. Women ask women, but the men never question me. (Peter)

If men discuss the decision less than women, and why they do or do not, is not known for certain.

According to Seccombe (1991) and Galvin (1999), at least some men have a strong urge to have children. Michael and Theresa's perception is in keeping with King's (1986) research in Australia, which argued that men left the childbearing decisions (timing and number of children) to their partners. Rob also believed this from discussions with his friends:

A lot of my friends, as they've got a wee bit older into their thirties or whatever, and as they're finally having families and noticing we're not, a lot of them have said '*Oh, well, I don't really care one way or the other but she really wants them so we're having them*' and '*It's time to sort of pass on the baton*' to someone else. (Rob)

One possible explanation for the ambivalence of men towards parenthood is that, whilst having children has a significant impact upon the life and career of a woman (Haussegger, 2005), women physically carry the pregnancy, and most Western women have control over contraception, most men will not be able to have children unless they have a partner who is willing and ready. If men perceive that the reproductive decisions are controlled by women, then there would be less cause for discussion amongst men.

Whilst pressure to have children from other males may not always be explicit or based on an assumption of hormonal desire and instinct, as can arise when the recipient is female, men do get harassed about the lack of children:

Friends might have joked about it... 'Why can't you have children?' ... 'Are you shooting blanks?' ... I just shrug it off, you know...it doesn't deserve a response. But it's just the way you feel. Some people might feel intimidated by that question or badgering, you know, people joking about it. But I just never felt intimidated by it.
(Peter)

As Peter said, whilst he had been harassed in this way, he believed it did not affect him, and he acknowledged that this badgering could affect other men, depending on how the person receiving such comments felt at the time. In keeping with some American (Cullen & Grossman, 2007; Diamond, 1997), and New Zealand (Cameron, 1990) literature, Peter's friends thought that there was still some importance of fathering or 'potency' to masculine identity. Peter also talked about his father, who he did not recall ever questioning them about having children, yet he had on more than one occasion offered a monetary incentive to do so, despite already having nine grandchildren:

On one or two occasions he did offer an incentive (Peter)

Yes, you know, money for grandchildren. Anyway, it's not worth the money, thank you very much (Andrea)

It's not worth the money (Peter)

Peter's father was already a grandfather, so this was not a case of the father being deprived of grandchildren. The money offered to the couple was seen as a serious offer by the couple, but had no influence upon their decision to be childfree. The reason why the father tried to convince them to have children is unknown, but they know that he did.

Some men also found that friends who are parents have difficulty in understanding that childfree men can enjoy playing with children without wanting their own:

I suppose the more we've had to do with other people's kids the more exposed to them and the more that you see how you get on with them the more you realise actually that you would be quite a good dad if it came to it. So because you think that is it reason enough to go down that route and want to have my own kids? I suppose that's some pressure that you put on yourself. Your mates will make a special point of saying 'look, I've got this and I never thought I'd be good with kids' and he's messing around and they all seem to like him. So I suppose you get some pressure or positive reinforcement from other people. But then there is, you know, when you are seeing lots of kids and playing with them and you seem to get on well with them then people don't see why you don't want your own. That's the real pressure that I've felt. (Rob)

As Rob alludes, initially some childfree people may shy away from having children because of being inexperienced and unsure about children, but that is not the reason for being childfree. Several of my participants were quite happy to develop relationships with children such as their nephews or nieces, which helped to convince the children's parents that they did not necessarily hate children. However, this provided a means by which further pressure could be brought upon them because the childfree couple could be perceived as would-be parents, or in denial of a desire for children. The 'bingo' card (Appendix A) includes a comment based on the idea that the ability to interact well with children is proof enough that the person should have children of their own. The stereotype of childfree people as anti-children will be discussed further in the following section on stereotyping.

There appears to be a gender difference in that men were more likely to be believed when they said that they did not want children. Sometimes, the man has been assumed to be preventing the woman from having children. Andrea relates:

They'll say something like '*Didn't Peter want children?*' Because it can't possibly be a woman who doesn't want children or there must be something wrong. (Andrea)

The idea Andrea talked about, of something being wrong, appears to match the experiences of Gillespie's (2000) participants which she referred to as a discourse of deviance or otherness. Being childfree was a deviation from the norm and

essentialist expectations of what is natural behaviour. This expectation of women to want children was also discussed by Michael and Theresa, who believed that men were expected to go along with their partner's childbearing decision:

It is ultimately a woman's decision, a man can want a child as much as he wants, but unless he's got a woman he is not going to get one, so ultimately [it is] the woman's decision, so if that decision is 'No, I don't think so'. It is, you are still looked at as if there is something wrong with you. (Theresa)

I think guys do get off quite lightly, it is only until you think a guy gets into a partnership, be it marriage or a long term relationship, that they are questioned, but even then it's still... (Michael)

But even [if] you said 'No, I don't want kids', people [would] probably look at you a bit funny and think '*Oh your life will be changed when your wife or your partner wants one*' (Theresa)

Theresa and Michael's discussion is in keeping with King's (1986) findings that men submit to the childbearing decisions of their partner (see page 33). Theresa's last comment is particularly interesting because childfree women have also been expected to change their mind in response to the desire of their partner for children (Zabin et al., 2000).

Rob believes that more men would be happily childfree if it were not from pressure from either their partner or parents:

There's a large number of blokes that would be quite happy not to have kids, but recognise that it's something that their partner really wants, and something that they're not going to be able to get out of, really... I'd be interested in how many fathers there are that either before they started to have a family or once they had a family, if they had the choice of not having to go down that route, because they felt pressure from their father, how many would have been quite happy not to. (Rob)

Having children is described by Rob as something undesirable, yet unavoidable, for men. Rob also shared his idea that he did not feel pressured to have children, particularly in relation to family legacy, by his parents because they were separated. This raises an interesting point about how the family background of a person can affect what is expected of them, including whether there is pressure to

have children or not. Social pressure does exist to exalt and idealize the experience of parenthood, which will now be discussed.

Idealization of parenthood

Participants believed that parenthood has been idealized:

One that personally amazes me.. we have got friends who recently had a child, and they found it really, really hard. The mother said, the mother of the mum said, they didn't know how hard it was going to be and I am like.. how can you have no idea how hard it is going to be having a child? Did you not think about this before you did it?.. It is going to change everything. It is just an absolute rose-tinted-glasses [view] about how it is going to be. Then you do hear people saying afterwards 'If I had known it was going to be like this I wouldn't have had children'. (Stacey)

You don't know until you are in the situation.. but you certainly have to go into it, what is it, eyes wide open, knowing that there is going to be quite a few tough years. There is going to be bugger all sleep for the first few at least and hard times. But if you didn't expect that you'd be pretty rose-tinted. (Craig)

There was concern expressed that parenthood is portrayed and believed to be much easier than it is. Theresa said that proof of parenthood being idealized can be seen 'every time you turn on the TV'. The idealisation of parenthood through the media was discussed in the focus group, with particular reference to the last season of the *Friends* sitcom, and the group unanimously believed that most aspects of family life were romanticised in television sitcoms. Whether parenthood and family life are portrayed idealistically in the media or not is debateable, though if media idealization does occur, the participants did not appear to be feeling pressured or harassed by it.

Idealization makes claims that parenthood is a certain path to happiness and fulfilment, as Max commented:

Well it is like there's mainstream view of how you achieve happiness or whatever in a society and that's a part of the equation, you find a partner and you have kids... and that's just an accepted sort of a thought. (Max)

This idea was repeated by Jill:

I think there is expectation.. I mean people do think that that's how they are going to be fulfilled in their lives [having children]. (Jill)

The popular belief participants are referring to, which is also contradicted by research (see Abma & Martinez, 2006), is that a person will remain unfulfilled so long as they do not experience parenthood. Women, in particular, are expected to find ultimate fulfillment through maternity (Daniluk, 1999). This idealization of parenthood was previously found in Australian research (see Mitchell & Gray, 2007). Participants in this research were also aware of the pressures and difficulties faced by parents, and often heard stories of the unpleasant, as well as the good, experiences of parenthood:

There is some stunning attitudes out there, there really is, ... and I think because we haven't got kids we hear all this stuff that other people wouldn't hear because people wouldn't tell it. There is that whole rose tinted thing about child birth, motherhood. So a lot of these stories don't get told. (Stacey)

Stacey was one of the participants who found that she was unable to view parenthood as something to treasure because she was told the horror stories. Participants gave examples of comments they have heard that reinforce their decision to not have children:

'If I knew then what I know now I wouldn't have had them' ... // they only tell that to us because we don't have kids... it's the unspoken thing you [as a parent] don't say because it makes you sound like you don't love your kids... // people say 'I love my kids to bits but...' // Society... they (people in media) don't talk about parents who have gone through the experience and decided that they really wish they hadn't. It's not something you see on TV or hear about in magazines because people just don't talk about this. (Female and male focus group participants)

This discussion shows that the childfree perceive that parents do not feel free to openly share their negative feelings about the realities of being a parent. Being told a story about the realities of parenthood was not what made participants choose to be childfree, though it may have provided confirmation. Also apparent to the participants, is that in reality, the experience of parenthood does not always match the promised vision. Participants also noticed pressure for parents to be seen as good parents who fulfill social expectations:

I think it is harder now for couples, the pressure on them to have everything and to have a family as well and perhaps women to keep working. I think it is [harder for parents], I don't know how some of them do it really, when you drive around the suburbs and you see mum, dad, and two kids playing in the neighbourhood, you know they have got about a \$300,000 mortgage or whatever it is and you think God...[there is] a lot of pressure on them (Jack)

Sara (see below) talked about how she had more respect for parents who admitted that parenting had downsides. However, when only the positive aspects were used to paint an idealistic portrait of parenting, this hard-sell tactic created skepticism:

We've had several friends that have said '*God, I love my kids, and I would die for them, but if I could go back to where I was before I had them, I'm not 100% certain I would do this route again.*'. So, um, I respect that sort of loving, ambivalent honesty. I [and].. I have more respect for parents who say that, because I don't doubt that they love their kids, and I don't doubt that they would ever give them back, and I don't doubt that children have added wonderful things to their lives, but at the same time, when they can fully express the downside as well, that's good, that's a really full picture of parenting. I'm more sceptical of those who say '*Oh, children are great*', '*Nothing bad about having kids*', '*It's all wonderful*'. (Sara)

The idealistic views of parenthood being perfectly wonderful may help to raise the sense of social value and importance of the role. As Rob and Craig said earlier, and a perspective shared by Letherby (1999) is, that being childfree has not been attributed equal status with parenthood, and therefore pride in the choice has not been as socially acceptable. Rob continued, sharing why he believed some parents talked about parenthood as being better:

There's just slightly a sort of patronising attitude, and maybe it's what you have to believe. Maybe there is something biological that happens that is a genuine comment or maybe it's just something you have to believe to cope with the sleepless nights and difficulties and changing dynamic of the relationship that are a natural part of coming into that situation... So it's just a chance that you take that a child will completely change how you look at life. It's a leap of faith, really. Because there's no turning [back]. If it's all just a bit of PR... we'd rather be making a nice feed or flying off somewhere nice or go off to work doing something you enjoy. (Rob)

Other participants also wondered if idealizations were believed by parents because they provided self-assurance during difficult times, and were more about convincing the parents themselves than the childfree:

People with little kids running around saying '*I love it*'...but I think it would be sad if they believed anything else. You have to make the best of the situation. Even if they can tell themselves that this is the best thing that is cool. (Ange)

As hinted at by Ange's comment, when she specifically referred to parents of young children, idealizations of parenthood are not necessarily shared by all parents.

Comments by participants suggest that they felt pressured to believe in an idealistic perception of parenthood, which participants felt were biased against the childfree. The idealizations of parenthood described by participants as a form of pressure were discussed in overseas literature (Boyle, 1997; Dally, 1982; Mitchell & Gray, 2007), and relate to more than one of the 'bingo' comments. Comments based on beliefs that parenthood is better than caring for other people's children, that parenthood is worth all the sacrifices, that no other job is more important than parenting, and that nothing smells better than a newborn baby, are all identified on the 'bingo' card (see Appendix A) as pressuring comments heard by childfree people. Cameron (1990) describes the higher status ascribed to parenthood, not as a pressure, but as a perspective that, when adopted, negatively forms a person's view of the childfree. The following section reveals, through the experience of participants, how childfree people have been negatively stereotyped.

Stereotyping

The childfree can be a target for stereotyping. The most common stereotype that my participants were aware of was being regarded as selfish. Other stereotypes were that they were immature, anti-children, and too focused on their career.

Childfree couples were also stereotypically perceived to be lonely, and using pets

as child-substitutes. These will be discussed in turn, supported by quotes from participants.

Whilst the stereotypes raised were not exclusively ascribed to one gender or the other, some participants felt that much of the stereotyping was primarily directed at childfree women. Michael believed from his experience that the men in childfree couples are perceived as ‘unwilling participants in the background’, as if they do not choose to be childfree for themselves and discuss this with their partner. One female participant talked about how she felt that stereotypes were more directed at women than to men:

I’ve been seen as a child-hater. I think that we live in a time that is a bit more flexible...I still think, that as a female you don't really feel that way... I think there's this perspective that, for a lot of women who haven't bred, as being quite selfish, money-oriented, you know, that kind of thing. The weirdo cat lady.
(Ange)

Despite increased acceptance of other differences in lifestyles and personal choices, childfree women feel they continue to be perceived negatively. It also appears that in some cases, the couple’s decision to be childfree continues to be attributed mainly to the woman (see Theresa’s comment on page 69). Instead of society celebrating a woman’s strength and freedom to choose to not have children, she is negatively stereotyped.

Selfish

Being called selfish has been a common experience, particularly amongst women participants. Participants referred to the selfish stereotype in eight of the interviews. This stereotype has multiple meanings, and one of these is that the childfree were motivated by an economic selfishness. This stereotyping of childfree couples as selfish and money-oriented was referred to during the focus group:

'You must be rolling in dosh if you haven't had children', and '[You must have] money coming out your ears because you haven't got kids' Financially you do do better, but the bottom line is ...I think people seem to really think that that's the one reason you do it [be childfree]. It's a good side effect but it wasn't the reason. You don't think about it that way. (Female focus group participant)

The benefit of not having the cost of raising children may not be a couple's major consideration in the childfree decision, yet it could be assumed as the motivation and misunderstood to be an indication that the childfree person or couple are overly capitalist, consumerist and individualistic:

I think there's this perspective that, for a lot of women who haven't bred, as being quite selfish, money-oriented, you know...that kind of thing. (Ange)

Participants in Gillespie's (2000) study reported being similarly stereotyped, as a ruthless 'career woman'. Andrea and Peter described how, to their surprise, being a 'career woman' was perceived as negative:

[At a morning tea we were] talking to the priest and his wife. They asked [if we had children], and we said that we don't have children, and the priest's wife said to her [Andrea](in a disapproving, negative tone) *'Oh, so you're a **career** woman'* (Peter)

But in **that** sort of tone *'Oh, so you're a **career** woman'* (Andrea)

As if there's something wrong with it. (Peter)

[I thought] Yes. And? (Andrea)

This interaction shows that there is a negative stereotype of women who choose to focus on a career, and also that women without children are presumed to have made this choice. The stereotypical idea of a career-driven person was described by Zidane:

I guess it's more of a superwoman syndrome. If a woman hasn't had kids it's because she's put her career first, she's good at it. She's made a fortune and she's living the high life and really happy with all these other areas of her life. That's more of the stereotype of a woman who hasn't had kids. It tends to be more of an over-achiever stereotype than anything else. It's the same with men, too. Men who have decided that they're going out to change the world [or] become a millionaire. (Zidane)

This stereotypical view portrays childfree people as primarily focused on the goal of creating great personal wealth, an idea which has already been refuted by other participants. In keeping with the superwoman ideal, as discussed by Twyford

(2008) and Park (2005), childfree women may be expected to achieve more and put more effort into their career because, without the extra effort required by motherhood, routine working is not accepted.

Another connotation of the selfish stereotype is that the childfree person is not taking other people's desires into consideration. Jackie shared an account of a friend who could not have children, despite IVF treatment. When the treatment failed, the couple accepted their fate and adopted the identity of "childfree" to be positive about their life without children. The friend's mother-in-law

[She] turned around when they said that they were going to consider themselves to be childfree, she turned around and told them that they were being selfish cause they weren't providing her with grandchildren. (Jackie)

Another part of this stereotype is that the childfree are self-focussed:

Part of what my sister was saying about me being selfish, [she thinks] it is all about me, [that] I just want to care about myself and don't want to care about anyone else. (Max)

Max's understanding of his sister's comments is likely to be influenced by the sibling relationship, which may be making him perceive more difference and antagonism than there is.

Participants refuted that being childfree was any more selfish than parenting, and referred to parents selfishly having children for the purpose of having them to look after them in their old age. As Craig said, both childfree and parenting couples are looking out for themselves, though with different expectations:

I think it is just a selfishness. There are so many levels, like it is a case of [others thinking] we are just straight out selfish because [as a childfree person] you don't want kids, and then there is like well people with, supposedly looking out for your future, '*What about when you are old? Who is going to look after you?*' [But] what happens if [after having children] your kids decided to fly off to blimin eastern Columbia and live in a blimin mud hut for the rest of their lives now they are not going to support you either. So that kind of fallacy goes out the window. '*What about young grandkids for us?*', or '*What about*' this, that, and the other thing, there is a whole lot raft of stuff, it is a kind of big guilt thing. (Craig)

Craig's comment poses a question of why the childfree are being pressured to feel guilty when parents are also making the choice based on what they want. The implication of stereotyping the childfree as selfish is that parenthood is chosen as a selfless act. Participants questioned the validity of viewing parenthood as unselfish, referring to the selfish motives of some parents as no less selfish than the childfree, which was perceived to be hypocritical:

One of my sisters ..she's the person who I've got the biggest reaction out of and she thinks that I am just selfish .. [because I am] not wanting to have kids and it's a weird rational, it is like she wants to have kids cause she wants kids. She doesn't want kids for some selfless altruistic thing to help society, or help the world.
(Max)

Furthermore, some participants suggested that it was worse to have children for selfish reasons than it was to not have them for selfish reasons, as with the former there are children affected. Some participants perceived the idealisation of parenthood as being a self-protective mechanism:

I think then people get a bit defensive sometimes, and then they try and justify it. It'll either be an insult or '*You're selfish*'. And I think that says more about you than about us. ..You must be feeling threatened by what I've just said. (Kelly)

Kelly believed that parents who thought that parenthood was chosen out of and proof of a person's selfless, socially-motivated goodwill helped parents to cope with the many and ongoing challenges they faced. However, Meyers (2001) suggests that both idealisations of parenthood and motivations espoused by mothers are social myths that were internalised well before they entered parenthood.

Selflessness was evident in this comment by Jill and Jack:

But I think because we haven't got children we have got more time to spend with people, and think of people, because we are not thinking of the family unit. If you have got kids you are obviously thinking of them, doing things with them, you go to sport, you worried about their school results and all that sort of thing. As Jill said, we're not complicated with all that, so we can be there for anybody at any stage. (Jack)

And we have been to, that doors always being knocked on, the phones ring for help and we are here, and we feel that's our purpose is not to actually have had children but to have had other people come through our lives that perhaps need us in one way or another. (Jill)

Jack believed that because they did not have children of their own to be concerned about, that they were able to provide additional support for parents and children of parents that they know. This couple are clear examples of how the childfree use their resources to assist the lives of others. Jack and Jill made efforts to contradict the childfree stereotype as being selfish, and to prove that parenthood is not the only means by which a person can contribute to society.

One participant talked about the satisfaction she had in being able to contribute through her work:

At least we're putting something back because I know we're changing people's lives, with my clients, in a way that's going to have an impact. (Kelly)

This comment suggests that Kelly felt a need to contribute to others in some way, as if this counterbalances being childfree. Whilst Kelly's work provided support to families in need, Sara enjoyed being able to spend her time giving emotional support to her friends who had children:

I don't have kids of my own, but I like kids, so I'm quite happy to talk, listen, give support, and say what little I know about it... when the children have gone to bed and I'll ring mum up and ask 'How was your day?' *'Oh, it was terrible'* ..and give her some proper time, air time. (Sara)

Sara's account portrayed her friendship with mothers as providing support in a way that, perhaps, other parents did not. In their own ways, whether it was personal or professional, participants enjoyed taking opportunities to provide support to parents and/or their children.

Some reasons for the selfish labelling were offered by participants as to why parents would believe that a couple owed it to other people to have children.

These included the parental desires for playmates for their children, for other parents to share parenting experiences with, and for grandchildren to bring status to their grandparents. Whilst some participants wanted deny the attribution of being selfish, this appears to be because either they spend much of their free time and/or resources helping other people, or because they thought it unfair that the motivations of some parents were not also recognised as being selfish.

Immature

Four of the couples commented on being perceived as immature, or less mature than parents. A general belief in the inevitability of parenthood may lead to the conclusion that parenthood is a part of being adult, and is a further maturational step. A friend of Rob had a conversation in front of him about how people without children were frivolous, which he described as:

Probably without meaning to, but I think there's a real sense of elitism... that once you've got kids you've moved onto the next level that no one else understands and you've moved beyond the frivolity of life before kids. ..there's just slightly a sort of patronising attitude. (Rob)

To take this thought further, one can conclude that being without children is less mature or responsible than parenthood. Gillespie (2000) believed this resulted from hegemonic ideological doctrines. Such an idea can be inferred by the childfree from the various comments they received, such as being told that they will change in time, and that having children matures a person. However, a sense of elitism was also present through the focus group transcript, and parts of some interview transcripts, which is in keeping with social group theory (Hogg, 2003). Participants sometimes described parents in a way that revealed that they perceived being childfree as evidence of being superior, for example, they felt they were more questioning, and thereby less susceptible to blindly following social norms.

Zidane believes that society has a checklist of adulthood:

Well, I grew up with that and it's imprinted upon me. Yeah, that, um...that I'm sort of more of a man-child than a man. Because, although I've been in a relationship for ten years, been in a job for ten years, had a mortgage and paid it off, got a house. So, by lots of standards of society I'm an adult. Um....but I don't have kids yet, so I always feel that there's this slight expectation [leading me to feel] that I'm not quite an adult yet. Because, until you have kids, you don't really know what it's like to be a grown-up... Somehow, there's this feeling that ok, I'm sort of like a bit of a playboy.... I've always felt that people who have kids...they've sort of got this slight feeling of looking down on me, like I'm not really grown up in that sort of sense. (Zidane)

Despite taking on the responsibilities typical of adulthood, other than parenthood, Zidane felt that society still perceived him as not reaching full adult status, and that, as suggested by Cameron (1990), some aspect of maturity is associated with becoming a father. In keeping with other findings by Cameron (1990), Zidane also noticed a subtle social hierarchy which occurred when friends entered into a 'parenting club', that Zidane felt appeared to hold itself superior in some way. The stereotype of the childfree as immature appears through the idea of parents being seen as more responsible than they were before they had children, from which some people conclude that the childfree are not as mature as they could become.

Participants could feel that they are being seen as immature because of the disbelief of others and being told that they will change their mind when they get a bit older. The disbelief and expectation that the childfree will change are topics that will be discussed in the next chapter. In effect, the childfree are being told that with the added maturity of age will come a revelation or trigger to prompt them to enter the parenthood stage of adulthood, no matter what they say currently.

So I think people don't seem to see [a childfree person such as myself] as a whole person because you haven't done the whole parenting thing. (Craig)

Craig's comment is evidence that there is a view of parenthood as a completing or maturing life experience in some way. However, it does not follow that because some people become more responsible once they have a child, that couples without children are not responsible.

A participant in the focus group related how they were questioned about having any responsibilities:

[we were asked] *'Why are you bothering to get married? Why are you bothering to buy a house? Why are you bothering to do this because you don't need financial stability because you've got no offspring?'* (Male focus group participant)

This comment suggests that traditional responsibilities expected of adults, such as getting married and purchasing a house, have been associated as being necessary and purposed for raising children. The participants did not associate being childfree as releasing them from a need for stabilizing responsibilities.

Participants were aware that their choice to be childfree allowed them to avoid the responsibilities of raising children, but they did not believe that becoming a parent was an essential catalyst to reach maturity.

One couple talked about how the level of responsibility they each had at work shielded them from perceiving themselves as immature:

I sort of think we live a 20 yr-old lifestyle and that parenthood, I don't think it makes you...I think there's something in it that means you have to behave more responsibly because your whole priorities are changing. I don't know if that makes you more responsible or it's just a change of lifestyle. I don't feel older than I did ten years ago. Our lifestyle is probably better in terms that we're able to do things and get more satisfaction out of life than we did ten years ago, so I suppose we are living a Peter Pan existence, but I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think it would be more disappointing if we had the opportunity to live our life like we do at the moment and with the benefits of not having kids, and didn't make the most of that. And I don't see that as being irresponsible. I think we both have responsible jobs and take responsibility in society. (Rob)

I don't feel like I'm avoiding growing up that little bit more by not having kids. I think because of my job I've always felt like there is responsibility with the work that we do and you have to behave a little bit differently, and there's a whole lot of things you face in your job that other people don't have to think about or deal with. So it's not [only] having kids [that makes you grown-up]...I don't feel pressured that 'Well, you're not grown up yet'. (Kelly)

As Kelly and Rob point out, childfree couples can and do take on socially responsible roles which they believe matured them. However, from Zidane's experience, mirroring the experiences of childfree people elsewhere (see Gillespie, 2000; Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Seid, 2000), some parents may be felt to view the childfree as somehow lacking in experience or knowledge because of their decision.

The idea that parenthood provides maturation and a sense of responsibility did not appear to be of concern to my participants, in contrast to the participants in Ciaccio's (2002) research. This lack of concern may be due to participants not having as many responsibilities outside of their careers as parents do (Rob, page 56).

Anti-children

One of the stereotypes reported by five of participant couples, and found on the 'bingo' card (Appendix A), is that there must be something wrong with childfree people that causes them to not like children:

Especially if you get into a group of people where everybody has children and you're the only one that doesn't have children, [you are] looked at as if there's something wrong with you, [that] you must hate children. (Andrea)

Andrea thought that simply not having children was enough of a deviation from the social norm for some people to perceive her negatively. Whilst the stereotypical image of a child-hater conjures up a person who is unhappy, alone, cold, and excessively strict, which fits previously identified stereotypes of the childfree (Jamison et al., 1979; LaMastro, 2001; Vissing, 2002), I am unable to

assume that was the perception of a childfree person in situations as described by Andrea.

Participants felt it was necessary to explain that their decision to be childfree did not mean that they disliked children:

It's not that I don't like kids. (Jack)

I really like kids..I just don't want to go home to them, 24/7. (Sara)

Sara's comment, whilst denying that she disliked children, also suggests that she understood herself as having a limit on how much contact with children she would enjoy. Participants did not believe the stereotype of disliking children was a characteristic of the childfree.

Most participants had, and enjoyed, ready access to children, either of immediate family members, friends or colleagues.

We've got friends that have got kids, so we haven't missed out on children in our lives, we've had them right through cause all our friends have had kids and they've looked at us as second parents. (Jill)

Therefore, they did not feel that they were missing out on children or that they had made their choice without fair consideration and knowledge of both the joys and effort that parenthood entailed. Amy said that 'There is the assumption that some people make that because I don't have any children I don't like children, and that's not actually true'. This stereotype may be overcome by some, though it is not easy to convince everyone:

It's not an anti-child thing at all. I can appreciate that there are neat moments with kids. Generally, I know that I have been seen as a child-hater in the past, but I think that people are starting to get the idea that I can actually really enjoy them. (Ange)

The reason for this stereotype of the childfree as anti-children, according to Cameron (1990), is a perception that liking, without wanting, children is an impossible contradiction. Participants' comments reflected the argument from

May (as cited in Hird & Abshoff, 2000) that liking children does not automatically translate into a desire to raise one's own children.

One reason why parents could get the impression that the childfree do not like children is because some may be reluctant to interact with babies. But as Stacey explains, the reasons for such reluctance can be complex:

The really terrible thing if you actually do goo over a baby or have fun with a kid, [people would say] '*Oh she is getting clucky*'. That's stopped the last couple of years, but that, I always used to get that. It actually made you stay away from kids and made you not grab the baby and hold it, and you get it all time, and it makes you so self conscious you didn't actually want to have any contact with them. Every time you did it something like that was going to happen... It actually made you really anti after a while, because we used to get that at work it was just a steady stream of people coming in with babies. And everyone was expected [to] goo and gaa which is fine, I'll do it now but I wouldn't do it ten years ago, no way. Just because of the reaction of people. (Stacey)

As Stacey indicated, the automatic assumption that "goo(ing) and gaa(ing)" is a sign of a maternal urge for a baby was enough to make her hold back, and not from a dislike or lack of interest in babies. Therefore, in order to avoid being harassed about being maternal or 'clucky', some childfree women may reject young children, and may then be viewed as anti-children.

Another couple who happily interacted with children also said that they were thought to be child-haters, but that that label was incorrect:

We don't have any objection to children, so long as they're not ours. (Peter)

Peter's comment, in combination with others (Sara page 83, and Ange page 83), suggest that, for some childfree people, they do not like children enough to want full-time contact. Therefore, the stereotype may be a case of extreme categorisation by people as either 'for' or 'against' children, and a lack of understanding by some that children can be liked and appreciated without being desired. Such an interpretation is supported by previous research (Cahill, 2003;

Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Jamison et al., 1979; Mitchell & Gray, 2007). It is unfortunate that social pressure may in some cases contribute to childfree couples maintaining their distance from children as Stacey described, as both can benefit from the relationship. Jack and Jill, as an example, were able to provide mentoring, a refuge and welcome to various children in their networks because of their childfree position.

In summary, this research found no basis for the stereotype of the childfree as hating children. It has also shown that the stereotype can have a negative consequence in inhibiting the formation of positive relationships between the childfree and children. An additional concern was raised by Veevers (1973), who suggested that some people may only have children as a way to avoid negative stereotyping associated with not having children. Veevers (1974) argued that children born in such circumstances would, at best, only receive marginally competent parenting. However, without substantiated evidence, it is unknown how children have been or could be affected by being born to a person who only became a parent to avoid being stereotyped.

Substituting for children

Five couples were aware of, and disagreed with the idea of their pets being substitutes for children. Pets were perhaps spoiled, and valued for their qualities, but were not fulfilling anything more than the desire for animal company:

I have a cat, but I wouldn't be sitting there [to introduce myself to someone] going 'I have no children but I have a cat', because to me the cat isn't a substitute for a child. With the cat, we put the food in the bowl and we go away and we leave it for a weekend. (Female focus group participant)

Theresa also commented that other people thought that their cats were substitutes:

We have two cats and they're our babies. They're our children substitutes apparently. (Theresa)

The quote indicates that Theresa differentiated between treating cats as dependent members of a family, and as substituting for children. The care shown to the cats may have been misinterpreted, thereby causing people to suggest that they were substitutes, which Theresa disagreed with.

Ange elaborated on the difference between pets and children:

With cats, in 15 years, if you got a dud it's no problem. You don't have the same choice with children... Having animals is a completely different choice. You can go to work and leave the dog at home all day. (Ange)

As Ange explains, in agreement with Serpell (1996), her pets are not treated as children or thought of as similar to children. Some, but not all of the participants had pets that they cared for very much, and were jokingly referred to by participants as the children of the relationship. These participants likened how they felt about their animals to parenthood:

Because it is like '*Love my child, love me*'. (Jack)

It is an extension of them. (Jill)

Yea, and I suppose we are the same with our cats. (Jack)

[If] people don't like our cats, I'm like, [then I] don't like them. (Jill)

No but you and I agree, we spoil them rotten. I suppose it is the same principle we put our energy into them. (Jack)

Do people think they're your child substitutes or do you think that? (Interviewer)

Oh we tell them (other people) they are, they're our babies. We always call them the girls. (Jack)

And of course people actually do get confused. Oh, no that's our cats. (Jill)

Yea because [on] our answer phone there for a while, with Jamie and Ursh when they were alive... 'I am sorry Jill and Jack, Jamie and Ursh can't come to the phone at the moment'. But then we like to take the piss out of people like that eh. Yea it was fun. (Jack)

Other participants shared how their pets were considered family members:

I've a family, and I don't mean to sound trite..(inaudible)... our relationship and our cats. That might sound totally ridiculous to people who have kids and that sort of thing, but they are the things that we take care of, and therefore they're family. I don't mean that to be disrespectful to people who have kids who obviously need a

lot more responsibility. But when I come home from work this is the family that I come home to... (Rob)

Maybe I've been lucky with where I've worked and my manager not having kids, and I talk all the time about my cats. But before we had these two [cats], the two that I had previously, when I had to get them put down because they were old, I got bereavement leave. They were fantastic about it. Some of that probably was because I talk all the time about my boys and what was going on. So in my head I thought this isn't any different to someone's child being sick. (Kelly)

Childfree people who have pets can be viewed as in denial about their assumed parental urges. Perhaps this is due to the joking of some couples (e.g. Jill and Jack) that their pets were their babies, or the nurturing and emotional attachment, as described by Kelly, that some childfree people develop for their pets. A point made by both these participants and reflected in literature (Battersby, 2005; Serpell, 1996), is that pets may be the closest thing to having children that some childfree couples experience, but this does not mean that they are substitutes for children, just as pets of parents are not necessarily substitutions for additional children. Some participants referred to the negative stereotyping of childfree women who have several cats as being weird, since this is not applied to women who also have children.

Lonely old folk

A prediction made by other people, and discussed by three participant couples, was that when they got old, they would be lonely and/or without anyone to care for them:

Yea, '*What's going to happen when you get old?*', '*You'll be on your own*'. Your kids could end up living in Timbuktu so what's.. there is no.. that's not a reason. There is no guarantee your kids are going to stay with you, especially these days when there is so many places to go and to go and live. (Judy)

An expectation that, unlike parents, childfree people will be lonely in their old age was also raised by participants in Letherby's (2002) study, who also pointed out that having children does not guarantee comfort and support in ones old age.

Nevertheless, the possibility of loneliness and vulnerability is understood by parents as one of the pitfalls of not having children. Participants understood this comment to be used as a threat because of the implication that a lonely old age would be their future punishment for being childfree.

Rob pointed out how he perceived that parents were selfish for having children in expectation that their children would care for them in old age:

There's lots of good reasons for having kids, but one of them isn't to have someone to change your nappies when you're eighty... (Rob)

The childfree are aware that when they are old they will not have their own children to visit them, but they are equally aware that having children does not guarantee that children will stay close to and visit their parents. None of the participants in this study were elderly, but they were aware that they were predicted to become like this stereotype, and some appeared to embrace it:

'You'll be really sad and lonely' and I turned around and said I'm going to be one of those old women with 50 cats, and it shuts them up, but I probably will be. There have been two or three that have made that comment *'But when you're old don't you want grandkids to come and see you? Who is going to look after you?'* Well how do you know that? You know you can't guarantee that kids are going to look after you. So, that's definitely not a reason for us to do it. (Kelly)

Some participants, such as Kelly and Craig (see page 76), did not refute the possibility that they could fulfill the stereotype, but argued that parents were just as likely to be lonely and therefore they felt the issue was moot.

Participants felt that the stereotype was used by some people as a reason to have children, and they preferred a more self-reliant retirement plan:

'If you don't have kids who will look after you when you get old?' I turn around and say I'll have my mortgage paid, my super-an[-nuation], and I can look after myself. (Female focus group participant)

Whilst participants repeatedly heard comments about them being old and lonely, as if they had never considered their future welfare, they did not believe that being

childfree or a parent was the single determining factor of whether a person would be lonely later in life. Participants did not consider this stereotype, which is included on the 'bingo' card (Appendix A), to noticeably affect them beyond the annoyance of comments and questions.

Chapter summary

The New Zealand context appears to create some difficulties for childfree couples to negotiate. There are cultural ideas and workplace practices that participants believe favour parents over the childfree in some circumstances. Participants also talked about feeling socially excluded. Men and women both have additional pressures from social ideas, expectations, and traditions that can be hard to ignore or act against.

Participants were aware of being stereotyped in several ways. They felt that the stereotypical portrayals of the childfree as selfish, immature, and anti-children were unkind and unjustified. Participants rejected the stereotype of their pets as being substitutes for children, as children are not wanted by the childfree, as well as the stereotype of being child-haters. Participants redefined the threat of being without children to care for them in old age, turning it into a threat to parents that having children is not a fool-proof solution to a comfortable retirement. Some stereotypes mentioned in the literature were not discussed by participants, such as being less loving, as found by Jamison, Franzini, and Kaplan (1979) (see page 21). Several reasons could explain this, including change in social perceptions of the childfree.

CHAPTER FOUR: HARASSMENT AND PRESSURE

This chapter will explore and discuss the experiences and views shared by the participants about being harassed and pressured to have children, and the ways in which the participants coped with these experiences. All participants shared examples of harassment or pressure as found on a 'bingo' card (Appendix A). None of the participants knew about the 'bingo' card, which was produced to collate the common comments heard by childfree people in Canada, and other parts of the world. The existence of this artwork, and its positive reception amongst online childfree communities, indicates the regularity with which these comments are heard, and the commonality between the experiences of childfree people internationally.

Participants described how various people would question their decision, try to persuade them with promises of fulfilment, or warn them of the consequences that they would suffer as a result of not having children. Some were explicitly told that they should be having children, and all were repeatedly in the position of having insensitive and unwelcome comments and questions directed at them from a number of sources, which collectively produces social pressure. The first section of this chapter will discuss the sources of harassment and pressure, then the forms of harassment and pressure will be discussed, and finally the ways by which participants coped will be discussed.

Sources of harassment and pressure

Participants felt that there were a number of people who did not pressure them, and amongst those listed were good friends and some family members. Eight couples experienced pressure from their family, being their parents, siblings,

and/or extended family members. Uncles were, surprisingly, mentioned by three of the couples as attempting to harass them about having children. Brothers were not mentioned at all, whereas sisters were identified by two participants as being persistent in attempts to harass or pressure. Comments made by a sister (Max page 76, Andrea page 58), in context of the full transcripts, appeared to be inflamed through friction of the sibling relationship, which appears to also render the pressure ineffective.

Seven participant couples described one or both sets of parents as accepting their decision, having given them the freedom to live their own lives as they chose, and not pressuring them for grandchildren. Three couples talked about experiencing pressure from a parent, as was the case with Stacey and Craig:

My mum makes it quite clear that had she had, had she been born in a different generation she probably wouldn't have had children. I think she understands it completely. Dad probably does to. They definitely respect our decision, I am not so sure about your (*addressed to Craig*) parents. (Stacey)

My parents are completely the opposite, actually possibly why I don't have kids... 'What about us?', 'What about grandkids?', 'What about your future?', 'What about..' this, 'What about..' that. (Craig)

As experienced by Craig, the pressure felt like persistent nagging, and made parenthood less appealing to him. When parents insist that their childfree children conform, it may result in an increased resistance to having children, as in Craig's example. I noticed that the couples who experienced the more explicit or persistent pressure from their parents were those that were married, whilst the participants in a de facto relationship felt less, if any, pressure from their parents.

As could be expected, many friends they socialized with were not identified as significant sources of pressure or comment. Participants shared with me that

when peers entered parenthood, in addition to a reduction in social contact as already discussed, this could precipitate pressure from the now parenting friend. Unlike friends, new acquaintances, contractors, clients or customers cannot be selected for their acceptance of childfree people, and these are the people identified by some participants as being their primary source of pressure:

Pressure doesn't necessarily come from family or friends. It can come from anyone
(Focus group participant)

Thus, even if a person's family and close friends are all supportive, harassment and pressure can still be experienced regularly through other forms of social interaction, as well as media.

Contacts at, or through, work were common sources of pressure or harassment, being discussed during five of the interviews. Both men and women participants were pressured through a work contact. However, strangers, or new acquaintances were the most common source of pressure or harassment, which were identified by Vissing's (2002) participants as the source that was easiest to cope with. Seven of the couples talked about experiences when people who did not know them made comments or remarks that were felt as pressuring or harassing. People who placed pressure on participants were of varying ages, both male and female, and usually a parent themselves. Further to these external sources, one participant couple talked in-depth about how they put internal pressure upon themselves. The following two sections discuss the ways by which participants felt harassed and pressured.

Forms of harassment

Whilst participants were not specifically asked about harassment (see Appendix G), their responses to questions about being pressured included experiences that,

whilst not acting as direct pressure, the feeling of harassment they caused was felt to be related. My interpretation of how the participants responded to questioning about being pressured is that being harassed is evidence that the participants have been disparaged for acting against the socialized norms of wanting and having children. Harassment refers to comments or responses stemming from an expectation that the childfree person would follow the social norm by having children. This section discusses how people's responses implied an assumption that the participant will/does want children, and disbelief in the childfree decision.

Assumption of desire for children

Participants were keenly aware that they were asked *when* they were going to be having children, rather than being asked *if* they were. This aspect of pressure closely links to other sections such as disbelief and social norms. This assumption appears to be faced primarily by the female participants.

What bugs me the most is that there is a presumption that I am able to have children and that the reason I don't have them is perhaps that I can't have them. ... There is a presumption that I am unable, and it might be really sensitive that I can't, and hello you are barreling into this without really thinking. And there is also the reaction that I have had from a few people when they have found out. I've had people in tears for me because [they incorrectly assume that I want but] I can't have children, really, it is just awful. No, it's okay you don't have to cry for me, I am okay with it. (Theresa)

This experience of Theresa highlights the fact that multiple assumptions are made about childfree women. Firstly, there is the assumption that all women want children, and, therefore, when there are no children, the conclusion is reached that there is infertility (Vissing, 2002), or perhaps a psychological problem (Hird & Abshoff, 2000). The assumption that all women want children, according to Jones and Brayfield (1997), is a result of pronatalism. Secondly, some people assumed that a couple's infertility was acceptable as a topic for open discussion. Thirdly, that a woman without children would (or should) not be happy to be sterilized.

Some childfree people may be unable to have children as a result of choosing sterilization to ensure their decision, or they may even discover that they would be unable to have children if they did change their minds.

Participants felt that people tried to pressure them to change their minds about having children before they ran out of time:

I wonder if in the next few years things will change to '*You're running out of time*', '*Your eggs are getting old*'. Around 27 I started getting a couple of comments around that (that I was getting older)... I think at 25, people start. '*You should be..*' doing something that you're not doing (having children), or should at least be looking for. (Ange)

As pointed out by Ange, having children is a social expectation (Gold, 2002).

Ange describes how, women are expected to at least start thinking about how to achieve their maternal goal of having children by the age of 25 years (Cameron, 1997). Similarly, Rebecca has been told that when she 'hits 30' she'll want children because of the hormonal surges and instinct. Rebecca understood that some people think the decision of when or whether to have children is not up to her, but rather to her assumed natural and unavoidable hormones. As told by Kelly, this pressure comes from others, and internally due to socialization:

I remember when I was twenty-two, during my professional training placements, and my supervisor at the time, she was about 31-32 and desperate for kids. We'd go to the gym at lunchtime and sitting on the exer-cycle, she had this magazine open. On the page where it was open there was a picture of a baby and the woman on the other side started dribbling over it saying '*Look at that beautiful baby*' and I said oh it's just a baby and they turned and looked at me like I was a monster, and said 'What?!' and I said I'm not interested in babies, and I don't want any. They said '*Oh wait, when you hit thirty it's all gonna happen*' and '*Oh we were like you when we were your age*' '*Something will happen and it'll all kick in*'. And I remember waiting when I turned thirty and thinking come on when's it going to happen, and I wanted kids less than when I was twenty-two. It wasn't anything hormonal it was just me and thinking is time going to run out? Will we regret it? Worrying that oh my god time's ticking and do we need to hurry up? But yeah, there's definitely people who've said '*Oh you'll change your mind*' or it was '*When you hit thirty*' or '*Wait til you get married, then you'll want them*'. We've proved them wrong. (Kelly)

Kelly was expected to make a fuss over and desire a baby. When she did not do this, the reactions of the other women suggested that she was viewed as having

said something terrible, which was then dismissed as folly because she had not reached the maturational transformation that would cause her to want a baby. Kelly was told to expect herself to change, which is a belief that a woman who does not want children is immature and does not know her own mind. The incorrect beliefs of others in a universal desire for parenthood caused Kelly to worry and question herself unnecessarily. As she comments, the belief, and not the childfree decision was at fault.

The inevitability and power of this transformation into a woman who wants children was assumed, and led to disbelief of women who protested that they would not change their decision. This patronising disbelief of a woman deciding to be childfree has caused problems. As Stacey experienced (see page 62), when this assumption carries over into the workplace, and employers or business associates treat all childbearing-aged women as mothers-in-waiting, expecting news of pregnancy and a decrease in work commitment, this can inhibit the progress of a childfree woman. Therefore, as it has potential impact on a woman's career, being believed to have made and to be committed to being childfree is important. Childfree people could try to avoid disbelief of employers through self-employment, yet they may still find themselves compensating for business partners who have children, and concerns of potential clients that they could become pregnant and shift priorities.

Disbelief

A belief that women will change their minds could be founded on a related belief in the existence of a biological, maternal instinct or drive, believed to be triggered by one or more factors. A common factor believed to contribute to this is reaching an age when the relevant hormones precipitate a strong desire for children:

What I've found the response has been, is very dismissive. *'That's what you say now'* There's this expectation that there will be this point where all of a sudden my biological clock is going to kick in and I am going to crave babies. Apparently that's what's going to happen...I understand that my position in society, there's a social expectation that I will have children. There are those messages in the media. I just don't buy into them. I suppose there's not so much pressure, as... my choice being dismissed. Especially as I've been coming up to thirty, and hitting thirty, through my employers and people I work with... comments like *'In time...'*, *'Running out of time...'* I don't feel pressured, but disbelieved by my friends and family at times.
(Ange)

The repeated encounters in which others were disbelieving and surprised at the childfree choice could serve to inform the childfree person that after all, there really was no choice as there was only one accepted option. Rebecca said that the response to her had been *'Really? You'll change your mind when you get older'*. People did not believe that Rebecca's decision was permanent, despite the existence of research finding that few childfree people change their mind (see Heaton et al., 1999).

Whilst attending a course, Sara encountered a woman who was so taken aback to hear that she did not want children that the woman responded:

'Oh really? How freaky!'. It was as if it had never occurred to her that someone might feel that way, and she couldn't really get it. (Sara)

If Sara had instead said that she wanted to have children, it is doubtful she would have had the same disbelieving response. The disbelief was perceived by Hannah to extend to the medical field, because of their refusals to allow childfree women tubal ligations to prevent unwanted pregnancies (see quote on page 62). Prior to the current eligibility criteria (see Appendix B), being in a committed childfree relationship was perceived to be an advantage, as Jack's support helped them achieve Jill's sterilisation through private treatment:

They only gave it to us because we both went to the interview. (Jack)

[Be]cause they wouldn't do it, being 30 they were a bit reluctant to go down that track and we really had to be adamant. (Jill)

As Jill points out, they did encounter medical resistance to securing their choice, despite also having mitigating factors. In keeping with literature (Morell, 1994), disbelief was linked to an expectation that they would later regret the decision, as they were expected to change their mind. Gillespie (2000) suggests that this medical gatekeeping of the sterilization procedure has played a critical role in the continuation of the ideology that children and childbearing are central to womanhood.

Female participants could not understand that they could be presumed to not know their own mind at 25 or 30 years of age, yet be taken seriously for every other adult decision such as career, relationship, and financing a mortgage. Participants, especially the women, found this insulting and annoying because the decision to be childfree is singled out from the many other decisions that they and other people make. Participants told me that few couples expressing a desire for children were warned that they would regret it later, even though that was a possibility.

Forms of pressure

The forms discussed include a pressure to have children as a social responsibility, a belief that children are an expected part of marriage, and harassment through an assumption that children are desired, a disbelief in the childfree decision, and pressure to justify or change the childfree decision.

Social responsibility

Participants have been told that 'People like you should have kids' (Kelly, Amy, Ange, Sara), 'If everyone didn't have kids, then the human race would die out'

(Zidane, Tristan), and that 'Children are the future' (Ange, Zidane). These statements, which appear on the 'bingo' card (Appendix A), express the idea that all fertile people within a society have a responsibility to produce children, especially if they have sufficient funds to afford children, or they are particularly conscious of environmental issues:

Part of the reason I don't want kids is because of environmental reasons and because of my politics and stuff like that, and the reaction [from other people] is '*Oh but people like you should be having kids, I mean you are the kind of person that should have kids because you'll bring your kids up to also be considerate about the environment*' and blah, blah, blah and these other things, right? And I am just like no, I really think that there should be less people in this world.. there is this base assumption that people that are more environmentally conscious should have babies or something rather than other families, like, that aren't maybe so well educated or something, rather than them having five kids. It should be people that are environmentally conscious having five kids to raise the consciousness level or something and I am just like.. 'What?!' (Hannah)

Well I got that from my sister as well, she said '*Oh well, you're the person who should be having kids because you care about stuff*'. (Max)

Yeah, yeah I get that heaps as well it is like well what are you going to say next that people that have low education levels should stop breeding or something, cause yea then you just get into a eugenics argument... But yeah it is like '*Oh the intelligent ones yea they should have kids*' It doesn't really sit well with me. (Hannah)

Hannah and Max felt their decision to be childfree was more socially responsible than a decision to have children, because they believed that having a child would have a negative impact on the environment.

Very little literature could be found that discussed pressure stemming from responsibility to one's nation. In the beginning of the 19th century, Hollingworth (1916/2000) argued that concern for population maintenance is the fundamental reason why pronatalist ideologies such as the maternal instinct were introduced. Hannah and Max's environmental concerns agreed with the argument of Veevers (1973), who stated that because of the concerns regarding the population explosion that was occurring, and the pressure this was expected to put on resources, that people should be encouraged to not have children. However,

Veevers (1974) also argued that married couples no longer perceived having children as their responsibility, but as their right. More recently, Cohen (2006) refers to the falling fertility ratio in the United States as being a serious concern due to, amongst other things, worrying national economic consequences of having too few workers to support and care for the elderly population.

During the focus group, participants expressed the view that their being childfree was commendable because they were not adding to the population. Participants raised environmental concerns, which were discussed by Cohen (2006), to counter arguments that they have a responsibility to produce children:

Humans are the biggest pollutants aren't they?..

..In this day and age you're selfish if you do [have children]. This is the first time in history that we have literally overpopulated the planet. Overshot. ...I'm happy that that (not having another human to impact on the environment) is a side effect, because I really like to do everything I can for the planet, but I wouldn't go quite so far as to say I wouldn't have children for that reason. But it comes up as a debate.

The focus group discussion also included mention of a local politician, who is currently the mayor of Hamilton, who had publicised the need for educated couples to have children:

We were contributing to the dumbing-down of society because we were [not having children]...the intelligent ones were choosing not to have kids and the lower [socioeconomic] ones were..

..Bob Simcock said that. It was in the paper about 5 or 6 years ago.

Participants were told that in addition to their intelligence:

I have had thrown at me that '*There is lots of people out there who can't have children*', and as if it is justification for me having them. It is like I feel sorry for them but that's, you know..... Everyone has one [idea] that [because] '*You're bright people, you should be breeding because if you don't then other people will*' ... and it is like, great put that on my shoulders. How is that a reason for having kids? It is just incredible. If you are going to have them, you should really want them for their own sake.
(Stacey)

Suggestions that a couple's perceived ability to have children, in combination with their expected high intelligence, were reason enough to have children, were

not accepted by participants. A similar argument, put to Amy, is that the point of our existence is to reproduce:

My minister, when I was about 16 I had this discussion with him [about] why I didn't want children. He asked me 'Well, why are you here [on earth] then?' [and I replied] well, maybe God has something else in mind for me. He told me I was being presumptuous, and I told him he was being shortsighted. (Amy)

The participants' experiences appear to reveal an expectation that, even if a couple do not want to have children for personal reasons, that they should still have them either for society's sake, which would please the New Zealand demographers referred to earlier, or because it is a person's duty.

Social expectation of marriage

Becoming married, in particular, seems to be followed by pressures and an expectation to have children:

It was just a natural thing that when we got married it was expected within the first couple of years you'd have a kid, it was just the natural procedure. I don't know... everyone did it. It was state of the nation sort of thing eh. A lot of people used to say, or people have made the comment that you got married to have children, that was the idea of marriage. (Jack)

Similarly, Kelly commented:

Once we got married, then people started commenting more. But now they don't. They've just accepted that we're not going to do it. But, yeah, I noticed it when we got married. (Kelly)

The expectation that a married couple will follow in the steps of others to parenthood is still present, despite the growing diversity of alternative lifestyles (Heaton et al., 1999; Macklin, 1981), as some participants discovered. A comment made at Rebecca and Clarke's wedding in 2007 was 'Why did you get married if you're not having children?' People's responses to participants revealed that the purpose of marriage, and long-term relationships, was still perceived to be to have children, which fits with overseas research (Gold, 2002; Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Wilson, 2005), and is evident on the 'bingo' card (see Appendix A). Stacey described it as a 'matching set' that couples collect as per the social norm:

I have this horrible suspicion it is going to get worse as people like, '*Right we've got the house, we've got the car, we've got the dog, oh we need a child*'. And it is this matching set, and I think oh, and you see so many parents who don't actually want to be parents, they want to be friends, they want to be friends with their kids, they want to dress the same as their teenage kids, and I am thinking, it is not what parenting is about. (Stacey)

Participants believed that deciding to be a parent needed to be thought about more carefully than simply following social expectations and norms

Pressure from this expectation arose as people had difficulty in understanding a purpose of marriage outside the schema of social norms for relationships.

But you would expect it.. like.. that if theoretically we were to get married there would be an expectation from the greater society [that we would have children]. (Hannah)

Yeah, well purely because if you are getting married that sort of shows that's almost like the sign of what.. what you want.. yeah. It is almost [that] if you are getting married then there is other things that come along with that. Definitely. (Max)

It is like a package. (Hannah)

Yeah, exactly, yea, get married and yeah, it almost shows.. people think '*Oh they want marriage so why wouldn't they want kids?*' sort of thing. It is just a tradition I suppose. (Max)

As indicated by Max and Hannah, getting married can be perceived as a sign that a couple have adopted the traditional Western relationship norms, which include having children. The tradition of the woman taking on the man's surname when married is another norm that childfree couples may or may not follow:

When we got engaged, there were lots of phone calls backwards and forwards to mum when we were planning the wedding. In one of the first phone calls, I said that I wasn't going to change my surname, and she's quite traditional and struggled with that concept and said '*Oh but what's going to happen when you have kids? Which name are they going to have?*' (Kelly)

Participants, including Kelly, were typically asked *when*, rather than *if*, they were going to be having children. This questioning reinforces the social expectation that children would be forthcoming, and suggests that the person asking has not considered that there is an option to not have children. Jack discusses how he

intentionally plays on the presumption of strangers asking him about having children:

I think people shouldn't automatically presume and the same when I was in travel, when I was working and punters client's would come in and they'd say, '*Oh you have a family Jack?*', and I would say no I don't have any kids. '*Oh I am sorry*', and I used to say Christ don't be sorry for me, I would leave home if we had. Just to shock them, people automatically presume, eh, that cause you have been married a while you've got children. It is just a natural, I suppose I shouldn't be mean to them, because they're only being interested in your life, but they presume that you've got them. (Jack)

A second assumption made, from this example, is that not having children is something to be sorry for. Of noteworthy attention is the shared understanding of the term 'family' that appears to occur, with both parties seeming to interpret it as referring to children.

Expectation of change

Participants became annoyed that some people not only believed that they would change their mind, but also appeared to think that their comments would make a difference to their decision. Participants did not appreciate people who, without knowing them, made comments that showed disbelief and lack of respect for the childfree decision. Questions and comments were persistent from some individuals:

One person who keeps on bugging me about having kids... She would go '*How is Sara? When are you going to have children? ... Why not? ... Oh, but you must have children*', after she's just been complaining about her own kids. She's '*Oh, but if you don't have children then you'll be alone when you're old. Who will look after you?*'. (Zidane)

This quote includes several different ideas behind pressuring, and, in this way, shows the persistence some people demonstrate when questioning a childfree person. If one sort of question appears unsuccessful, as this quote shows, the person may switch to a different form. The ongoing nature of such comments, whether they are from one or multiple people, combines to produce what can be experienced as pressure and/or harassment.

What is surprising to the childfree about people's reactions to their status is that other people think it is any of their business.

Acquaintances or work people, often always it seems to be *'Oh I used to be like you once upon a time, I didn't want children either but oh, I've had mine now and it's the best thing I ever did, so you might change your mind'* and *'It is really good, you should'*, like trying to talk you into it. You can't talk me into it and why are you trying to, why does it matter to these people whether I've got children or not? (Theresa)

Theresa did not understand how the personal and complex reasoning that led them to their decision could possibly be considered a suitable subject of enquiry, particularly from strangers. Childfree women interviewed by Vissing (2002) also spoke of how they felt questions about their choice to be intruding into what they considered to be private business. Participants in my research reported that this type of questioning was perceived to have been intrusive, yet inevitable. The reason people asked why a couple was childfree was often seen by participants as being a result of their lack of consideration of the childfree choice. The normality of having, wanting and talking about children appears to be taken for granted:

There's still a belief that things will change, that you'll... *'It's different when it's your own'*. They say *'Oh, you're missing out on this, and you're missing out on that'*. (Ange)

Apparently subscribing to the belief in maternal instinct, people have concluded that Ange had not thought fully through the decision and that, when she did, then she would change her mind.

When the decision to become a parent is made after much deliberation (or simply when a child is created), this is congratulated. Yet, when the decision to not have children is made, the deliberation and decision are either labeled as faulty or disregarded. It is apparent from my research that the participants have thought carefully about their individual needs and desires in life, and how best to achieve

these in their circumstances. One example is Kelly, who talked about how she expected that children would have a negative impact on their relationship:

I don't want them. We've got a really cool lifestyle and a really amazing relationship. Kids will change that, and not in as much in a positive way as it will be negative. (Kelly)

Some participants knew from a young age that they did not want the family lifestyle they grew up in:

I remember looking at my parents one day and thinking how boring their life was. That is just not what I want for my life. (Ange)

The decision is revisited and reconsidered every so often by some couples:

We just keep making sure in case something changes along the way, and we want to know that once we're no longer fertile to have them, that we thought it all the way through, and didn't put it to one side. (Sara)

Though Sara denied that this self-questioning was a result of other people's disbelief and being told that she would change her mind, the certainty and insistence of other people with this pressure makes it likely to be influential if internalised. The stability of a choice to be childfree, though questioned by others, is supported by Australian research (Qu & Weston, 2004) that revealed that, as a person ages, their desired family size does not increase, but instead, decreases.

Social pressure to change their decision was perceived by a childfree couple as ignorant or insulting. Childfree people do not want anybody thinking that they need to be protected from themselves, whether this is people they know socially or a medical practitioner. A reluctance or refusal to accept a person's right to choose to not reproduce, whether this is based on age or not, is demeaning and unjust.

Justification and explanation of the childfree decision

All participants shared the experience of being asked to explain their decision, which many tried to do. However, one couple said that their explanations were only sought because the real reason was viewed as insufficient:

You can use whatever rationalisation you like why you have kids, or why not to have children. (Sara)

At the end of the day, it all comes down to.. you want to have them or you don't want to have them. That's the real reason. Everything else is just window-dressing. (Zidane)

As Sara and Zidane suggest, attempts at explaining the decision can be difficult. This demand is typified on the 'bingo' card (Appendix A) by the question asking 'Why don't you have kids?' Many participants felt that it was unfair for their decision to be seen as needing justification, and suggested that if people were asked to explain why they wanted children, parenthood would be revealed as more selfish and irrational than being childfree. According to Gillespie (2000), even if childfree do try to explain their decision, the questioner is likely to interpret their response to fit in with current stereotypes.

Participants wanted their decision to be accepted rather than questioned:

For God's sake leave me alone! (Stacey)

As expressed by Stacey's wish, the decision is a personal matter that is often not recognized as such. Stacey's comment was also referring to her wish that inappropriate pressure and questions about her choice would stop, since she was past what she considered to be the childbearing years. One focus group participant relayed how he stepped-in to defend a cousin who was being harassed by an aunt about having children, asking her:

'What's it got to do with you?' (Male focus group participant)

Similarly, but without the forthrightness of Jack, Kelly said that, when asked why she had no children, she thought to herself:

It's none of your business [why I don't have children]. But you can't [actually] say that. (Kelly)

Kelly appears to have accepted that her choice is not something she is able to keep private, or that she can avoid having to try and explain when she is asked.

Self pressure

Ideas and stereotypical beliefs in society, such as those discussed in this research, may contribute further to pressure experienced by a childfree person if they are internalised:

When you first get into a relationship, your family starts putting pressure on you, even subconsciously...after a while they stop, because they see they're not getting anywhere. Then it's your friends when they start to have kids themselves, they start. Then you start putting the pressure on yourself and thinking maybe we're misjudging things and we should be doing that, and maybe I'm being selfish for that, thinking that holidays together and time together and meals out, and whatever we enjoy doing are more important. And then there's the somewhat more philosophical approach, where you start thinking will our lives have been wasted if we don't have kids. We don't have something to hand on to the next generation. What is the point of being on the planet? What is the point of having spent a life on the planet? Are we just there to enjoy what we can over the period of 70-80 years or whatever we've got, or is it a point of investing in something else that will hopefully carry on. We're in a privileged position because we're able to do that. That's the main pressure I feel now, over and above any of the others. When I'm thinking about things that is where most of the pressure comes from. There may come a point in your life when you look back and think well what really was the point of all that. Was all about having nice meals and seeing amazing places or did we really miss the point of the whole thing? (Rob)

Some childfree people may, as Rob did, spend time contemplating what their decision might mean for them in the future. These thoughts appeared to be self-critical and questioning, but not doubting of the decision. Some of these ideas Rob expressed appear similar to comments made by others trying to pressure the childfree into parenting. Despite the social contribution he continues to make through his job, Rob wondered if having a focus on fulfilling personal desires during his time off was sufficient, and whether the point of life may be something beyond the individual. A question seemed to remain with him whether the

purpose of life was to enjoy it as much as he could, or to sacrifice some enjoyment for the sake of investing in something greater.

The concern expressed by Rob seems to show that pronatalist thoughts may be being reproduced through socialization, which needs further study. A commonality between many of the different forms of pressure and harassment discussed by participants, also noted by Park (2002), is an emotional basis of fear. There is fear of regretting the childfree decision, of negative social consequences, of missing out on positive life experiences, of being alone, of a childfree life having no meaning, and that there is something wrong with them for wanting to be childfree.

Of important note is that the participants all spoke of the same comments and questions, as found on the 'bingo' card (Appendix A), some of which have been included in quotes, such as the most common ones: 'Why don't you have kids?', 'You'll change your mind', and 'It's selfish'. Of the comments on the bingo card, only one was not specifically mentioned by participants: 'Children are a woman's greatest achievement!' This may reflect the context of New Zealand where we have had many women well-known for great achievements in politics, business and sports. Some of these women, such as the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. Helen Clark and the former Governor General, Dame Silvia Cartwright, are known to have led fulfilling lives without children, thereby acting as a type of childfree role model. However, this research has found that there is a lot of similarity between the comments heard by my participants, and those heard by childfree people in other parts of the Western world, such as the United Kingdom (Battersby, 2005), Australia (Moore & Moore, 2000), and Canada (Cahill, 2003). As these same

comments are made by and to a variety of people, it follows that the ideas or values behind them are not wholly personal, which was also recognized by participants.

Coping

How do the childfree withstand or cope in situations when they experience the sort of pressures that have been discussed in this chapter?

You've got to have a determination...you've got to believe in what you do and go with it, that's the biggest thing. (Jack)

This advice from Jack was his advice to anyone facing difficulties or a big decision, as he did not differentiate the choice to be childfree from any other life choice a person makes. Jack's attitude reflects those of Cameron's (1997) participants, who did not want to be viewed as having 'an issue' that caused them to be without children, and argued that it was simply a choice.

The participants of this study had a variety of responses similar to those found by Cameron (1997) and Park (2002). One strategy of stigma resistance described by Campbell and Deacon (2006), is that of thinking critically about how the stigmatized group is represented. Participants shared the following during the focus group:

They (parents) think that you don't know what you're doing... //and [that] they can change your mind for the better, I suppose... // [parents] think that what's good for them is good for everyone else. (Male focus group participants)

Participants perceived the people as basing their pressuring comments on incorrect assumptions, which aided in maintaining their belief that their own reasoning was more considered.

Participants offered a number of suggestions as to why they were the objects of pressure and stereotyping, aside from this being a result of socialisation. These suggestions were: that some parents were perceived to be jealous of the lifestyle, did not like their assumptions to be challenged, were seeking self-justification, and believed the childfree stereotypes, discussed earlier, to be true. Previous childfree research participants have also suggested that pressure is due to the envy of parents (Veevers, 1975). Pressure was understood to come from some people because they were sincerely concerned and desired the childfree to join them in the perceived assurance and rewards of the parenting majority:

Parents may think that the childfree do not know what they are missing out on...it's quite condescending or arrogant. They need to understand that other people are, and can be, different. (Female focus group participant)

This perspective was described as frustrating because some of these parents did not appear to the participants to be willing to open their mind to allow for differences in what people need, want and find rewarding.

Tolerance

The perception of childfree couples that they would feel social pressure regardless of their actions reduced the attention they gave to social pressure that they have children, and to pay more attention to their personal needs and reasons for not doing so:

It doesn't matter what it is, somebody's not going to agree with you. //You can't please everybody //.. You don't want kids or...there are pressures on parents of a child that is gay or whatever the case may be, or runs away with some ethnic group that they don't believe in. They've all got pressures haven't they? And we're just one of those subgroups. It's life. (Male focus group participants)

This discussion reveals an understanding of how the responses they experience are not personal, and that the childfree are not alone in receiving disapproval.

Initially, before developing responses to questions that work for them, some childfree women find people's reactions to be upsetting because they do not

understand why they are questioned in detail for being childfree when they do not question the other person's decision to have children:

Initially I used to get a bit disturbed, because I got upset, because I thought [to myself] why do they always think that they have to question me in detail about my decision not to have children? [Be]cause I don't question them about their decision to have children. (Andrea)

This anxiety, also found by Pachankis (2007), may be short-lived. Once the childfree grow accustomed to responding to such questions, as Andrea did, then they can even find questions about their childfree status to be amusing:

We're never intimidated by any questions, or offended. As I said, I was amused by the way people asked questions about it. (Andrea)

Although, a tolerance can take time to develop:

If it was twenty years ago, I could have got quite embarrassed and not known what to say, but now I just don't care. (Female focus group participant)

This comment was said in a way that indicated that she developed confidence, or nonchalance about the questioning and negative responses she had from other people as time moved on, and she no longer sought or worried about other people's approval. I believe that participants developed an acceptance for how they were treated, and for the pronatalism that caused them to be treated so.

Support

Childfree couples can provide a valued form of support and encouragement to each other:

I had an interesting conversation the other night... I went up to see some of my clients... they're a young couple in their early 30's and they brought up the subject they didn't want children because they were going to go overseas. So we got talking, and they were really quite rapt to talk openly to somebody like myself who didn't have kids. It was quite amazing they were just sort of stoked that somebody could talk so freely to them. (Jack)

As this example indicates, they can share amongst themselves their experiences, and reasons for being childfree. That some childfree couples felt able to ignore or be amused by people who ask questions (Andrea, page 110) may indicate that when they are able to access support from others, particularly those who are

childfree, such relationships may act as a protective factor against internalizing stereotyping. However, because they are a small minority, childfree couples do not often (and knowingly) meet other childfree couples from whom they can find support for the decision. One exception, according to Hannah, is within the activist punk community:

I think within the activist and punk community especially, it is really, really supportive... One of my best friends has had a baby recently and she's involved in like the activist punk scene, and because so many people in that scene are pretty anti having kids [because of environmental reasons]... she said '*They made me feel really, really bad for having a baby*'. (Hannah)

The punk activist community appears to be one group in which the childfree could be accepted.

As found in previous research (Barnett & Macdonald, 1986; Rowland, 1982), the opportunity to discuss their feelings about having and not having children is sought and valued:

We went to see a counsellor, and spent a session with her. And the long and the short of it was that I said 'Look', I went in there and I said 'The first thing I'm worried about is that you're going to start pressuring me to have kids, you're going to say "*oh, I've got kids and it's great, and you know, you should consider it*", and she said '*Well, actually, I have one son, and I would never recommend to anyone that they become parents, I love my son, but I hated being a parent. I had one child and I was very clear after that, that's all I wanted*', and she went through her reasons and so on, um, and she said '*I'm not saying this to tell you you shouldn't have kids, but I'm just telling you this so you don't feel pressured*'. And then, she said a lot of stuff that was anti [having children], and I felt better for having talked to her about those sorts of things. I felt quite validated. (Sara)

From Sara's account, we learn that childfree couples do not wish to discuss their decision with a person who will pressure them or not provide a balanced view, and that having their decision respected is both affirming and appreciated. This supports similar findings by Cameron (1997). Ange talked about how being in a relationship with someone who shares the childfree decision is protective:

Maybe having a partner who feels the same way helps a bit too. If he was keen on having kids and my family knew that, I would be getting a lot more [pressure]. (Ange)

In addition to having a supportive partner, having acceptance of themselves as being an individual with needs and desires, and being prepared to live according to what they feel is best for them, is a contributing factor to resisting social pressure:

So there is lots of different sides of the coin.. you've got to live your life and be true to yourself and that's a decision you're making for you, nobody can tell you what's right or wrong. (Jill)

Standing ground

Being prepared for opposition was evident in some responses of participants. For example:

I start to question them and they don't like, people don't like being questioned, you know what it is like, they don't like their underlying values harassed and that's the sort of person I am. If they start harassing me I'll start digging deeper 'Why do you say that?', 'Oh really?' You bounce it back and they don't like that. They shut up. (Michael)

Michael felt there was a need to challenge the majority perspective when his decision was not respected. It is also likely that, in order to make the uncommon decision to not have children, a childfree person would have to have put a lot of thought into it and may be partly prepared for expected opposition:

I'm actually quite proud of being childfree because it's something I have consciously thought out and made that choice. (Female focus group participant)

Sometimes, those who supported the childfree couple in their decision also felt the pressure they were under from others. This led to the supporters trying to respond to the social pressure themselves. An example of this was shared by Jack, relating how his mother responded to questions in a similar fashion to how he had:

I think it was not so much us, the interesting thing was my mum for example, people would say to her constantly 'Oh when are Jill and Jack having kids?', 'When are you going to be a grandmother?' and all that sort of thing. Mum got sick of it didn't she and she came up with the line herself which I was really proud of her. She said 'You realise that some people can't have children?'. That was her answer. (Jack)

And boy did that shut them up (Jill)

That shut them up, but in the early days if anybody ever said anything to me I'd just turn around and say I am sterile and that embarrassed people like hell. Cause

they couldn't answer they didn't know where to go next. But I don't mind about shocking people with things like that, you just say it and they gulp. (Jack)

From what Jack said, it appears that some childfree people have learned that certain responses to questioning about them having children will embarrass the questioner and thereby prevent further enquiry. This technique of faking infertility was discussed by DeOllos and Kapinus (2002). Mentioning sterility usually meant that the conversation was dropped, as discovered by Jack, unlike responding with the truth that children were not desired. However, as discovered by both Michael (page 61), and another participant, sometimes this could backfire:

[using the false excuse of not being able to have children] is a cop-out, and you don't want it to turn into sympathy and pity. (Female focus group participant)

Having questions turning into pity was risked in some situations, depending on the circumstances and their mood.

Participants attributed their resistance to independent and educated analysis, and thereby it was difficult to sway:

I think you need a certain level of education to realize you have the choice to not have kids //I think that the reason that you do have that higher proportion of educated people who don't have children is that to get past that social pressure you've got to have a certain level //You can see clearly what you want to do rather than just what's expected of you. //I think it's fair to say that at university, you come out with a more critical mind than what you went in with. (Male & female focus group participants)

This comment appears to match the coping technique of discrediting the people doing the stereotyping, and fits with the idea that strongly autonomous people are less influenced by social norms, which was suggested by Park (2005). Veevers (1974) suggested that the childfree are well-equipped with strategies to discredit pressure from friends, but that pressures and arguments from authoritative figures, such as psychologists, are not so readily deflected. Participants may not have felt much need for coping or resistance to pressure, as the most commonly identified

source of pressure was that from strangers, or acquaintances, and not from authoritative figures.

If the reported occurrences had meant nothing, how is it that they were so easily and clearly recalled? Despite the assurances of the participants that the events did not affect them, I believe that their responses may well have changed during the intervening time since they were pressured or harassed. Some participants reflected that, as they reached their 40's, the pressures to have children decreased. At this stage of life these participants were no longer in the expected age bracket for reproducing, and were less likely to have peers entering parenthood.

Choosing a different perspective

Rather than accept the view of some that the childfree lifestyle is wrong or ridiculous in some way, my participants thought that it was the arguments and pressure that they are faced from others which were ridiculous. Participants talked about how they perceived parenthood:

One that personally amazes me we have got friends who recently had a child, and they found it really, really hard, when the mother said, the mother of the mum said, they didn't know how hard it was going to be and I am like, how can you have no idea how hard it is going to be having a child? Did you not think about this before you did it? (Stacey)

When Stacey was experiencing pressure or harassment about having children, she mentally recalled such occasions as this, when a parent was heard to talk about the difficult reality of parenthood. Stacey noted that the sources of pressure were typically the same people as those who were shocked and unprepared for the challenges of parenthood. Another participant described parenthood as a risk:

It's like gambling, and there isn't a turning back. (Rob)

Their ideas of entering parenthood as irreversibly entering a lifelong gamble with no guarantees of success or happiness seemed to limit the effects of pressuring

comments. This form of coping can be described as redefining what being a parent and being childfree mean, which Ory (1978) discussed. A negative view (or more awareness of negatives of parenting than of being childfree) helped them to disregard what was said, and perhaps could help to act as a shield against harassment.

Whilst, according to participants, the experienced pressures did not affect their sense of self and confidence in their decision to be childfree, they said that they believed some people were parents because of social expectation and pressure, and not from a decision:

Perhaps sometimes they haven't got the guts to say '*I don't really want children, it's just that society says that I've got to have them. How come you got away from it and I didn't?*' ... //It's justification of their position too... Sometimes it might not have been a conscious decision [to have children]. It's not like they thought I am going to have X number of kids because I feel pressured by society or my parents or something like that. Sometimes it's just '*I never really thought that you couldn't do that, and now I'm really pissed off because you actually did what I didn't do and you've sort-of got what I'd quite like to have if I had actually thought about it*' ... //A bit like sour grapes. (Male focus group participants)

From this discussion, participants appeared to believe that the selfish labelling of the childfree was about the person's reaction to not getting the satisfaction they wanted or expected from having children. The sense of participants having escaped from parenthood appears to provide a form of relief and self-congratulation that nullifies pressure. This discussion shows that the childfree can interpret harassment as jealousy from parents. One explanation for this interpretation of harassment by participants, and in keeping with previous research findings (Koropeckyj-Cox, Pienta, & Brown, 2007), is that childfree people appear to be under no psychological disadvantages and are no less satisfied with their choice and lifestyle than parents.

The way in which participants in this study responded to pressure and questioning varied according to the situation, as was found by Cameron (1997). Some participants coped by learning to enjoy challenging people's assumptions, and were proud of themselves for being more aware of and sensitive to differences in people's circumstances than other people. Some participants appeared unconcerned about social pressure and stereotyping, by not taking it personally (Peter on page 67, and focus group participant on page 110). Similarly, other participants viewed people's responses as simply a reflection of beliefs that were only of concern to them because they perceived them as uninformed (Max on page 70, and Amy on page 100).

As one of the younger participants, Max felt that his age had prevented him from experiencing 'the full brunt' of pressure, as his sister was the only person who he had received negative responses from. Max expected that he would develop a coping method as he got older and experienced more pressure. In contrast, Jack, as the eldest participant, had well-practiced responses and coping mechanisms. Whilst no longer experiencing pressure to have children, he was aware of the pressure and expectations through the assumptions of people he met.

When I asked the focus group, at the end of the session, what the 'negatives' were about being childfree, they unanimously responded that there were none. Though the answer was likely to have been influenced by the supportive and anti-natalist context in which it was asked, this answer may be because participants do not view people's negative responses to them as a part of being childfree. I may, or may not, have received different responses if I had asked the question individually. It is possible that the participants, in order to decide to not follow the

social norm of having children, perceived being childfree in such a positive way, that experiences of stereotyping, pressure and harassment were not considered as having any influence over how they thought or felt.

Chapter Summary

The existence of social pressure to have children, as discussed in the literature review, through socialization of social norms and expectations, still exists in New Zealand. With many similarities to the findings of Cameron (1997), my conclusion is that the experience of childfree people today differs little from experiences of a decade ago. Pressure takes the form of personal questions and comments from a range of personal contacts, for which childfree men and women need to develop coping mechanisms. There may be times when a childfree person experiences a spate of comments or questions, and each occasion has unique contextual factors that can influence the response of the childfree person. The experiences shared by participants show many similarities with researched and self-reported experiences in other countries.

Pressure seems to be focused on those who appear in the likely-to-have-children category, and often comes from people who are not close enough to the couple to know they have chosen to be childfree. The pressures discussed are unlikely to be reduced whilst assumptions continue. Whilst the participants of this study claimed that the pressure they felt had no effect on them and was not significant, particularly as it appears to lessen over time, this is no excuse for the intrusion and lack of acceptance for this personal lifestyle choice:

It's their opinion. This is my life, and I should be able to do whatever I want.
(Female focus group participant)

Participants did not take necessarily offence because they were faced with a different opinion when people questioned the childfree decision, but when they felt that the other person's opinion was pushed upon them.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Previous research revealed that negative stereotypes and pressuring of the childfree exists overseas. This thesis has contributed to this knowledge by confirming the existence of stereotyping and pressure to have children as experienced by childfree couples in New Zealand. The context, sources and forms of harassment and pressure encountered by participants have been described and discussed, as well as how childfree people cope with the pressure they experience. This concluding chapter will present a summary of the findings, my personal reflections, discuss the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for further research. The final section contains my concluding comments.

Summary of findings

The literature review in chapter one revealed that, like other Western countries, New Zealand is currently pronatalist. Pronatalism, in combination with a belief that every woman has a maternal instinct, appears to negatively shape New Zealand society's view of the childfree. Freedom and acceptance of couples to be childfree requires women to be freed from the expectation of maternity, and to be both valued and respected equally with mothers for social contributions aside from child-rearing. This research shows that the goals of liberation and autonomy for women that feminists (Meyers, 2001; Movius, 1976; Snitow, 1992) have long sought, have yet to be realized. I also argue that this reproductive autonomy, whilst of primary importance for women, should also be achieved by men.

This research has found that both men and women feel harassed and pressured to have children. Experiencing life as a childfree person can involve feeling less

valued than parents, disrespected, and marginalized within a pronatalist society. An example of this is when childfree people receive heavy workloads, which are not always offset by pay, due to having to compensate for parents who take time off work to tend to child-related responsibilities and incidences. This inequality was perceived as evidence of their needs being less recognized and valued. A lack of recognition for the social contributions that childfree people make, particularly those they are able to make only because of being childfree, is likely to further strengthen the divide between the childfree and the parents they are (or could be) supporting. The themes regarding the influence of the macro context upon how participants felt stereotyped and pressured were identified by participants to be more noteworthy than I expected to find.

Participants felt that they were stereotyped in several ways, with the most common being regarded as selfish. A belief that there is something wrong for a person to not want children (Hollingworth, 1916/2000; Jamison et al., 1979; LaMastro, 2001; Letherby & Williams, 1999; Morell, 1994), appears to be reflected in participants' comments about the maternal instinct and an expectation of change. Researchers and psychologists need to ensure that their own practices do not contribute to or ignore the stereotyping of childfree people.

Most of the forms of harassment and pressure found in the literature were experienced by the participants in this research. A common experience of participants was being disbelieved, and this appeared to be more of an issue than in previous studies. Feeling disbelieved seems to be closely related to being told that they would change their mind, and a belief that all women have a maternal urge for children. Participants were also questioned about how they would be

cared for in old age without children, which was also found in the literature. Similarly, the experiences of participants with pets were that other people assumed the animals to be substitutes for children. Participants learned to accept and then to cope with comments that pressured and stereotyped them.

Whilst literature discussed pronatalism (Heitlinger, 1991; Hollingworth, 1916/2000; Lisle, 1996; Park, 2002; Snitow, 1992) and maternal instinct (Daniluk, 1999; Ireland, 1993; Kinsley & Lorberbaum, 2004; Nicolson, 1999), these were experienced by participants in terms of expectations, assumptions, and being disbelieved. Interpreting the participants' narratives became complex when I considered that participants could misunderstand the comments made to them, which I was unable to verify without speaking directly with the people who purportedly made these comments. For example, whilst participants reported being viewed as less mature or responsible than parents, there is the possibility that this was actually an aspect of a view that the childfree were 'missing out', found by Ory (1978). Furthermore, literature which reported the perceptions of the childfree (Calhoun & Selby, 1980; Callan, 1985; Koropecj-Cox, Romano, & Moras, 2007; Polit, 1978), could not be directly compared to the perceptions of participants in this research.

Some stereotypes found in the literature were not specifically mentioned during interviews by participants, such as their being viewed as less interpersonally warm (LaMastro, 2001), less happy and as having had a dysfunctional childhood (see Jamison et al., 1979), and as being psychologically unstable (Hird & Abshoff, 2000). This does not mean that they were not experienced, as participants may have simply not recalled such occasions during interviews, or not known exactly

how they were perceived by some people (e.g. 'a look' on page 82). A further acknowledgement to be made, due to the small number of participants, is that these stereotypes may be experienced by childfree people who did not participate in this research. The fact that the participants of this study did not report experiencing all forms of stereotyping found elsewhere does not mean that we can excuse what does occur or not push to eliminate the pressure and stereotypes that have been found to exist in New Zealand.

Depending on how pronatalist a person's social network is, childfree people in New Zealand may find they are required to continually cope with negative responses to their childfree decision. Some participants shared how they could find it tiring to repeatedly be pressured to explain their decision, and feel exasperated that people were unable to comprehend their decision, as exemplified by Stacey (page 92), Andrea (page 11061), and Theresa (page 103). There is the possibility that the current attitudes that stereotype and pressure childfree couples are changing to become more accepting of the childfree lifestyle choices, but such an attitude change would take time, and repeated studies would be needed to confirm if this was occurring or not. This research is evidence that people still have negative perceptions of the childfree, and that childfree people in New Zealand have similar experiences to childfree people in other Western and industrialized nations, such as Australia and the United States. A call for a change in education to reflect and accept growing diversity of lifestyle options, including being childfree, was published in the United States by Macklin (1981), with no apparent effect. More pressure for change is needed than articles in journals which can be relatively unknown and inaccessible to the general public.

From what was found in research both overseas (Gillespie, 2000; Ireland, 1993; Nicolson, 1999), and in New Zealand (Cameron, 1997), there appears to be a prevailing belief in society that everybody has a fundamental desire for parenthood. This belief comes from a combination of pressures: a common belief that normal women have a maternal instinct (Ange, page 86), the disbelieving response of other people to the choice to be childfree (Hannah, page 87), and the perception of pets as child-substitutes (Theresa, page 70). Gillespie (2000) suggested that there were three responses to the decision: disbelief, disregard, and stereotyping as deviant. These were all experienced by participants in this research. In keeping with Mollen's (2006) findings, the childfree women in this study, who did not follow this expectation of having a maternal desire, were stigmatized and questioned by a range of people. All female participants believed that some people thought that there was 'something wrong' with them for not wanting to have children. Male participants appeared to experience less pressure than their childfree partners, but they were not immune to pressuring comments and ideas about legacy and masculinity.

Childfree participants revealed how they experienced a variety of harassing comments, and felt pressured to change their decision, but that there was no pattern as to who would, or would not, do this to them. People with negative ideas about the childfree could sometimes be avoided by participants minimizing contact with them, but this was not always possible. When close family members were a source of pressure or harassment, participants used a variety of means to cope, such as leading the other person to believe there was a fertility problem, making a joke of the comments, ignoring or antagonizing them. For several of the participants in this research, the comments and questions they received were not a

significant concern. The pressure and stereotyping they experienced were perceived as an inevitable part of life for most people and not serious enough to induce them to reconsider the childfree decision.

Whilst the ideas and beliefs about childfree people resulted in participants experiencing similar comments, the people who made these comments were diverse, as was found in previous research (Cameron, 1997; Vissing, 2002). Participants received harassing comments and questions from a multitude of people they came into contact with, such as family members, friends, work colleagues, and strangers (see page 92). Whether a childfree couple was affected by stereotyping or pressure was very contextual. Aside from common influences such as mood and stress-levels, there were several contributing factors to sensitivity. These included: the level of support or acceptance they feel, the amount and type of pressure they feel, who the source is, and the social context of the comment. Of importance was the couple's ability to select people for social contact who did not pressure them. Childfree couples have a need for support and relationships, just as parents do.

Participants used more than one coping technique when responding to comments or questions about their choice, which was also found in previous research (Park, 2005). They may openly challenge the offending assumption or belief of other person (e.g. Michael's comment on page 112), ignore it (as a focus group participant suggested on page 110), or try to explain (e.g. Hannah on page 98). Alternatively, some participants admitted to either allowing a person to think they were unable to have children, rather than by choice (e.g. Kelly on page 53), and another participant told how she avoided contact with babies in order to prevent

anticipated pressure. The personal decision to be childfree can still cause tension when shared; the evidence of this is the difficulties experienced by the childfree in maintaining friendships with people who are parents. This tension, or division, between women needs to be addressed and replaced with respect from both groups for each others' choices.

A value of community psychology is respecting diversity and fighting against marginalization and unfair treatment of minority groups. Childfree people could benefit from increased attention of community psychologists in the form of assistance with reducing the prejudice found by this research. In order to do this, further research is needed to understand why this prejudice, in the form of stereotyping and harassment, occurs.

Personal reflections

As my age approaches the median age of having a first child for women in New Zealand, I am part of a peer group that is entering motherhood. Being a female of almost 30 years old has the potential to make the question of motherhood almost unavoidable in discussions with friends and when meeting strangers. I felt that there was conflict between the belief I developed as a young woman that my body was my own to do with as I pleased, and the social pressure I feel now, that I am supposed to be submitting my mind and body to the social expectations and norms of those around me. I was made very aware that to not show maternal behavior and desire for children did not gain social approval, as it was met with horrified responses and social exclusion. In doing this study I wanted to know if what I was experiencing was normal amongst those in similar circumstances, and how other childfree people coped with the responses they received.

Being childfree was an aspect of my identity that alerted me to the potential benefit of doing this study. In doing this study, I personally benefited from having my identity and feelings as a childfree person validated. I was also very pleased to discover, after the focus group (see Appendix I), that at least one participant also found involvement in this research to be a positive and validating experience. It is feedback such as this, from participants, that informed me that my research was worthwhile. In saying this, I expect that future endeavors and life events which I find myself in will continue to challenge my choice, but I feel this study has helped prepare me for this.

Being childfree also made the data collection and analysis harder. As discussed in the limitations of the research, a more thorough understanding of what the participants said could have been achieved if I had been more observant during interviews of comments that needed clarification from participants. I felt that critiquing the contributions of participants was a challenge, as I wanted to accept what they said without questioning it. I also wanted to unquestioningly accept the image the participants projected, which was as being resilient and independent. The time constraints on this research meant that I could not put sufficient investigation into the validity of the image they projected.

From my own experience of growing up with a mother who informed me that she had not wanted to be a mother, I understand how a child can be affected by being born to a reluctant mother. Obviously, this influenced my view and argument that motherhood should not be pushed upon a woman. I believe that every woman should have the right to do with her life as she sees fit, to not have her options

restricted unjustly or unnecessarily, and that her decisions should be respected. These beliefs have formed the foundation of my passion for research into childfree experiences. These beliefs are individualistic in nature, and have been influenced by my experiences of Pakeha culture.

Some literature included reference to religious teachings as a form of pressure to have children (Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Hollingworth, 1916/2000; Jones & Brayfield, 1997), whilst other literature referred to childfree people as being less likely to identify themselves as religious (Abma & Martinez, 2006; Somers, 1993). Whilst I do understand that some religious beliefs, including those of some Christian groups, may add to pressure, this has not been the case in my experience of being a Christian. Religious ideas seemed to me to be an individual matter and interpretation, which cannot be generalized to an entire religion or to the childfree, in general. Some participants had an idea that comments and questions made to them by people with Christian beliefs were founded from the religious beliefs.

I was aware that I needed to remain open to the possibility of religion being a factor in pressure. My own Christian experience has given me an awareness of the temptation many people have to attribute the interpretations of a few individuals to everyone who shares that belief system, and I wished to avoid doing this. My bible study has lead me to understand that not everyone is called to fulfill the same roles, and that human society functions best when acting together as the different parts of a human body. I view parenting as one of such roles that some, but not every person, is intended for.

I consider that the many environmental problems associated with the overpopulation of humans in the world would mean that a decrease in the human population would be good for the planet. I have heard the argument in discussions that humans have a natural instinct to breed in order to support the continuance of the human race. Human extinction due to failure to reproduce (see Rotblat, 2002) is not something I worry about, or believe can continue to be used as a rationalization for maintaining the human population growth rate of the last two centuries.

The comments and experiences of harassment that participants shared with me did not come as a surprise. My perception of being perceived negatively and stereotyped was validated and confirmed through hearing accounts similar to my own experiences, from participants, and in literature. I also found that by developing a more informed understanding of these social interactions, through academic research, I have improved my ability to cope with these responses, and my appreciation for the value of research.

Limitations and recommendations

The data collected during this research was limited by my limited skills in undertaking in-depth interviewing. During the interviews, there were comments made by participants that should have been referred back to for clarification. At times, I personally related to what the participants were saying, and found myself slipping into a more empathetic role than was good for the research. At the time, my belief that I understood what they meant was really only my interpretation, and was coloured by my own experience. One such example is when participants spoke about a 'look' they were given (e.g. Theresa, page 69; Andrea, page 82).

Other occasions when asking for clarification would have been beneficial included when Rob was referring to parents as having a patronising attitude (page 79), and when Zidane related how he felt particularly harassed (page 102). A deeper understanding of the participants' ideas and responses could have been achieved had I been more critical of what I was hearing.

The small sample used in this research was a limiting factor. A large sample can create generalisable data, and allow for comparisons between groups (Fife-Schaw, 2000). A larger participant group may have increased generalisability, but at the expense of focus, and depth. Restricting the study to a limited age range may have allowed for depth whilst not requiring an impracticable number of participants. It is also important to remember that large samples of childfree participants have been identified as being difficult to achieve (Cameron, 1997).

The method I chose, to interview couples conjointly, may have had an effect on the participants and data. I may have had very different results if I had not restricted the study to couple interviews, or to people in a heterosexual relationship. More people may have responded if I had asked for individual interviews. Individual interviews may also have allowed differing perspectives of each person to be shared without being influenced by what their partner has already shared, and some participants may have shared personal feelings or experiences more fully or in a different way if their partner was not present.

Future research

Future research could be produced with half of the couples in a younger age group, and the other half in an older age group, which could enable exploration of possible differences in pressure experienced by age cohorts, such as types of

questions asked of them, and effect of stereotyping. Future research should also include experiences of childfree couples over sixty years old, and ask whether they felt bothered by being asked about assumed grandchildren, or whether they were lonely and regretful as per the stereotypical expectation.

Future research may benefit from more time spent interviewing participants, perhaps over two interviews or combined with individual interviews, to enable a more thorough clarification of comments. Asking participants to keep a diary as a record of people's responses for a period of time could also be useful to reveal how regularly participants felt pressured. I did not ask participants to give an estimate of when responses and comments reported by participants occurred, to establish how recent the examples were. A longitudinal study could also be quite useful to investigate how pressure can change over a lifespan.

Some cultures may be more prone to pressuring for children than others.

I am not able to make cultural statements on the basis of my one Maori participant's experience. However, in keeping with the importance of community and family in non-Western cultures such as Maori (Herbert, 2001), these would be likely to place more pronatalist pressure on their members than do individualistic Western cultures. Research into cultural aspects of pressure to have children is an important area for future study.

There are multiple avenues that future research could take that could be useful in supporting the development of greater understanding of childfree experiences and perspectives. Research could not be found that investigated the media, what impact it has on the childfree and how media are involved in stereotyping of the

childfree. A particular lack of research also exists into the ideas and experiences of childfree men. Furthermore, research could include family members and friends of childfree persons, to better understand their social context.

No current research exists that discusses the views that parents in New Zealand hold about childfree people, and how these are constructed. Understanding this could help to know what attitudes or beliefs need to change. Another question worth asking in further research is how parents justify or explain the pressure and stereotyping experienced by the childfree. There are also implications for research that is not specifically focused on the childfree.

Policy and practice

It is important for research on the childfree to be from a perspective that is not prejudiced against them. Childfree people want to be understood, but above all, to have their choice accepted, validated, and believed. Childfree people do not want to feel harassed or treated as having less value than parents. Ways to improve acceptance of the childfree lifestyle need to be found and implemented. For this to happen, discourse in media surrounding the choice to have children or not needs to be balanced by fair representation of the childfree option. Support for the childfree choice by the medical profession also needs to increase, by way of increasing choices and access to safe and long-term contraception for women.

Veevers (1974) suggested that implementation of anti-natalist policies, such as providing economic bonuses for people without children, could serve to change social attitudes towards and legitimize the childfree choice. Such a move would need to be managed carefully, as anti-natalist benefits could reinforce the stereotypical perception of the childfree as being materialistic and selfish. Whilst

government funding (e.g. for IVF treatment), and workplace policies (e.g. flexible hours and maternity leave) are developed to meet the needs of families with or wanting children, the needs of childfree families should also be recognized and addressed. Childfree families do need support through policies to assist them to manage work-life balance, access to and funding for sterilization procedures and long-term contraceptive measures.

Concluding comments

Parenthood is not a role to enter into lightly. Participants appeared to be more concerned about how pressure resulted in other people, who did not specifically want children, having children because it was expected. Participants suggested that parents and potential parents carefully evaluate their own intentions and reasons for having children before judging those of the childfree. The choice to remain childfree may be perceived by some people as taking the selfish and easy option in comparison to parenthood, but this does not justify ill-treatment of the childfree. Behavior that is simply following a social norm, because the alternative is not recognized or viewed positively, risks creating problems. If the choice to not parent is met with negative stereotyping, and harassing pressure, then there is a risk that some people will be pressured into parenthood with negative consequences for them and their children.

The childfree choice appears to still be little known or understood. Greater awareness is needed amongst researchers, and society in general, that being childfree is an option, and that there is great diversity amongst the people who choose it. Women's preferences are not homogenous, but very diverse, as international research suggests (Hakim, 2003a). Therefore, the labeling of

childfree people as selfish, immature, and destined to regret their decision, is not supportive or accepting of diversity. I conclude from this research that childfree people in New Zealand are a minority group who are at risk of a form of marginalization.

The childfree may not be faced with pressure and stereotyping every day, but they should not be experiencing it at all. Some stereotypes may have a basis, in that some childfree individuals are selfish, dislike children, are very career-driven, or they treat pets as if they were their children. Yet, parents can also be selfish, very career-driven, and abuse children. Stereotyping of childfree people as different from parents contributes to social exclusion. Differences can be recognized without being used to divide or devalue. I believe it is reasonable to argue that the decision to be childfree should be respected and valued equally with the decision to parent. The findings of this research should be of concern for feminists who seek to free women's identities from their sexual reproductive role. A view I share with Cassidy (2006), Hird and Abshoff (2000), is that allowing women to be pressured to have children is akin to subscribing to the belief that a woman's primary function and identity is centered in her sexual reproduction, and to prevent women from having the freedom of choice.

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APPENDIX A
Breeder Bingo Card

<h1 align="center">breeder bingo</h1>				
It's different when it's your own!	Your child could grow up to cure cancer!	People like you SHOULD have kids!	You were a baby once, too!	What about the family name?
Who will take care of you when you're old?	What if your parents hadn't had kids?	The only reason to get married is to have children!	It's all worth it!	The biological clock is ticking!
You'll change your mind!	If everyone didn't have kids, the human race would die out!		But the Bible said, "go forth and multiply!"	You forget the pain of labor and birth!
People who don't want kids are selfish!	You aren't a real adult until you have kids!	Children are a woman's greatest achievement!	Don't you want to give your parents grandchildren?	It's the most important job in the world!
What's the matter, don't you LIKE kids?	The children are our future!	Don't you want genetic immortality?	Nothing is better than "new baby" smell!	Aren't you curious to see what they would look like?
WHY	DON'T	YOU	HAVE	KIDS?
b	i	n	g	o
<small>http://7deadlysinner.typepad.com</small>				

APPENDIX B

Criteria for Sterilization

GYNAECOLOGY

National Clinical Priority Assessment Criteria (CPAC) Sterilisation Procedures

Patient ID: Complete patient details or place patient sticker here	
Nat. Hospital No.: _____	Consultant: _____
Name: _____ D.O.B. ____/____/____	Name of Assessor: _____
Address: _____ _____	
Date of Assessment: ____/____/____	

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td colspan="2">Age of female</td></tr> <tr><td>30 years or younger</td><td style="text-align: right;">5</td></tr> <tr><td>31 -35 years</td><td style="text-align: right;">10</td></tr> <tr><td>36 years or older</td><td style="text-align: right;">15</td></tr> </table>	Age of female		30 years or younger	5	31 -35 years	10	36 years or older	15		COMMENTS	
Age of female											
30 years or younger	5										
31 -35 years	10										
36 years or older	15										
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td colspan="2">Number of live children</td></tr> <tr><td>0</td><td style="text-align: right;">0</td></tr> <tr><td>1 - 3</td><td style="text-align: right;">5</td></tr> <tr><td>More than 3</td><td style="text-align: right;">10</td></tr> </table>	Number of live children		0	0	1 - 3	5	More than 3	10			
Number of live children											
0	0										
1 - 3	5										
More than 3	10										
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td colspan="2">Unplanned pregnancies</td></tr> <tr><td>Nil</td><td style="text-align: right;">0</td></tr> <tr><td>1</td><td style="text-align: right;">10</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td style="text-align: right;">15</td></tr> <tr><td>3 or more</td><td style="text-align: right;">20</td></tr> </table>	Unplanned pregnancies		Nil	0	1	10	2	15	3 or more	20	
Unplanned pregnancies											
Nil	0										
1	10										
2	15										
3 or more	20										
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td colspan="2">User contraception</td></tr> <tr><td>No contraception difficulty</td><td style="text-align: right;">0</td></tr> <tr><td>User contraception difficult (irrespective of cause)</td><td style="text-align: right;">25</td></tr> </table>	User contraception		No contraception difficulty	0	User contraception difficult (irrespective of cause)	25					
User contraception											
No contraception difficulty	0										
User contraception difficult (irrespective of cause)	25										
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr style="background-color: #f2f2f2;"><td colspan="2">Medical History: Health risk impact due to potential pregnancy</td></tr> <tr><td>No identified health risk</td><td style="text-align: right;">0</td></tr> <tr><td>Health problems that increase health risk during pregnancy (mild)</td><td style="text-align: right;">10</td></tr> <tr><td>(moderate)</td><td style="text-align: right;">20</td></tr> <tr><td>(severe)</td><td style="text-align: right;">30</td></tr> </table>	Medical History: Health risk impact due to potential pregnancy		No identified health risk	0	Health problems that increase health risk during pregnancy (mild)	10	(moderate)	20	(severe)	30	
Medical History: Health risk impact due to potential pregnancy											
No identified health risk	0										
Health problems that increase health risk during pregnancy (mild)	10										
(moderate)	20										
(severe)	30										
TOTAL		<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px; border: none; border-radius: 50%; background-color: white;" type="text"/>									

National Guidelines for using the National Sterilisation Clinical Priority Assessment Criteria (CPAC)

General comments and directions

- These sterilisation criteria apply to both female and male sterilization. In the case of male sterilisation the female partners age, user contraception and medical history are to be considered.
- All sections of the form should be completed including particulars of diagnosis, procedure intended and the outcome of the assessment.
- Select one score only from each category from the options provided.
- The score should be calculated during the consultation, and the patient informed of their eligibility or otherwise for publicly funded treatment.
- If there is a conflict between generally accepted clinical practice and the decision made by comparing a patient's criteria score to the threshold, then generally accepted clinical practice should prevail. Do not adjust the total score but make comment in the box provided as to the reasons why the clinician considers that this patient is an exception. This must be clear so that CHE administrative staff are aware that the clinician has overridden the threshold score and will book the patient in for surgery. It is expected that the number of exceptions will be very small and these exceptions may be audited from time to time.

More than one procedure

Where two or more *related* procedures are contemplated at the same session (for example, under the same anaesthetic) then the score should relate to the most significant procedure. If the procedures are unrelated then a separate score should be determined for each procedure.

“User contraception” section

User contraception difficulty is irrespective of cause and may, for example, relate to:

- either the woman or her partner
- inability to use other forms of contraception
- unsuitability of other forms of contraception
- adverse reactions or allergies

APPENDIX C:
University Recruitment Poster

Childfree (by choice) Participants Wanted

MSocSc Thesis Project

When *Man + Woman* ≠ *child*: Resisting the parenthood pressure

Requires participants that are;
Couples who choose not to have children



The research aim: to explore experiences of social pressure to have children and stereotypes faced by couples who choose to be “childfree” (e.g. as being selfish).

What will be involved: an interview of approx. 1 hour

For an information sheet please contact;
Theresa Riley (c/- Department of Psychology)
tmr18@waikato.ac.nz
University (07) 838 4466 ext. 6619
Or Mobile (021) 0360557

Community Newspaper Article

Checking out the childless

CHILDLESSNESS is increasing in New Zealand, according to the 2006 Census, and Statistics New Zealand predicts that one in four women born in 1975 will remain childless.

Childlessness encompasses people who have delayed, cannot or have chosen not to become parents.

Waikato University Masters of Social Science student researcher Theresa Riley said forgoing parenthood put a person in little-understood minority group. Such individuals and couples could be subjected to scrutiny and judgment.

"I want to know whether voluntarily childless people in Hamilton experience the same expectations and pressures as (are) found elsewhere.

"People may have trouble understanding why someone would not want to have children. As a result, voluntarily childless people are commonly asked to explain their de-



THESIS RESEARCH: Theresa Mary Riley PICTURE: Shane Morton

cision, despite the private nature of the subject.

"Previous research found that parents place pressure on their adult children to produce grandchildren, and that not having children was seen by others as a sign of being selfish, anti-child and refusing to 'grow up'."

Ms Riley said there was no typical reason for the decision to not have children. "Reasons may include work instability or commitments, having no desire for children, lack of family support, or acknowledgement of unsuitability for parenthood.

"I would like to be contacted by voluntarily childless couples who would like to be interviewed."

Volunteer childless couples can contact Theresa

Riley via email tmr18@waikato.ac.nz, phone 021-036-0557 or Waikato University 838-4466 ext 6619.

HAMILTON PRESS, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2007

APPENDIX E

Participant Information Sheet

Resisting the parenthood pressure: When *man + woman* ≠ *child*

Participant Information Sheet

What is the project about?

The project aims to explore the pressures and stereotypes experienced by couples who have decided to remain child-free. I would like to identify the extent and types of such experiences faced by heterosexual couples in New Zealand who make the conscious choice to not have children.

Who is the researcher?

I am a Masters and Postgraduate Diploma (Community Psychology) student based in the Department of Psychology at the University of Waikato.

The procedures will be subject to the approval of the University of Waikato's committee on ethical conduct of research.

Why am I being asked to participate?

You can contribute to the project by sharing your experiences in relation to others' reactions to your decision to remain childfree. I invite you to do this in either an individual meeting (as a couple) and perhaps in a focus group discussion with other child-free couples, if you would like.

What will I be asked?

I would like to discuss;

-Expectations or pressures (e.g. from family/'in-laws', colleagues and friends)

-What stigma or stereotypes affect you and/or you are aware of

-Differences in other's reactions to your decision (e.g. their sex or age)

What will happen to my information?

After the interview I will send you a copy of the interview transcript for you to comment on before I use it. I will include an analysis of what the group as a whole tell me in my thesis report. Later, I may use the information to publish articles in journals. The information you provide may be stored for up to 5 years for the purpose of publishing academic articles.

Will we be interviewed together?

Ideally, yes. The interview will be arranged at a time and location that suits you both.

Will other people know who I am?

Only the other members of the focus group should you choose to attend one. In writing up my report and later articles, I will refer to participants only by their chosen pseudonym. I will omit or disguise potentially identifying information as much as possible. However, while I will take all possible care in protecting your confidentiality, it is possible that you may be recognised by some readers. This might happen, for example, if somebody that knows you well reads the report.

What if I agree to participate and then change my mind?

You may stop the interview at any time. Any information recorded about you will be returned or destroyed.

How can I find out about the results of the study?

I will send you a short summary of the project results – if you so wish.

Who can I speak with about my participation in this project?

If you have further questions or concerns, you are welcome to discuss these with myself or my supervisors. Contact details are below.

Will I be asked to sign anything?

Yes. Before you begin, the interviewer will ask you to sign a consent form acknowledging that you have been adequately informed about: a) the study, b) what you are being asked to do, c) what will happen to your information, and d) your right to withdraw without being disadvantaged or penalised.

What do I need to do now?

If you would like to participate in the study, please contact me. Let me know if you would like to participate in a focus group discussion or not. I will negotiate a time and place to meet with you both at your convenience.

The Researcher and Supervisor contact information:

Theresa Riley, c/- Dept. of Psychology, University of Waikato, PB 3105, Hamilton. *Phone* 07-838 4466 ext 6619 (or 021 0360557) *Email* tmr18@waikato.ac.nz

Prof. Jane Ritchie, Dept. of Psychology, University of Waikato, PB 3105, Hamilton. *Phone* 07-838 4466 ext 8402 *Email* psyc0123@waikato.ac.nz

Dr. Neville Robertson, Dept. of Psychology, University of Waikato, PB 3105, Hamilton. *Phone* 07-838 4466 ext 8300 *Email* scorpio@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX F

Consent form

University of Waikato
Psychology Department
CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT'S COPY

Research Project:

When man + woman \neq child : Resisting the parenthood pressure

Name of Researcher: Theresa Riley

Name of Supervisor: Neville Robertson

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee.

Participant's

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

University of Waikato
Psychology Department
CONSENT FORM

RESEARCHER'S COPY

Research Project:

When man + woman \neq child : Resisting the parenthood pressure

Name of Researcher: Theresa Riley

Name of Supervisor: Neville Robertson

I have received an information sheet about this research project or the researcher has explained the study to me. I have had the chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with other people. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee.

Participant's

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G

Interview schedule

Introductions

Profile:

Status & length of relationship _____ Ages: _____ Culture _____

Employment (full/part-time) _____ Preferred names _____

1. Background to being child-free

Begin with their story - describing how they came to identify themselves as remaining without children :

- *Tell me about your decision to be child-free.* If necessary, probe for
 - How firm is this decision & was it individual or together
 - When they first discussed non-parenting (when friends, dating, or after a few years)
 - Experience with children (e.g. enjoy or avoid).
 - Support for the decision – those who are, and are not.
 - How aware are they of being without children & not fulfilling biological potential?

2. Stereotyping

Here the intention is to explore the interviewee's knowledge of current child-free stereotypes:

- What do different identifying terms mean to you? E.g. childless/childfree/non-parents/dinks*
- stereotypes aware of (are they accurate?)*
- avoid or mislead people about your choice?*
- Experience of direct stereotyping? – get Source, Context, Who was focus, Effect on them*
- How do you respond to it?*
- How are you affected by stereotypes of parenthood, family, women, femininity, etc?*

3. Pressures

Check each pressure given has a source, example, and how they were affected

- Parents (of each)*
- Siblings*
- Extended family, aunts etc*
- Friends*
- Colleagues*
- Strangers or acquaintances*
- Media & society*

- Primary source of pressure?*
- Coping strategies?*
- Anticipated pressure (whether actually experienced or not)*
- If no negative pressure is felt (parents, society, etc) – how do they explain that?*
- Support or Positive pressure for decision?*
- Men; Does it require a different view of masculinity? And what about family/self-continuation?*

4. Closing

- Anything else to add?
- Snowball sampling – ask & request permission.
- Interest in focus group?
- Interest in follow-up in XX years?

Review of the interview transcript.

APPENDIX H

Email to focus group participants

From Theresa Mary Riley <tmr18@waikato.ac.nz>
to
date 21 November 2007 13:16
subject Friday 7.30pm - Childfree Focus Group
mailed-by waikato.ac.nz

Hi

Thank you very much for being willing to meet and help me a little more. The details of the meeting;

Friday (two days away) - 7.30pm at 72 Chedworth Ave (off Hukanui Rd). Our lovely hosts have extended the invitation that if you wish to stay afterwards for social chat (& BYO drink if you wish), you are welcome.

I have prepared a preliminary summary of what I have found, which I will share with you. What I would like to discuss are (to give you a 'heads-up');

- Your reflections/comments on being interviewed for this research
- What you think is at the core (issue/motivation) behind the pressure to have children
- What makes a childfree person less susceptible to pressure/stereotyping

Other things you may want to know;

This focus group consists only of those who have been interviewed for this research

Focus groups work best when participants talk and discuss amongst themselves (I am only there to guide & listen) - note: variety of opinion & experience is welcome!

You will be invited to briefly introduce yourself to the group

Please feel welcome to ask questions if you have any. note - I have a conference to attend on Friday, so won't be near email then.

My mobile phone number is 021 036 0557, in case you need to call.

Regards,
Theresa

APPENDIX I

Thank you email from participant

From #####
To Theresa Mary Riley <tmr18@waikato.ac.nz>,

Date 26 November 2007 17:48
Subject Re: Thank you!

Hiya Theresa,

I really enjoyed the evening! Cool, interesting, intelligent, funny people. Lots of food for thought. It was a very affirming group to participate in. Thank you for inviting us to the research evening. Being part of a study was never so much fun!

Thankyou also for sharing some of your own thoughts and perceptions about being child-free. (PS: they didn't colour my attitudes, so don't worry that you compromised your research :-)) I came away from the whole experience with a sense of being more highly conscientised about the issues. Thanks for that.

I look forward to reading your thesis some time. (They have them up in the campus library, don't they?)

Have a good week,
Sara