ADD MEN AND STIR? AN EXPLORATION OF MEASURING HER, HIS, AND THEIR DESIRE TO HAVE A BABY

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ABSTRACT

In most cases, having a baby is a couple-level phenomenon. Is desire for a baby also a mostly couple-level experience? Most fertility studies focus primarily on the desires of women or women's reports for the couple. We "bring men in" to measures of couple baby desire using the National Survey of Fertility Barriers (NSFB) wave 1 measures of her, his, and her of his desire for a baby among 337 heterosexual couples without children. We summarize partner reports using latent class analysis and observed categories, and argue for that a two variable observed approach is superior. In most couples both partners desire a baby and the woman is accurate about her partner's desire; few couples strongly disagree, and similar numbers do not want or are unsure if they want a baby.

INTRODUCTION

Having a baby is a dyadic process for most people; however, there are challenges to studying fertility from a couple perspective. Most research on fertility has focused on women; however, most research uses information on women and few studies incorporate male partner perspectives (for an exception see Keizer and Schenk 2012 or Thomson et al. 1990). The introduction of additional male-partner-specific responses creates a more complete perspective of a couple's desire for a baby. Partners can agree or disagree about whether or not they desire a baby and partners can be accurate or not. Many studies have only one partner providing responses, and often the partner providing the responses are women that are in heterosexual relationships. Therefore not only do we also explore how accurate women are about their male partner's desire for a baby, but also if accuracy differs by level of agreement assessed through both partner's self reports.

Our goal is to extend research on fertility desires by determining a parsimonious approach to capturing couple-level desire for a baby including partner level of agreement. We also assess characteristics of couples with differing desires for a baby, including both demographic (e.g. age, race/ethnicity, financial status, relationship status, length of relationship) and attitudinal (religiosity and importance of parenthood) characteristics of the couples. We limit the scope to couples that do not currently have children. In an attempt to determine a parsimonious approach to couple-level desire for a baby, we provide an empirical and theoretical grouping of couple desire for a baby. Utilizing Latent Class Analysis (LCA) and theoretical investigation the first measure suggested is a couple-level

measure including three latent classes of couple desire (agree yes, agree no, and ambiguity). Second, we propose a two dimensional measure of desire: (1) type of agreement and (2) accuracy, which account for both the direction and level of agreement but also flesh out if accuracy of the female's perception of her males partner's desire is a separate component to desire rather than included a one.

With three variables (her desire, his desire, her perception of his desire), each measured with four possible values (want a baby, probably want a baby, probably do not want a baby, do not want a baby) there are 4*4*4=64 possible categories of couple desire. We therefore first ask how many observed categories are there. The most straightforward categories capture agreement, i.e. all three variables indicate definite desire, probably desire, probably no desire, or definite no desire for a baby. The remaining possible 60 categories could be collapsed into "disagreement". Doing so, however, hides the kinds, as well as the degree, of disagreement. For example, a couple in which one partner definitely wants a baby and the other definitely does not have more extreme disagreement than couples in which one probably does and one probably does not. It is also possible that it could matter if it is the woman or the man that does or does not desire a child. Finally, it is unclear if it matters more if there is actual agreement or disagreement (based on her own desire and his own desire) or perceived agreement or disagreement (based on her own desire and her perception of her partner's desire).

There is much research on fertility intentions, with most of the focus on women and less on couples. We explore desire for a baby from her reports, his reports, and a constructed "their" reports of couple-level desire. We specifically

assess desire to have a baby outside of intentions. Within research, desire to have a baby is not separated from fertility intention; however, we explore desires as its own element within the childbearing process. The National Survey of Fertility Barriers (NSFB) includes a random sample of women ages 25-45 and a subsample of male partners. The Wave 1 data was collected between 2005-2007 and contains a unique combination of respondents and measure to support our line of inquiry.

BACKGROUND

Life Course Perspective

Life course perspective takes into account the causes and effects of the transitions, or turning points that exist within an individual's lifetime. For example, marriage and parenthood are examined within the life course perspective guided largely by the normative assumptions within society that surround these major life events. Previous research assumes that the transition into marriage is followed by the transition into parenthood (Hagestad and Call 2007; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Assuming this given temporal order may be a poor way of examining the trajectory of fertility in the life course. Thus, given the changing demographics—including more women deciding to be childless (Dye 2010), the childfree movement (Blackstone and Dyer Stewart 2012), and the decoupling of marriage and fertility (Hayford et al. 2014) —the desire to have a child may play a salient role outside of the normative trajectory of childbearing, in that it may function separate from marriage.

The life course perspective posits that lives involve a series of transitions or life events, which are embedded in trajectories that give a distinct form and meaning (Elder 1985, 1994). For example, in particular historical times and cultural contexts, there are norms about the ordering of marriage and parenthood and how transitions are associated. For example in the 1900s in the United States middle and upper classes the norm was to marry and then transition into parenthood (Hagestad and Call, 2007; Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001). Behaviors have been changing in the United States with many more births occurring in cohabiting unions, even among middle class couples. There are other changing fertility patterns, for example more women are deciding to be childless (Dye, 2010), there is now a childfree movement (Blackstone and Dyer; Stewart, 2012), and there is a general trend of a decoupling of marriage and fertility (Hayford, Guzzo, and Smock, 2014). Changing patterns of relationship formation and fertility suggest the value of asking individuals about desire for a child. This dyadic process couples across the life course highlights the "linked lives" aspect of the life couple perspective specifically. This research explores couple-level processes, by utilizing the "linked lives" component to flesh the complexities of couple-level desires to have, or not, a baby.

The "linked lives" vein of the life course perspective highlights the interplay and connection that individuals have together (Hutchison 2001). Linked lives incorporates the growth and progression of life planning that becomes synchronized (Elder 1998) much of which happens around family planning (Sampson and Laub 1993). Linked lives can offer useful insight into couple dynamics as relationships are a dyadic process. Whether relationships grow

together or separate, individuals in relationship share linked lives; which in turn may determine or change couple's ideologies. This alone can have an impact on desire to have a baby.

In addition, we know of no studies that include measures of one partner's perception of the other partner's desire for a baby and the partner's response to the same question. Due to a number of characteristics such as relationship context, age of partners and length of relationship, we expect that couples will vary in level of agreement, accuracy of perception, desire for a baby. Our goal for this paper is to determine groups characterized by partner agreement and direction of desire (yes, no, maybe) for couple's desire for a baby.

There are few studies about the consequences of partner disagreement on fertility intentions (Williams, 1994 and Korenman et al., 2002). Using data from the National Survey of Family Growth, Chandra and colleagues (2005) found that a little more than one in five mothers reported that they and the baby's father did not agree on birth intentionality or they did not know the father's feelings towards the birth. Yet agreement or lack of agreement could be more important for perceptions of relationship trouble than actual desire for a child. Even if partners agree about desire for a child, perceived disagreement could be as important as actual disagreement. Alternatively, inaccurate perception of partner desire could indicate an underlying problem in the relationship. The increase in the proportion of women ending childbearing years without having children (Dye, 2010; Hayford, 2009; Hayford, 2013; Lampic et al., 2006; Maximova and Quesnel-Vallee, 2009; Proudfoot et al., 2009; Velez et al., 2011), suggests that more couples will need to

think about desire for a child rather than take childbearing for granted. Because prior work and the life course perspective argue that partner agreement regarding desire for a baby has several implications for individuals and couples, we focus first on determining the best way to measure couple desire.

DATA & METHODS

Data

For this research we use data from wave one of the National Survey of Fertility Barriers (NSFB), a random digit dialing telephone survey of 4,797 women of childbearing ages (25 to 45) which includes a subset of the women's husbands/partners. The study was designed to assess social and health factors related to reproductive choices and fertility for U.S. women. The first wave was collected in 2004-2006, a second wave was collected 3 years later, but will not be used for the purposes of this study. The data are nationally representative. Black and Hispanic women and women with fertility problems were oversampled, and the appropriate weighting analyses were used to account for the oversampling. Using the American Association of Public Opinion response rate number 4 calculations the response rate for women answering the screening questions is 53 percent. This number is typical for contemporary RDD surveys (McCarty et al., 2006). For further information about the study design and measures access: http://sodapop.pop.psu.edu/codebooks/nsfb/wave1/. To view the public-access data files visit: http://sodapop.pop.psu.edu/data-collections/nsfb. Extensive

comparisons with Census data indicate the weighted sample is representative of women age 25-45 in the United States.

The subset of data used for this study was restricted to 337 zero parity heterosexual couples. By limiting the sample to these parameters and based upon our theoretical groupings we have allowed for some groups to emerge with very small sizes. Although this may provide some difficulties within analysis, these groups have shown to introduce a novel look into couple level desire for a baby. These theoretical groupings will be compared to those determined through Latent Class Analysis. This subset of data introduces the distinctive relationship that cannot be measured through other datasets. Without the use of this nationally representative couple-level data the perception of desire and actual desire can be utilized to understand its effects on different key variables.

Methods

As a first step in this research project, we provide descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and chi-square analyses. These results were used in order to develop and support the theoretical groups that were formed. These will serve as avenue for comparison between the theoretical groups and those formed through Latent Class Analysis.

Measures of couple level desire include the women's report, the men's report, and the women's perception of men's desire. In an ideal situation, we would also have the men's perception of the women's desire; however, the NSFB did not collect information on then men's perceptions. Given the lack of male's response on

women's perception to have a baby, we only utilize the measure of her, him, and her of him.

Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is preformed to create mutually exclusive groups within the sample based upon responses from the three response variables of interest. The LCA will indicate how the possible combinations of the response variables differ. These groups are created based upon how the couples respond to their desire to have a baby.

Type and Level of Couple Desire

To simplify the observed analysis, we collapsed into two categories, "probably" and "definitely," and added distinction among those who disagree into couples in which there is disagreement and the woman knows this, there is disagreement but the woman thinks that there is agreement, and there is agreement but the woman thinks that there is not. These five categories capture her perception in addition to "actual" agreement or disagreement, categories that could be relevant for estimating the association of fertility desires and relationship quality. There are a variety of ways to collapse the potential 64 categories into more manageable and, potentially more useful, smaller group of categories. We describe our approach and comparisons of the resulting categories on several characteristics in the results.

Exploratory Variables

Once the latent classes are identified, we compare them based upon relevant variables within our study. This comparison enables us to understand what differences, if any, exist between groups based upon focal variables grounded theoretically and empirically in fertility research. Differences in fertility based upon

demographic characteristics (age, race/ethnicity, and education) have been well documented (Brand and Davis, 2011; Hayford and Guzzo, 2013; Kim and Raley 2015; Sweeney and Raley, 2014; Velez et al. 2011), and are therefore, although necessary for the comparison of groups, not conceptually unique to this study. Other individual level factors such as religiosity, importance of parenthood and economic hardship have been explored less, but are still relevant within fertility research (Hayford and Morgan, 2008; Lampic et al., 2005; McQuillan, 2004; Wilson and Koo, 2006). Given the importance of these variables, we include them in a comparison to the latent classes in order to expand the limited research. Finally, a group of couple-level specific variables are used to compare the latent classes including relationship status, length of relationship and relationship satisfaction. This analysis will serve as the first part of a set of two papers that identify and explore the fertility experiences and relationship struggles of these groups.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the variables in the analyses for the whole sample. On average, men tended to be older than their partners; however both average ages for men and women are at the midpoint of possible age range for the sample (25-45). The average length of relationship is roughly 6 years, but there is a wide standard deviation (5.49). Women tend to have higher levels of education than their partners (her = 16.25; him = 15.46). The majority of couples are homogeneous by racial composition where only about 9.5% of the 337 couples are in heterogeneous relationships by race. In addition, 83% of the couples are married.

Accuracy Score

In order to assess the role of the female's perception of her partners desire we created an accuracy score. The purpose of the score is to compare the male partners reported desire to the female partner's perception of his desire. We subtracted his score from her score to estimate how accurate she is about his desire for a baby. A value of "0" indicates complete accuracy and ± "3" indicates farthest from accurate. Figure 1 shows that most women (57%) are perfectly accurate. A very high percentage (97%) are accurate within one level of the four level measure (e.g. definitely yes compared to probably yes).

Latent Class Analysis (LCA)

Of the potential 64 groups resulting from the concatenation of desire categories (N = 4) and type of desire (female's desire, male's desire, and female's perception of male's desire) 42 response groups actually exist. Through latent class analysis, three main groups emerge: agree yes, agree no, and ambiguity. The latent groups comprise both partner's reports and her perception of her partner's desire. Of these groups, there are differences amongst those couples that are both white by latent class type. 63% of those that are in the "agree yes" latent group are both white; whereas, 84.2% of those that are in the "agree no" latent group are both white. Additionally, those that "agree no" have lower levels of education than those that "agree yes" and are "ambiguous." There are differences in importance of parenthood for both partner's however, there are only significant differences for his religiosity.

Table 2 provides means and proportions of the independent variables by the 3 ways of measuring couple baby desire: (1) latent class groups, (2) observed couple desire (3) accuracy. The LCA groups of couple desire, women's reports appear twice (her and her perception) and therefore have more weight in this measure. Given this, we suggest a second measure of couple desire; that is, captured by accuracy score apart from the type of agreement within couples. Because the latent class measure conflates ambiguity and disagreement plus over weights women's reports, we develop two observed measures that separate agreement, direction, and accuracy.

There are significant differences across importance of parenthood for both partners, length of relationship, and age. In addition, her religiosity is significantly different whereas across the latent groups, his religiosity was significantly different.

Table 3 provides the association between the three latent groups and 4 observed group measures. With the three latent groups across the agreement type measure of desire, some congruency forms; however, it appears that the LCA measure of desire is a more crude measure. That is, we lose the direction and type of desire. This may be due to the fact that her perception of his desire is coupled with both partner's reports. Additionally, the ambiguous category is 86.8% congruent with the ambiguous LCA category; however, the disagree category is separate out further with the ambiguity within the latent classes.

The LCA and observed measures have high overlap (98%) on the couples in which both partners do not want a child. The small percent in the LCA ambiguity reflect the women's inaccurate assessment of her partner's desire. Among the

observed "agree yes" couples there is less overlap with the latent categories (84%). Because a higher proportion of the women were inaccurate about their male partners desire for a baby, either saying he did not want or he probably wanted/did not want. Among the couples with observed ambiguity (both partners said probably), the LCA categories 13% as "both yes" based upon her inaccurate report of his desire. There is still 86% overlap. Only the observed measure separates the disagree group (N =32). Most were categorized as ambiguity in the LCA (65%) with the remainder in the "agree yes" (21.9%)—the biggest error. Therefore LCA provides less information and shows the damage of combining direction, agreement, and accuracy in one measure.

Women are, overall, fairly accurate in reporting their male partners desires. Yet, for many topics, it can be useful to know level of accuracy as a separate dimension of the couple. Therefore, given the limits in collecting data, especially monetarily, it is okay to ask her perception of then men's report. That is, to really capture desire at a couple level, the 2 measure variable ought to be used.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Moving from individuals to couples adds information and complexity to the study of fertility desires. Conceiving a baby is fundamentally a couple phenomenon, yet desire for a baby is ultimately individual. Partners may or may not share similar desires and may or may not know accurately now their partner's desires. Our goal is the offer an approach to best capture the couple, individual, and perceptual accuracy dimensions of desire for a child among men and women in heterosexual unions.

Ideally we would have questions about her, his, her of his and his of her desire for a baby. The NSFB comes close to the idea, missing only the male partner's perception of his partners desire for a baby. With the three variables that we have, there are 64 possible groups reflecting the 4x4x4 values on the variables. Of those 64 categories, there were couples in 42 categories. With only 337 couples, 42 groups was unmanageable. We therefore sought ways to better summarize couple desire for a baby. We first used latent class analysis, an approach that seeks the "true" number of groups. The best fitting model indicated three latent classes: "agree yes," "agree no," and "disagree". These groups did not provide information on two important dimensions in the data: couples who maybe did or maybe did not want a baby, and how accurate women are about their male partner's baby desire. Fertility researchers have recently highlighted how many women have ambivalence, uncertainty, or a more laissez fare (okay either way) attitude towards pregnancy (McQuillan et al 2010; Miller et al 2013). Therefore the "maybe" couples are important to identify. In addition, the symbolic interactionist perspective in Sociology repeatedly demonstrates the power of the W.I. Thomas Theorem – what people believe to be real is real in its effects. Therefore knowing what women think their partner's desire is may be as or more important than his actual desire. In addition, her level of accuracy could provide insights about the couple that may be as or more important than the level of agreement or direction of baby desire.

On a pragmatic level, if women are generally accurate about their partner's baby desires, then "couples" could be studied by having women do the reporting.

Unfortunately we cannot do the same for male partner perceptions of his female partner desires with this data.

Because of the value of retaining the "maybe" categories and the accuracy measures, we propose a two variable measure of couple baby desire that is based on observed, rather than latent, categories. Using the variables for his and her baby desire, we created one variable that categorizes couples as 1) both desire (if either or both had a strong desire and the partner had at least a "maybe" desire), 2) both do not desire (if either or both had a strong desire not to have a baby and the partner had at least a "maybe" no desire), 3) both maybe do/do not desire (either yes or not), and 4) partners disagree (one had a strong yes and one had a strong no). When there was disagreement, we did not further specify who had the desire yes or no. We created a second variable that measures how accurate the woman is about her partner's desire: 1) accurate, 2) close, 3) inaccurate.

We find that for most couples, women are accurate. For research into the importance of accuracy for various outcomes (e.g. relationship satisfaction or actually having a baby or not), it is important to have both partners reports. For research in which the only concern is couple desire for a baby, her report alone is likely to accurately capture most couple situations. Therefore the decision to collect data only from the women or from both partners depends upon the goals of the research and resources.

More couples agree that they do not want a baby than disagree about whether or not to have one. Because the norm in the United States is to have children and most people want children (Hagewen and Morgan, 2002) we were not

surprised that most couples consist of partners who want a child. Substantial minorities of couples, however, either do not want a baby (and are presumably childfree) or disagree about whether or not to have a baby. The couples that disagree tend to be older, in relationships longer, to have higher economic hardship and lower relationship satisfaction. It could be that disagreement about baby desire is just one of several challenges in the relationship.

More important than any specific recommendation that we can make about how to measure couple baby desire is the evidence that different measures tell different stories. The latent class analysis provided a succinct measure of couple desire, but hid the couples that disagree under "ambiguity". Using a two variable approach allows us to retain her accuracy as a separate dimension of the couple, but for many researchers may be less important than the "true" reports provided by each partner. For other researchers the idea that the woman is usually accurate or close to accurate about her male partner and therefore can provide cost effective data may be most useful. Our next steps are to determine if there are differences in subsequent birth, individual, and relationship outcomes by couple desire and accuracy.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables in the Sample

	Mean/P	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Her perception of His Desire:				
Accurate	.638			
Close	.237			
Wrong	.125			
Her Age	33.792	6.561	25	45
His Age	36.151	8.404	20	63
Couple Racial Composition				
Both White	.718			
Both Black	.068			
Both Hispanic	.080			
Both Other	.039			
Mixed	.095			
Her Education	16.254	2.525	3	22
His Education	15.644	2.830	2	22
Her Religiosity	-.001	.622	-1.140	1.899
His Religiosity	.006	.642	-1.248	2.199
Her Importance of Parenthood	2.793	.854	1	4
His Importance of Parenthood	2.845	.742	1	4
Their Economic Hardship	1.323	.612	1	4
Percent Married	.828			
Length of Relationship	5.941	5.485	0	24
Her Relationship Satisfaction	.712			
His Relationship Satisfaction	.656			
N	337 (couples)			

Figure 1. Accuracy of Her Perception of His Desire to have a Baby

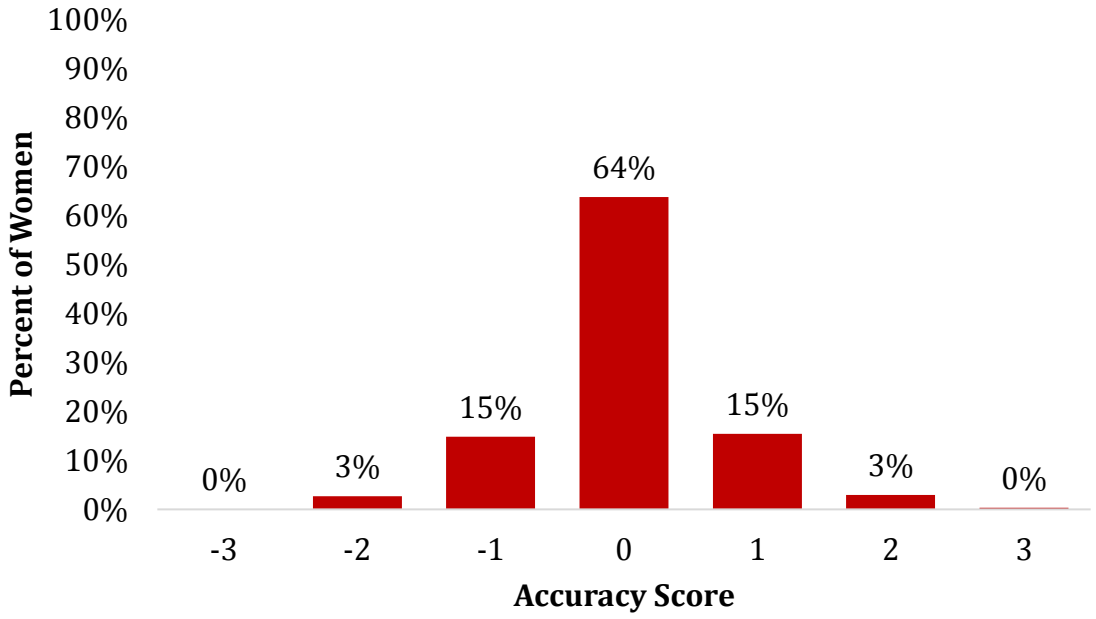

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics By Couple Baby Desire Measures

	Latent Class Measure Couple Desire			Observed Agreement Measure Couple Desire				Accuracy: Her of His Desire		
	Agree No (N=82)	Agree Yes (N=147)	Ambiguity (N=108)	Agree No (N=67)	Agree Yes (N=170)	Ambiguity (N=68)	Disagree (N=32)	Accurate (N=215)	Close (N=80)	Wrong (N=42)
	Mean/p	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*	*Mean/p*
Her Age	38.732	21.034	33.796	39.284	31.171	32.791	38.344	33.116	33.600	37.619
His Age	42.854	32.878	35.519	43.060	32.706	35.368	41.656	35.498	35.688	40.381
Couple Racial Composition										
Both White	.842	.653	.713	.876	.659	.721	.719	.721	.713	.714
Both Black	.037	.088	.064	.030	.088	.044	.094	.074	.063	.048
Both Hispanic	.024	.095	.102	.030	.106	.088	.031	.084	.063	.095
Both Other	.012	.061	.028	.015	.047	.015	.094	.042	.025	.048
Mixed	.085	.102	.093	.060	.100	.132	.063	.079	.138	.095
Her Education	15.914	16.357	16.370	15.894	16.450	16.574	15.281	16.425	16.031	15.810
His Education	15.346	15.757	15.718	15.379	15.718	15.912	15.234	15.816	15.314	15.378
Her Religiosity	-.055	-.077	.144	-.037	-.063	.245	-.117	.011	-.051	.030
His Religiosity	.026	-.094	.125	.052	-.044	.140	-.114	-.001	.016	.022
Her Importance of Parenthood	1.960	3.336	2.685	1.800	3.285	2.572	2.724	2.872	2.694	2.571
His Importance of Parenthood	2.192	3.252	2.787	2.097	3.221	2.670	2.789	2.895	2.797	2.679
Their Economic Hardship	1.291	1.367	1.287	1.214	1.356	1.316	1.391	1.289	1.485	1.187
Percent Married	.817	.830	.833	.836	.841	.794	.813	.819	.800	.929
Length of Relationship	8.793	4.626	5.565	9.090	4.271	5.706	8.719	5.405	5.85	8.857
Her Relationship Satisfaction	.634	.782	.676	.657	.747	.750	.563	.758	.638	.619
His Relationship Satisfaction	.549	.694	.685	.612	.700	.647	.531	.688	.563	.667
N	337(couples)									

Accuracy was included as a variable in the LCA.

Data Source: National Survey of Fertility Barriers Wave 1 (2004-2006); Couples without Children

Table 3. Cross Tabulation of Latent Class Groups (3) by Observed Agreement Measure of Couple Desire to have a Baby.

		Observed Agreement and Disagreement of Partner Desire to have a Baby				
		Agree No	Agree Yes	Ambiguity	Disagree	N Total
Latent Class Groups Capturing Couple Desire to have a Baby	Agree No	98.5%	0.0%	13.2%	21.9%	82 24.3%
	Agree Yes	0.0%	84.1%	0.0%	12.5%	147 43.6%
	Ambiguity	1.5%	15.9%	86.8%	65.6%	108 32.1%
	N Total	67 100.0%	170 100.0%	68 100.0%	32 100.0%	337 100.0%

Shaded boxes indicate percentages higher than 15%.
Data Source: National Survey of Fertility Barriers wave 1 (2004-2006); Couples without children.

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