

Childlessness and Parenthood in Colombia

Cristina Mercedes Perez

UCL

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I, Cristina Mercedes Perez confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been
indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Colombia has undergone profound socio-demographic changes over the past half-century, transforming the ‘average’ family and shifting gendered norms around education, work, and domestic life. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, and a broad definition of non-parenthood that includes all women and men who do not (yet) have children, I analyse childlessness across the ‘continuum’ of intentionality from choice through chance. By combining micro- and macro-analyses of (non-)parenthood in Colombia, I aim to critically engage with theoretical frameworks like the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), which explains large-scale socio-demographic change using individual-level ‘value’ re-orientations. This thesis presents the first comprehensive, quantitative analysis of Colombian childlessness. Employing descriptive statistics and logistic regression modelling to analyse census and Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data from 1985/86-2015, I establish the trend in female childlessness and explore intentionality; analyse factors associated with non-parenthood; and compare women and men. I show that overall childlessness is relatively low and stable (consistently comprising $\leq 10\%$ of women in their 40s), though ‘voluntary’ non-motherhood has increased over time. Union status is strongly associated with female and male childlessness at all ages, and although ‘definitive’ non-motherhood is associated with higher education (indicating advantage), ‘definitive’ non-fatherhood is associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. A year of anthropological fieldwork, including 35 semi-structured interviews with women and men (non-parents and parents), provided further insight into the factors underlying childlessness. I found that ‘intensive’ parenting ideals pervade Bogotá’s middle classes and are woven into narratives of non-parenthood. Non-parents also emphasised circumstantial and altruistic motivations, resisting the equation of childlessness with selfishness. Women typically framed non-motherhood using discourses of female empowerment/self-reliance, whereas men sought domestically-engaged fatherhood and fewer self-defined as ‘voluntarily’ childless. Although largely consistent with the SDT’s focus on self-fulfilment, these personal narratives also highlight important circumstantial and social factors which complicate explanations primarily based on ‘individualisation’ processes.

Impact Statement

By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the analysis in this thesis has sought to provide a comprehensive overview of childlessness in Colombia and has helped fill in another part of the global picture of the growing phenomenon of non-parenthood. It did so in an understudied, middle-income country that is dissimilar in many ways to the European settings in which most childlessness research is carried out. Using DHS data, I showed how ‘ideal’ childlessness is as good a measure of voluntary non-parenthood as more complicated and data-intensive measures, at least in the Colombian context, and this methodological approach could be applied to other countries with available DHS data. I also identified some important areas for future, qualitative research into Colombian childlessness, which include examining childlessness specifically amongst socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, men (especially older men), in cities outside the capital, and in rural areas. With respect to dissemination, I have presented preliminary findings at conferences and research meetings nationally and internationally, which has led to research collaborations with demographers in Spain (at the Centre for Demographic Studies (CED) of the Autonomous University in Barcelona) and France (at the National Institute for Demographic Research (INED)). I also plan to publish my findings in academic journals and am currently drafting articles. My research findings have also informed recent undergraduate and graduate teaching in Anthropology at UCL, particularly addressing childlessness and Latin American fertility, and I plan to integrate them into future teaching. Finally, the analysis in this thesis could be used to shape local policies, in Colombia and Bogotá, towards people without children, particularly focusing on stigma and gender inequalities, as well as issues around planning for older age without children. While in Colombia, I was in contact with the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF), who expressed an interest in my research findings, and I plan to contact them with my results.

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The IPUMS-I census data here were provided by the Minnesota Population Center, and originally produced by Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE)), while the Demographic and Health Survey data were provided by ICF International, and originally produced in Colombia by Profamilia.

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Introduction

This thesis presents a methodologically mixed approach to ‘childlessness’ in Colombia. Using census, survey, interview and other ethnographic data, I address the topic broadly, focusing primarily on the period since the 1980s. The demographic, statistical analysis roughly spans 1985-2015, employing nationally-representative data, while the anthropological analysis focuses on experiences of childlessness and parenthood in contemporary Bogotá, with some reflections on the past. While there is intense focus on low fertility and increasing childlessness in Europe (and now, Asia), Latin America has received less attention, likely because fertility still hovers around the ‘replacement’ level of 2.1 children per woman. Despite this, I started to notice that Colombian women’s magazines and other media outlets were covering non-motherhood, adapting the English and calling these women ‘NoMo’, short for ‘Not Mothers’. I wondered if non-motherhood was increasing in Colombia, too, and how much of it was by choice. Was it motivated by the same factors or was it distinct? I was also drawn to the topic of ‘childlessness’ as it intersects with diverse research areas: on one hand, feminist approaches to reproduction, gender and family studies, and on the other, demographic and economic concerns over growth rates and the sustainability of pension and other social security systems. Though there is a large body of quantitative and qualitative research on childlessness in Europe, I realised I knew little about this issue in Latin America. Though I had lived in Bogotá and knew many Colombians who never had children, yet knowing little about non-parenthood in Colombia, I was interested in how childlessness in that context compared to what we know in other parts of the world and sought to study the topic in greater detail. As a historically Catholic and pro-natalist country, but one which is changing rapidly both socially and demographically (and yet remains highly unequal), Colombia appeared to be a rich case study.

Local interest in chosen childlessness has grown steadily in the past five years, with a growing number of magazine and newspaper articles addressing it not only as a Euro-American phenomenon (through profiles of famous non-mothers like Cameron Diaz and Jennifer Aniston), but also an increasing number of pieces seeking out Latin American women who have chosen to forego motherhood. By chance, in October 2016, less than a month after I arrived in Bogotá to carry out a year of fieldwork, *Las*

Raras, a Spanish-language podcast, released an episode called ‘Childfree: Sterilised at 30’. This centred on the story of Francy Uribe, a thirty-something Colombian journalist who had decided, at just nine years old, that she did not want children.¹ Two decades later, still ‘childfree’, she sought to be sterilised. Her motivation stemmed from a deep desire to be a journalist and to see the world, two things she viewed as incompatible with motherhood. The daughter of a coffee farmer and stay-at-home mother from a small town in southern Colombia, she felt strongly that she did not want to follow in her mother’s footsteps. She left her town for a public university in Neiva, the capital of the Huila department, and from there, she moved to Bogotá and eventually to Chile, working as a journalist and travelling the world. Her motivations for non-motherhood were clear, and related directly to the conflict between being a mother and being a professional. After seeing how all-absorbing her friends’ and family members’ experiences of motherhood were, she decided to forego it herself. As I will show, Francy is not alone, and her story reflects a broader pattern that I observed in Colombia.

This introduction starts with basic geographical and historical background, then moves on to briefly introduce the Colombian sociodemographic context. I finish by defining what I mean by childlessness and considering how others have used this and related terms, before briefly summarising the subsequent chapters.

1. Colombia: Basic Geography and Demography

Colombia is situated in the northwest corner of South America, bordering Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador (see Figure 1). Its landmass extends across 1.14m. km² (roughly twice the size of France), incorporating two coasts (on the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean), the northern-most part of the Andean mountain range (split across three cordilleras), and numerous river valleys, the most historically important of which are the Magdalena and Cauca Rivers. Close to the border with Venezuela are vast grassland plains (called the *llanos*), which give onto Amazonian rainforest to the south. The Amazon rainforest occupies 35% of Colombia’s landmass, encompassing the entire southeastern corner of the country. Whereas the northern border with Panamá consists of rainforest and swamp and is one of the rainiest parts

¹ Episode available online: <http://lasraraspodcast.com/episodio/childfree-esterilizada-a-los-30/> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

of the world, other sections of the Atlantic coast (notably, the Guajira peninsula) are arid desert. Colombia is therefore known for environmental extremes and massive biodiversity, and it is usually divided into five ‘natural’ regions: the lowland Caribbean and Pacific coastal regions; the mountainous, Andean region; the eastern plains; and the Amazonian tropical rainforest (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 71). Most of the population lives in the Andean region, whereas the eastern plains and Amazonian regions are sparsely populated. The country is divided into 32 ‘departments’, or states, plus Bogotá, which is its own ‘administrative district’.

Figure 1: Maps of Colombia (Bogotá identified by red star)



Sources: Political Map (left) by Milenioscuro (CC BY-SA 4.0), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44931327>. Physical Map (right) by Grundkarte (CC BY-SA 3.0), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9408948> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

In 2018, Colombia’s population was 48.2m. (DANE 2019a), making it the third most populous country in the Latin American and Caribbean region, after Brazil and Mexico. Economically, the World Bank now classifies it as an upper-middle-income country, with a 2018 gross national income (GNI) *per capita* of US\$6,190, somewhat poorer than the upper-middle-income category average of US\$8,859.² Colombia is also very unequal. On the Gini index – which ranges from 0-100 with higher scores

² GNI *per capita*, Atlas method, available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=CO-XT> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

being more unequal – it had a value of 49.7 in 2017: similar to Brazil’s 53.3, but much more unequal than the UK’s 33.2 (2015).³

From an ethnocultural perspective, Colombia currently recognises three ethnic minorities: Afro-Colombian (comprising 10.5% of the 2005 population); indigenous (3.4%); and Rom/gypsy groups (0.01%) (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 86), with the former two groups having official recognition in the 1991 Constitution. The rest of the population (86%) consists of 37% who self-identify as white, and 49% as *mestizo*, or mixed white and indigenous (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 87). While indigenous and Afro-Colombians have special constitutional protections, they are still disproportionately affected by poverty, and the regions where they comprise the majority of the population suffer from a lack of State investment. For example, in 2005, three-quarters of Afro-Colombians “earned less than the minimum wage” and Chocó, a predominantly (80%) Afro-Colombian department on the Panamanian border, “had the lowest level of social investment per capita and ranked last in terms of education, health, and infrastructure”; it also experienced “some of the country’s worst political violence” between paramilitaries and guerrillas (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 90). Though Colombian racism operates differently from its American or British cousins, it is just as powerful.

Colombia is also highly regionally and geographically disjointed, due to the Andean mountain ranges, large rivers, and dense rainforests that cut across the country. The country’s ethnic groups are not evenly distributed, with most Afro-Colombians living along the two coasts, indigenous groups primarily along the Caribbean coast and in the Amazonian region, and the Andean regions largely dominated by the mestizo/white populations. Whereas Colombia started the 20th century as a rural nation, by the mid-1960s, 52.8% of the population lived in urban areas, by 1973, this was 61% (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 94), and today this is around 80%. Unlike other Latin American countries, Colombia is not highly centralised, and though about 1 in every 6 Colombians lives in Bogotá (population: 7.2m. in 2018), there are at least four other cities with populations of more than one million: Medellín (in Antioquia); Cali

³ The US figure was 41.5 (2016); all available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/si.pov.gini> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

(in the Cauca Valley); Barranquilla (on the Caribbean Coast); and Bucaramanga (in Santander).

2. Colombia's 20th Century Socio-Political Landscape

As I have alluded, Colombia's history has been punctuated by repeated periods of political conflict. As Meertens (2001: 132) argues, “[p]olitical violence has long been considered an endemic characteristic of Colombian history.” Between 1876 and 1902 Colombia experienced four ‘national civil wars’ (the last resulting in Panama’s secession), which exemplified entrenched disagreements regarding how the country should be run and how its constituent parts should be represented, as well as the extreme partisanship that would also dominate the next hundred years (Palacios 2006: 1). While the 20th century would bring massive population growth, large-scale urbanisation, industrialisation, and the mortality and fertility declines that characterise the (First) Demographic Transition, new generations of Colombians would not escape continued violence and unrest in both the countryside and many towns and cities.

Most recently, Colombia has endured more than 50 years of civil unrest. Quiet periods were interspersed with more active outbreaks of violence that can be traced back as far as the *Violencia* (literally ‘the violence’) lasting from at least 1946-58 (Bushnell 2010a), although other historians both trace its origins back further, to the 1930s (Arias Trujillo 2011), and extend its effects into the mid-‘60s (Palacios 2006). The *Violencia* nominally began as a period of sectarian conflict between the two dominant political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, but engulfed much of the country in crime and lawlessness, killing at least 300,000 people, and affecting thousands of individuals and communities (Palacios 2006: 138). Palacios argues that the *Violencia* is best understood “as an expression of the chronic defeat of state authority, rather than as a manifestation of the state’s collapse” (2006: 168), while Arias Trujillo makes the point that the general, “vague, abstract” name of ‘the Violence’ serves to diffuse fault, as if it were a natural disaster and we should blame “nature, not men, not the social environment” (2011: 89). He argues that everyone from the peasants who were victimised (and fled for their lives), to the politicians in charge, to the intellectuals and commentators analysing the carnage, all adopted this vague language, which implied that no specific actors were at fault. Rather than a ‘civil war’ with identifiable perpetrators, the (seemingly unavoidable) action itself caused the country’s problems

(Arias Trujillo 2011: 89). A major event early in the *Violencia* was the *Bogotazo*, a riot caused by the assassination of the popular Liberal presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in Bogotá, on 9th April 1948. This resulted in over 2,000 deaths and remains “the largest urban riot in the history of the Western Hemisphere” as sectarian mobs destroyed the city centre (Mason 2010: 326). Despite this early urban unrest, the *Violencia* took its greatest toll on rural and poor citizens.

This inequality that plagued Colombia’s 20th century was one of the factors behind the emergence of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*]) in 1964. The FARC is the most internationally well-known of the many left-wing guerrilla movements that would officially declare themselves sometime between the 1960s and 1980s, each growing out of different regions and with distinct objectives. Its appearance was a reaction to the government of the day bombarding rural areas to root out communist influences, though its origins go back to “the agrarian struggles of the 1940s” and it was a Marxist movement rooted in a rural, peasant fight for more egalitarian land distribution (Arias Trujillo 2011: 144). Over subsequent decades these objectives got lost amidst human rights violations and violence directed at the people for whom they were nominally fighting. Finally, though the FARC recruited male and female fighters, it was notable for its policies towards fertility: female members were supposed to use contraception and, in cases of pregnancies, typically had to leave their children with family or to abort, with allegations of forced late-term abortions (Herrera & Porch 2008), enforcing functional if not actual childlessness on the women who joined.

After a too-brief quiet period spanning the 1970s and early ‘80s, the civil conflict intensified once again, growing into the ‘drug wars’ of the 1980s and ‘90s. Meertens (2001: 134) identifies 1988-89 as a point at which political violence began to resurge, prompting more people to flee, as: “peasant struggles from the past, subsequent confrontations between guerrillas and the army, land-buying by drug traffickers, and the arrival of paramilitaries to ‘cleanse’” regions “of guerrillas and also of peasant organizations” all converged. Through the 1990s, conflicts intensified between the government, left-wing insurgent guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitary groups (sometimes aided by the government), and illegal drug cartels – the most infamous of which were based in Medellín (headed by Pablo Escobar until his death in 1993) and

Cali. Though these cartels had urban bases, fights over land and coca crops, as well as trafficking and smuggling routes, meant that the cultivation and manufacturing of cocaine also wreaked havoc on rural areas. Conscious efforts have tried to push the violence back into ever more peripheral regions, as in the early-2000s US-backed 'Plan Colombia' foreign aid package.

This seemingly endless conflict has also led to mass population displacement, again disproportionately affecting the poor. As Meertens (2001: 135) notes, during the worst periods of "murders, massacres, disappearances, and bombardments" of rural areas in the 1980s-90s, "whole communities" were displaced, facing the unenviable choice between certain death or being exiled from their homes and pushed into other towns and cities. Bushnell & Hudson (2010: 95) specify that, between 1985-2006, about 16% of all IDPs fled to Bogotá, though others ended up in regional capitals and other towns. Having lost everything, those who were displaced typically ended up on the outskirts of major cities, for example on the (generally poorer) southern fringes of Bogotá. Though IDPs have certain legally-guaranteed rights (including the 'right to a family', 'to health', and 'to return' to their homes (see Duran Garcia et al. 2007: 18)), while there have been various official efforts to restore people's titles to their stolen land, very few have been able to return to their homes, facing not only bureaucratic hurdles, but often also continued violence and threats. The sheer scale of the problem appears to overwhelm the Colombian State. In 2014, there were an estimated 6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), amounting to over 10% of Colombia's total population, with women, children, and ethnic minorities (mostly Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups) overrepresented (Ferris 2014). Though exceeded at various points by other nations, and though estimates vary, Colombia has often held the dubious superlative of having the most IDPs in the world, with the UNHCR estimating the 2018 total at 7.7m. people (UNHCR 2018). Despite the demobilisation of various paramilitary groups in the early 2000s, under President Álvaro Uribe's government, and a subsequent 2016 peace agreement between President Juan Manuel Santos's government and the FARC guerrillas, not all fighting has yet ended. Those at particularly high risk of violence include rural social leaders and human rights advocates, journalists, trade unionists and others seen as agitators by clashing groups. Unfortunately, as old groups of paramilitaries and guerrillas demobilised, new groups have moved in to seize power in their wake.

From a statistical perspective, the violence has affected the ruling classes far less, although notable exceptions grab headlines (e.g. the killing of judges, local/national politicians, or high-profile members of the élite and kidnappings for political or extortive purposes). While the need for rural land reforms and the country's endemic inequality lie at the roots of the conflict, the chronic fighting has done little to redistribute either land or incomes more equitably. In summary, Colombia's political landscape is characterised by unpredictable violence, fragile state institutions, and instability, corruption and inequality on a large-scale (Palacios 2006: 138). Since families have historically be expected to provide support where the state's institutions failed (Ullmann et al. 2014), it is important to explore what relationship, if any, Colombia's insecure political and economic climate has on aggregate fertility and individual experiences of and decisions regarding childlessness or parenthood.

3. Late-20th & Early-21st Century Social, Legal and Demographic Change

Healthcare Provision

Though narratives of violence dominate the national memory of this period, the 1990s were notable for major legal changes, notably a new Constitution in 1991, and a 1993 health sector reform in the shape of Law 100, which moved the country "from a national health system created in the 1960s, which gave a patrimonial role to the state and sought to be comprehensive, to a general system of social security in health" designed by a Harvard economist (Cueto & Palmer 2015: 242). The new system consisted of mandatory self-insurance, with healthcare provided by multiple private health insurance companies, and the state still taking responsibility for its poorest citizens through a subsidised system. The reforms were intended to promote choice and improve coverage and quality. Coverage for the poorest did improve (Lamprea 2014), but the new system also resulted in greater health sector fragmentation and a partially-insured population (Cueto & Palmer 2015). The Colombian health sector is still defined by a large degree of variation in service availability and quality according to a patient's ability to pay. While rich residents of the major cities can receive state-of-the-art care in private clinics that also cater to health tourists, those who cannot pay face much more limited options.

Tangential to this system, *Profamilia*, or the *Asociacion Probienestar de la Familia Colombiana* ('Association for the Wellbeing of the Colombian Family') has run a

network of private, non-profit family planning clinics across much of the country since the 1960s. *Profamilia* was founded in 1965 by a Colombian doctor, and affiliated with the International Planned Parenthood Federation two years later (Profamilia 2016). It provides contraceptive advice, supplies and procedures (including surgical sterilisations) at a reduced cost, alongside educational activities and social marketing programmes (e.g. radio shows promoting family planning). For its first 20 years, *Profamilia* focused exclusively on women and primarily on contraception in line with the ‘population control’ movement of the era. Since the 1980s it has integrated a broader range of issues, including: men’s health, HIV prevention, domestic violence, abortion (which was legalised in certain circumstances in 2006), antenatal care, and even treatments for *infertility* (Profamilia 2016). Since 1990, it has also overseen the implementation of the Demographic and Health Surveys, and it remains the country’s major player in reproductive and sexual health.

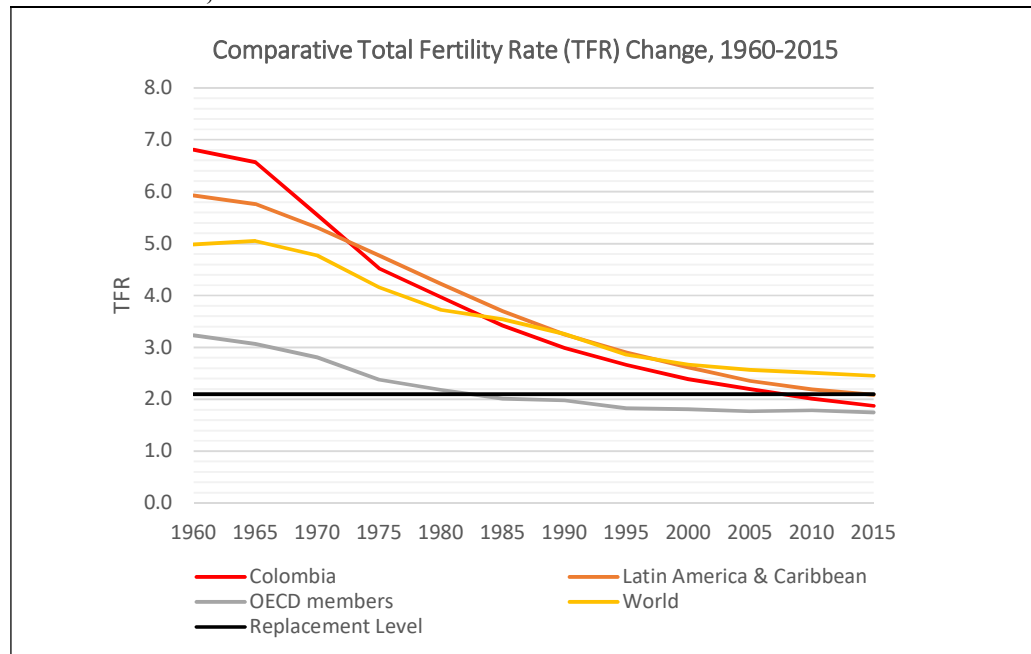
Expanding Legal Rights for Women

In 1954, Colombian women were finally granted voting rights (Bushnell 2010b: 47), and patriarchal norms loosened during the 1960s-‘70s. In 1968, women and men were granted equal authority over their children; in 1974, women achieved equality within marriage (before this point, “there was a legal requirement for women to obey their husbands”); and in 1976, divorce was legalised for those in civil marriages (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 106), though this was only extended to religious unions with the 1991 Constitution (Bushnell 2010b: 58). Finally, in 2006, abortion was made legal in Colombia under specified circumstances, including cases of rape or incest, foetal abnormalities, and to preserve a woman’s physical or mental health. Singh’s (2018: 11) indirect estimate of the abortion rate for women ages 15-44 in Colombia (in 2008) was 34 per 1,000 (or more than double the British rate of 13 per 1,000 in 2015). Additionally, although the mental health justification is meant to be interpreted widely as a reason for seeking legal abortions in Colombia, the same report notes that: “[o]f the roughly 400,000 abortions estimated to have occurred in Colombia in 2008, only 0.1% were reported as legal; however, the limited available data indicate a sustained increase in reported legal abortions each year since expansion of legal grounds in 2006, from 322 in 2008 to 5,688 in 2013” (Singh et al. 2018: 16). Unequal access to legal abortion is still unfortunately stratified along socioeconomic and regional lines, with rural and poorer women least likely to be able to access such services.

‘Spectacular’ but Uneven Fertility Decline

Between the mid-1960s and the early 21st century, Colombia experienced a what has been called a ‘spectacular’ fertility transition, as the total fertility rate (TFR) fell from nearly seven children per woman to just 2.6 by 2000 (Ojeda et al. 2011: 16) and around 2.0 by 2015. Figure 2 shows this decline, from above the Latin American and world average fertility to below both.

Figure 2: TFR (1960-2015) comparing Colombia with Latin America & the Caribbean, OECD countries, and the world

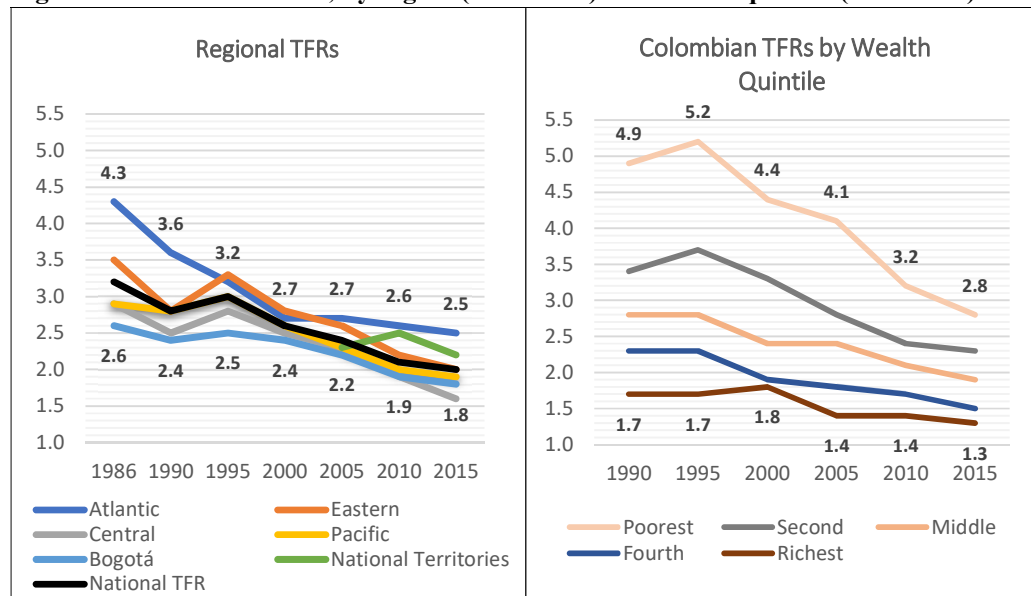


Source: Own construction, using World Bank data, from: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?display=default> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

Although the national TFR was still 2.6 in 2000, women with a university education were already having fewer than 2 children on average (TFR=1.5), and the country’s second- and third-largest cities, Medellín and Cali, each had a TFR of 1.8 children/woman (Profamilia 2000: 7). The first graph in Figure 3 shows how Bogotá and the Central region (where Medellín is located) have consistently had the lowest fertility in the country, while the Atlantic (Caribbean coastal) region had the highest fertility. The second graph illustrates the socioeconomic fertility differentials (using a wealth index measure that was integrated into the DHS from 1990 only), which are even greater than the regional differences, varying from 1.3 (for the richest 20%) to 2.8 (for the poorest) in 2015. It is notable that, even by 1990, the richest women’s TFR was well below replacement, at just 1.7 children/woman, and their total ‘wanted’

fertility rate was just 1.6 children, matching their actual fertility almost exactly. Even 30 years ago, 65% of married/cohabiting women in the richest quintile were using a ‘modern’ contraceptive method (increasing to 76% by 2015), and only 6% were judged to have an “unmet need for family planning”, decreasing to 4% in 2015 (ICF 2012). By the early 1990s, Colombian women who had the means to achieve their fertility desires were already largely able to do so. In contrast, the poorest women had a TFR of 4.9 in 1990 (almost two children more than their ‘wanted’ fertility of 3.0), and over one-quarter had ‘unmet’ family planning needs, though this decreased to 11% by 2015. While there is still a consistent inverse relationship between wealth and fertility, the substantial gaps between rich and poor have decreased over time, as the second graph in Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3: Colombian TFRs, by region (1986-2015) and wealth quintile (1990-2015)

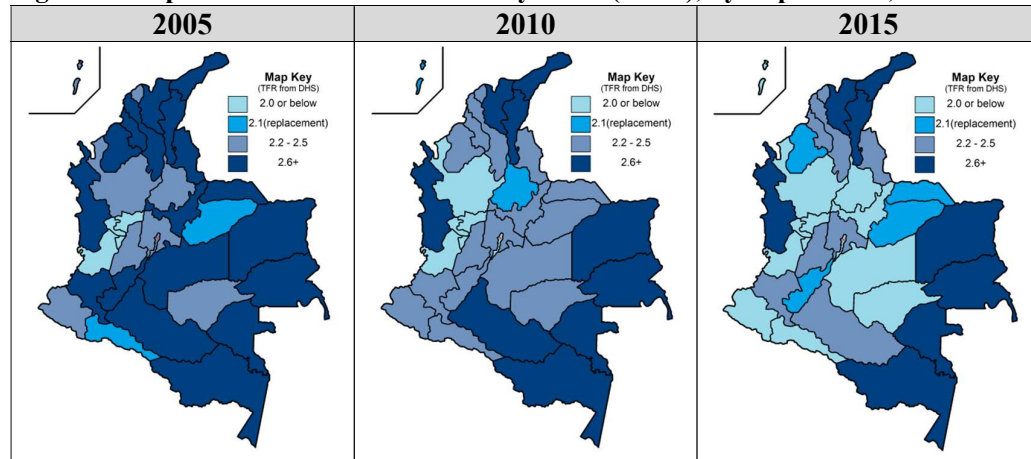


Source: Own construction, using DHS StatCompiler data (ICF 2012).

Looking at geographical variation graphically, low fertility is clearly spreading across Colombia. Figure 4 shows subnational, departmental TFRs, with lighter colours indicating lower fertility. In 2015, almost two-thirds (65.4%) of the Colombian population resided in regions with at or below-replacement level fertility, an increase from just 16.7% in 2005. The highest departmental TFR in 2015 (of 4.6) was from Vaupés, a sparsely-populated department in the south-eastern Amazonian region, or ‘National Territories’ bordering Brazil, which accounted for less than 1% of the national population. The department with the lowest overall TFR (of 1.3) was Caldas,

in the ‘Central’ Andean region, which borders the larger department of Antioquia (with a TFR of 1.4), where Colombia’s second-largest city (Medellín) is located.

Figure 4: Maps of Colombian Total Fertility Rates (TFRs), by Department, 2005-2015



Source: Own construction, using DHS TFRs from StatCompiler (ICF 2012).

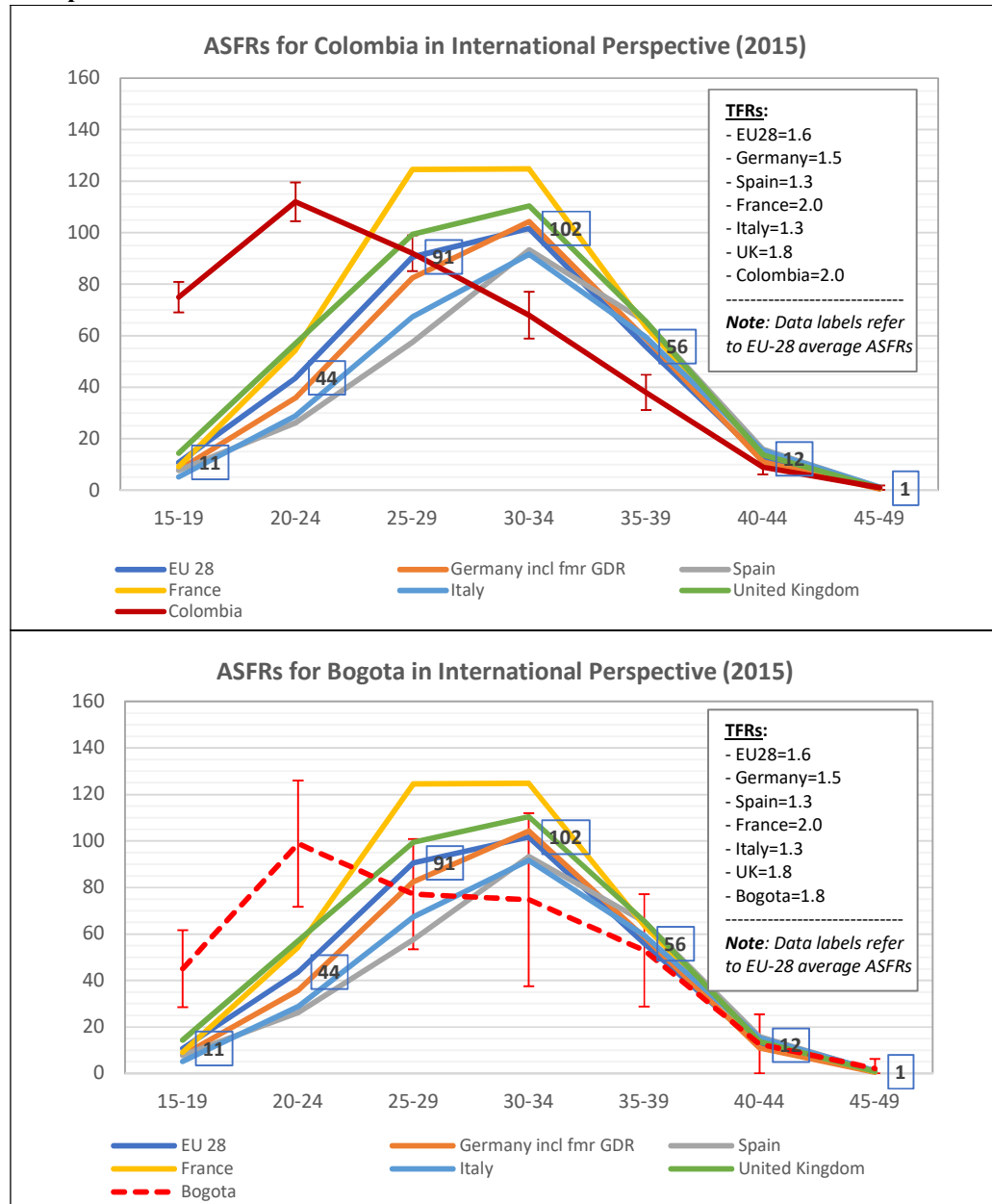
Historically, the Atlantic coast, Eastern region and National Territories (Amazonia/Orinoquia) tend towards higher TFRs, while the ‘Central’ Andean region and Bogotá typically have lower fertility. Departments with higher 2015 TFRs are primarily in peripheral or border areas which are less well-served by State infrastructure and services, and are home to a larger proportion of Colombia’s historically-excluded minority groups.

The graphs in Figure 5 compare Colombia’s and Bogotá’s age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs)⁴ to selected European countries. While overall fertility may be similar, the age distribution of these births could be very different. For example, Colombia and France both had a TFR of 2.0 in 2015, yet the first graph in Figure 5 shows their very different age-specific fertility patterns. Colombian has much higher fertility among teens (nearly seven times higher) and women in their early 20s (around 2.5 times as high), generally lower fertility amongst women in their late 20s (though comparable with some European nations), and much lower fertility in their 30s. The second graph in Figure 5 shows that, when comparing just Bogotá to the same European nations,

⁴ The ASFR is a measure of the number of children born to women in each five-year age group (from 15-49), expressed per 1,000 women, and is a measure of the fertility distribution across the reproductive lifespan.

although Bogotá's TFR is the same as the UK's (at 1.8), women in the Colombian capital have much higher fertility in their teens and early 20s.

Figure 5: Comparing Colombia's and Bogotá's ASFR's to the EU-28 and Selected European Nations



Source: Own calculations analysing Colombian women's individual 2015 DHS microdata with the R 'DHS.rates' package (Elkasabi 2019). European ASFRs (2015) from Eurostat (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/data/database>). [Accessed: 18/04/2019].

For example, teens in Bogotá have an ASFR four times the EU-28 average (45 compared to 11), and women in their early 20s have an ASFR more than double the

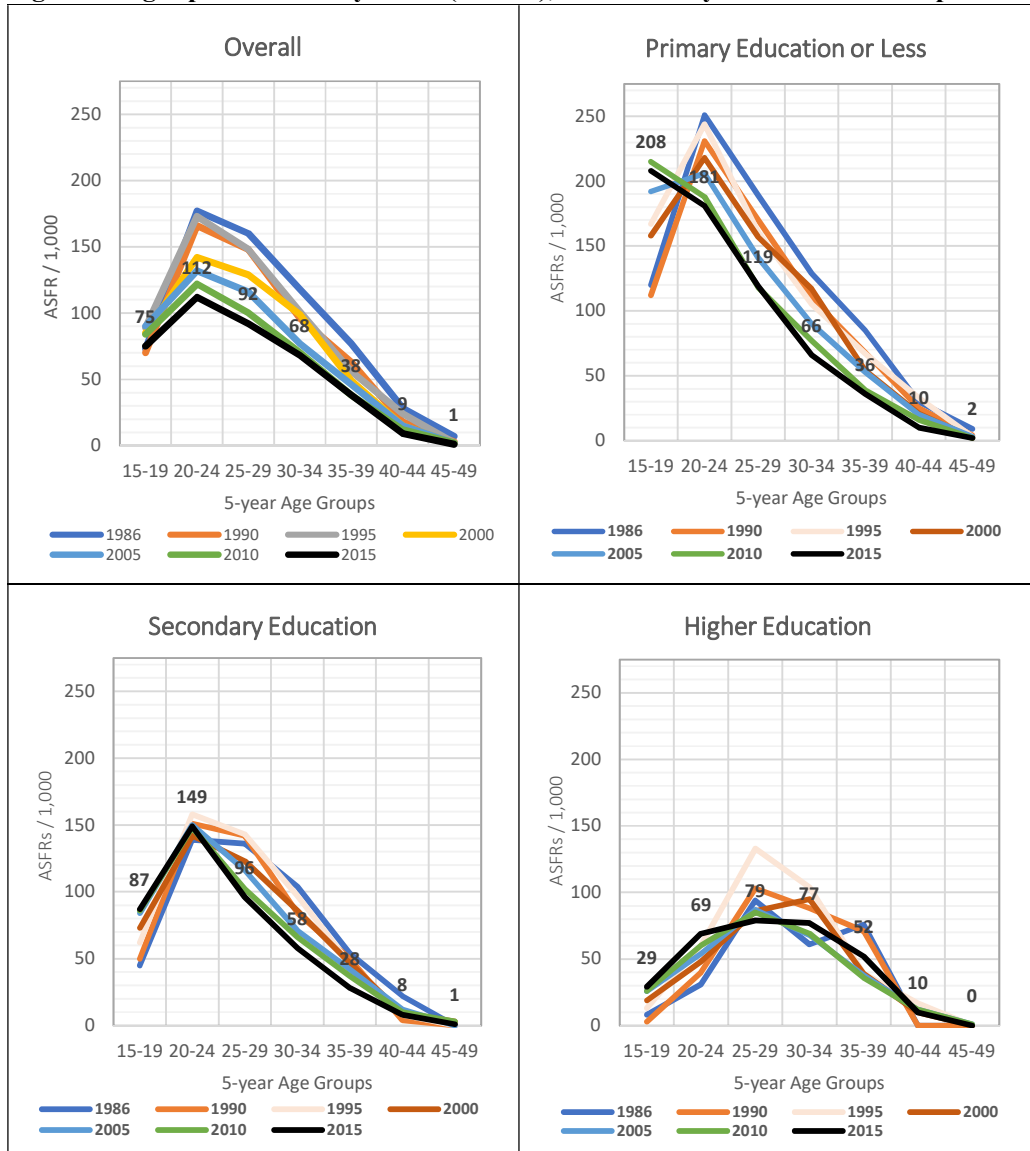
EU-28's (99 versus 44). In Bogotá, women aged 25-49 have fertility that is within the expected European range (though slightly lower for women in their early 30s, where there tends to be a peak in Europe, compared to a gradual decline in Bogotá). When interpreting these differences, it is important to note that, within countries, lower educational attainment and socioeconomic status are usually associated with earlier and higher fertility. The World Bank classifies Colombia as an 'upper-middle-income' country, whereas European countries are mostly 'high-income'.⁵ Therefore, on average, Colombian women are both far less wealthy and less well-educated than the European comparison sample. Europe's educational expansion took place significantly earlier than Colombia's, and European countries are both wealthier overall and less unequal than Colombia. While some Colombian women benefit from educational and professional opportunities roughly equivalent to their European counterparts, the least-well-off Colombian women still tend to be far worse-off than the poorest Europeans. Additionally, although Colombian women are now having fewer children, there is limited evidence that they are having these children any later than previous generations (see the first graph in Figure 6, which shows a stable age structure, despite declining fertility overall).

Colombian fertility still peaks at relatively young ages, with the highest birth rates amongst women in their twenties, though there is variation according to educational level. For example, in 2015, women with a higher education had a later fertility peak, which extended across ages 25-34. Additionally, teenage fertility increased throughout the 1990s and early 2000s: a common Latin American pattern, often associated with poverty and disadvantage (Flórez & Soto 2006). Age at first birth is correlated with age at first union, and Flórez (2000: 50–51) notes that the age at first union barely increased in Colombia (or in the rest of Latin America) between the 1960s and the 1990s, meaning that the observed decline in the TFR is not due to women forming later unions. Instead, the Colombian pattern typically consists of women having their first children at a relatively young age, and stopping childbearing early, in contrast with the predominant Western European pattern, where women usually delay first

⁵ See: <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups> [Accessed: 18/04/2019]. Although the EU-28 average includes Romania and Bulgaria, which are upper middle-income countries, they are the only EU-28 member country not considered 'high-income' by the World Bank. 'Upper middle-income' refers to countries with a GNI (Gross National Income) of US\$3,896-\$12,055 (a wide range), as of 2017, whereas 'high-income' countries are those with a GNI over US\$12,056.

births until their late 20s, early 30s or beyond (in a pattern typical of ‘fertility postponement’). However, more recent data since 2000 are showing shifts in these patterns, especially when the aggregate-level statistics are broken down by social stratum and education (Flórez & Sánchez 2013), as women with higher levels of education are much more likely to delay having children than those with no education, primary or secondary school. The graphs in Figure 6 clearly illustrate this pattern.

Figure 6: Age-specific Fertility Rates (ASFRs), Overall & by Educational Group



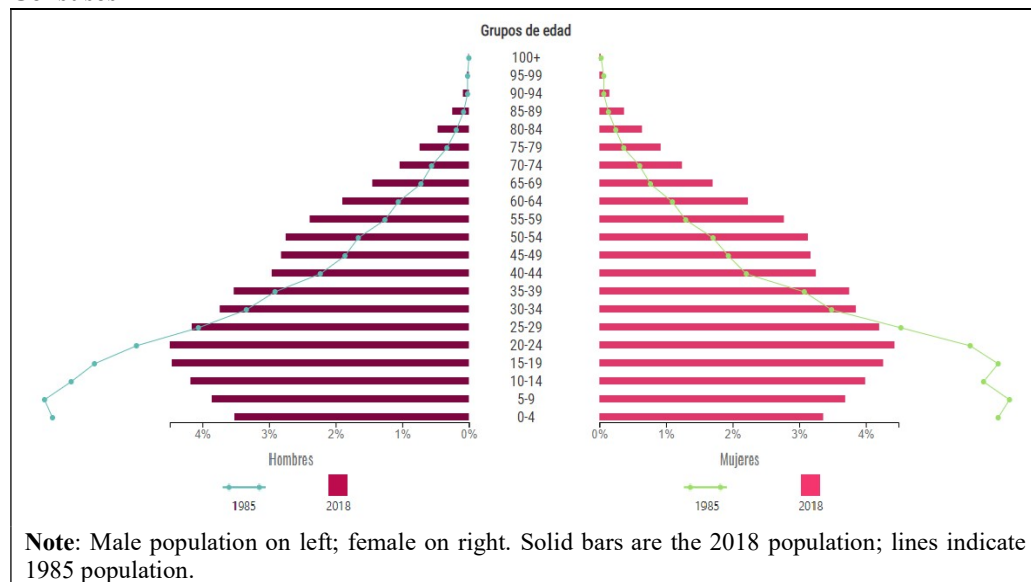
Source: Own construction, using ASFRs from the DHS StatCompiler (ICF 2012).

The final graph in Figure 6 also shows that, over time, early (including adolescent) fertility amongst women with a ‘higher’ education has increased, rather than

decreased, as would be expected. Esteve & Flórez-Paredes (2018) argue that, instead of changing pre-existing ‘patterns of disadvantage’ in Latin American countries, the expansion of higher education has simply reproduced them. In relation to stable (or even decreasing) age at first motherhood within absolute educational groups (e.g. “higher” education), they term this the Latin American ‘stability paradox’, whereby “although at the individual level, women’s years of schooling are strongly correlated with age at first union and first child, the striking expansion of schooling that has occurred over the past few decades has hardly had any impact on women’s transitions to first marriage/cohabitation or motherhood” (Esteve & Flórez-Paredes 2018: 138).

The overall fertility decline and increasing life expectancy, have led to a changing population structure, clearly displayed in Figure 7, which compares the Colombian populations pyramids from the 1985 and 2018 censuses. In this 30-year period, the population has aged substantially: in 1985, children under 15 made up 31.5% of the population and over-65s just 3.2%, compared to 18.6% and 8.9%, respectively, in 2018 (DANE 2019a).

Figure 7: Colombian Population Age-Sex Structure, Comparison of 2018 & 1985 Censuses



Note: Male population on left; female on right. Solid bars are the 2018 population; lines indicate 1985 population.

Source: DANE (2018 Census), https://sitios.dane.gov.co/cnpv/#!/est_pob [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

Changing Ways of Living: Family and Household

Although family and household are not synonymous (see Randall 2018 for a full discussion), there is strong evidence that Colombian household structures are

changing,⁶ and that this partly reflects broader social and family-related change, including declining fertility, increasing single motherhood, and greater acceptability of non-marital cohabitation across social classes. For example, household size has steadily decreased, with one- or two-person households increasingly common. Between 2005 and 2018, this proportion grew from 26% to 40% of all Colombian households (and from 30% to 45% in Bogotá) (DANE 2019b). However, in the case of single-person households, this is not always a positive decision, and often follows divorce/separation or widowhood, especially in older adults (Gallego-Montes & Villegas-Arenas 2015). The proportion of Colombian households headed by a woman has also increased, from 17.5% to 24% between 1993 and 2005 (Liu et al. 2017), and preliminary data from the 2018 census indicate that 41% of households are now headed by women (DANE 2019b).

With respect to nuptiality, Esteve et al. (2012) documented a large decrease (of 16-24 percentage points) in the proportion of women aged 25-29 who were married, across educational groups. This decrease was entirely accounted for by an increase in cohabitation for women with a primary or secondary education. Amongst women with tertiary education, the decreasing proportion of married women was split between those women postponing any type of partnership (and staying single longer, 40%) and those who instead entered into non-marital cohabitation (60%). Additionally, although most single mothers (aged 25-29 in 2005) lived in extended or composite households, only around one-quarter of married or cohabiting mothers lived in this household type, with ‘nuclear’ household arrangements being the norm for *couples* with children (Esteve, García-Román, et al. 2012). Though ‘nuclear family’ households are still dominant, comprising around 60% of all households in Colombia in 1995 and 2014, this aggregated measure hides change within the category, as households of two-parents plus child(ren) declined from 43% to 37% in that period, and both single-person and childless households grew (Flórez 2015: 17), not to mention the fact that the parents in many two-parent households will be cohabiting rather than legally married. It is also important to note that the ‘ideal’ type of a nuclear family built on the foundation of a legally-married heterosexual couple historically coexisted

⁶ In Colombian censuses, a ‘household’ is defined as people who co-reside and share food (Ruiz-Salguero 2011). Not everyone in that situation will self-define as a family; likewise, many self-defined families do not always co-reside and/or share food.

alongside a different reality, where high mortality led to widowhood and either single parenthood or what today would be called ‘composite families’, growing out of new partnerships. Non-marital cohabitation, too, has a long history in Latin America, where it served as a *de facto* marriage for men and women who simply could not afford the costs of officialising their unions (Castro Martin 2002). Therefore, though cohabitation is conceptualised as a ‘new’ family form in Europe, it is questionable whether this is truly the case in Colombia.

Given its replacement-level fertility and diverse family formers, demographers have recently explored the possibility that a ‘Second Demographic Transition’ (or SDT, a concept I will introduce in Chapter 1), is taking place in Colombia, and in a purely quantitative way, using DHS data from 1990-2010 and censuses from 1964-2005 (Flórez & Sánchez 2013). This broadly-focused analysis also excluded any in-depth consideration of childlessness, although it did conclude that characteristics of the SDT are ‘emerging’, particularly in Colombia’s largest cities.

4. Childlessness

What is Childlessness?

‘Childlessness’ simply refers to the absence of children. At its most inclusive, there is no qualification regarding intention or timing, and no negative or positive value judgement: ‘childless’ women and men are those who have no children. In their quantitative study, Miettinen et al. (2015: 8) operationalise ‘childlessness’ as “the absence of biological or adopted children in an individual’s life.” Similarly, though for qualitative research, Rich et al. (2011: 229) define ‘childless’ as referring “to those women who have never had, and currently do not have, any biologically or socially related children (such as step-children or adopted children), and thus have never assumed the role or identity of a mother.” Both definitions emphasise not only not having ever *given birth*, but also the social attribution of the motherhood role, through adoption, step-parenthood or fostering, which some non-biological mothers will undertake. The same logic applies to men.

Most demographic research tends to focus on biological motherhood (partly due to data limitations) and defines women as ‘childless’ if they have never given birth to a live baby. However, not being a biological mother is not necessarily the same thing as

not being able to biologically produce a child: “there is a big difference between *sterility* (the inability to conceive or to impregnate), *infertility* (the inability to produce a live birth) and *childlessness* (not having a living child)” (Berer 1999: 8, emphasis added). For example, it is possible to be *biologically*, but not *socially* childless (e.g. as a foster or adoptive parent).⁷ Therefore, deciding who falls into which category potentially depends more on temporality and/or social relationships than on biological ‘facts’.

Older demographic and sociological research (1980s and before) tends to exclude single women; however, Rowland (2007) distinguished between married and unmarried childlessness,⁸ which is important for contemporary research in populations where childbearing is almost as likely to take place outside of marriage as within. This is the case in Colombia, and using Colombian DHS or census data, it is possible to distinguish between childlessness in married, cohabiting, and single women.

‘Childlessness’ is therefore a complex phenomenon, subsuming a wide range of experiences under one umbrella. Although I will attempt to tease apart some of its sub-categories in my demographic analysis, there are obviously many nuances that large-scale surveys and censuses will fail to capture, which are only be accessible using more in-depth ethnographic methods. Finally, in my analysis of the secondary (DHS and census) data, I focus on women/men who have never had biological children. This likely includes a small number of women and men who have adopted or fostered other people’s biological children. In my interviews with women and men, I focused jointly on biological and social childlessness. This included a small number of people who identified as ‘childless’ (or as not having ever had or raised children), despite being married to or dating a partner who has children.

Complicated Terminology

Letherby (2000) reminds us that, since ‘childlessness’ is largely defined by an absence, in relation to an assumed norm of parenthood, it is sensitive to study and represent appropriately. As a concept, non-parenthood carries diverse positive and negative

⁷ Gestational surrogacy further complicates the bio-social complex of what constitutes parenthood, as ‘genetic’ motherhood is separated from gestation and childbirth.

⁸ Other researchers have interpreted married childlessness that is not due specifically to infertility as an indication of ‘voluntary’ childlessness (e.g. see Toulemon 1996b).

meanings and attracts varied socio-cultural responses, from praise and celebration to stigma and condemnation (Blackstone 2014). Berer (1999: 12) ponders whether “[p]erhaps the fact that not having children is slowly becoming a choice, and not just a tragedy and a source of shame, is an important historical change.”⁹ With this in mind, many women who are ‘voluntarily’ childless, particularly in the US and UK, have questioned the potentially stigmatising use of the term ‘child/ess’, because its inherently negative phrasing implies that something is missing from their lives, and favour the use of the synonym ‘childfree’, which has also been widely adopted in research (Agrillo & Nelini 2008; Basten 2009; Blackstone 2014). When describing different types of ‘involuntary’ childlessness, researchers tend to separate biological sterility/infertility from other (e.g. social) circumstances that lead to childlessness.

I am aware that the term ‘childless’ can be interpreted as a negative judgement, with the suffix ‘-less’ implying that they ‘lack’ something. However, this is not the way I conceptualise or use this terminology. Because I am interested in all forms, not just those which are ‘voluntary’, I will primarily continue to use the term ‘childless’, specifying where this is the result of a choice or for other reasons, where relevant. I also use other synonyms, particularly in the qualitative parts of thesis, such as ‘non-mother’, ‘non-father’, or ‘non-parent’. Although, like ‘childless’, these terms still define non-parents against something they are not – ‘parents’ – I prefer it because it can be made either gender-neutral or -specific. It also has the advantage that it is related to a term that has achieved widespread usage in the Latin American, and specifically Colombian, media coverage of this issue: ‘NoMo’. As the many articles and videos addressing this phenomenon explain, NoMo is short for “not mothers”,¹⁰ described variously as a “revolution”, a “movement”, a “lifestyle”, and a “generation”.¹¹ While

⁹ At a recent conference on reproduction, I was chatting to a young, British medical doctor who was incredulous when I told her that many Colombian non-parents felt negatively judged for not having children. In her mind, in the context of a climate crisis (and amidst recent Extinction Rebellion protests around London), childlessness should be applauded, not stigmatised. She clearly viewed it as a positive act and had difficulty seeing why anyone else would not.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.elespectador.com/cromos/estilo-de-vida/mujeres-nomo-un-nuevo-rol-en-la-sociedad-23472> [Accessed 13/05/2019].

¹¹ See: ‘*La revolución NoMo: Mujeres que no contemplan la maternidad*’ (<https://www.publimetro.co/co/noticias/2014/08/26/la-revolucion-nomo-mujeres-que-no-contemplan-la-maternidad.html>); ‘*Mujeres NoMo: el movimiento que rompe con la idea que lo natural es tener hijos*’ (<https://www.nuevawmujer.com/tu-vida/2017/05/10/mujeres-nomo-movimiento-que-rompe-idea-que-natural-hijos.html>); ‘*Mujeres NoMo: Un estilo de vida*’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dskjAF5gWo> ; ‘*Soy generación NoMo (No mother)*’ (<https://www.vanguardia.com/entretenimiento/galeria/soy-generacion-nomo-no-mother-MGVL368026>) [Accessed 13/05/2019].

most of this coverage tends to associate NoMo with chosen childlessness/child-freedom, some Colombian sources¹² recognise that, in its English-language version, it refers to “no[t] mothers” and that this can be due to infertility (i.e. not being able to have children), or “choice” (*elección*).

Nuancing Non-Parents: Intentions, Timing and Permanence

While childlessness is often framed in terms of binary oppositions – involuntary/voluntary – I agree with Berrington (2015) and others, that it is better conceptualised as a “continuum”. Exploring the degree of intentionality around not having children is important, not least for policy-makers attempting to target interventions for infertile couples that would be inappropriate for voluntarily childless ones. However, intentionality, even when it *can* be defined according to actively-expressed opinions, may change over the life-course.

Additionally, while sterility is not generally intentional (except where it follows chosen surgical sterilisation), some sterile or infertile individuals may never want to have children. Others may initially want them, but eventually arrive at a stage of acceptance or even celebration of being child-free, making these potentially overlapping states. Another conceptual distinction relates to time and permanence, as well as to innate versus acquired characteristics. The medical literature on infertility, for example, distinguishes between ‘primary’ infertility, which prevents a woman/man from ever having a child, and ‘secondary’, which occurs after a woman/man has already been able to give birth/father a child previously. This ‘primary’ or ‘secondary’ conception might also be applied to childlessness more broadly.

A woman/man may be ‘primarily’ childless (i.e. they have never given birth to or raised a child), or secondarily so (i.e. they had and/or raised a child, who later died or was lost in some other way). This ‘secondary’ childlessness could also be applied to some women who gave birth to a baby that they gave up for adoption, and who have not had or raised any further children. An idea similar to ‘secondary’ childlessness was common historically in the literature, which included adults whose children have all died as ‘childless’ (Poston et al. 1983), as well as in the research on the wellbeing of ‘childless’ older adults, which sometimes distinguishes between ‘actual’ and ‘de facto’

¹² See: ‘NoMo: Mujeres que han decidido no ser madres’ (<https://www.publimetro.co/co/nueva-mujer/2017/04/24/nomo-mujeres-que-han-decidido-no-madres.html>) [Accessed 13/05/2019].

childlessness, the latter form of which includes older adults whose children simply are not available to them, through migration as well as mortality (Schroder-Butterfill & Kreager 2005).

Although I focus only on ‘primary’ childlessness, ‘secondary’ forms are important when studying primarily older populations, since, as Schroder-Butterfill & Kreager (2005: 20–21) argue “[m]ost childlessness arises not from an individual’s or a couple’s sterility, but as a social phenomenon brought about through the combined effects of mortality, marital and sexual practices, and migration.” Certain Latin American social movements could also arguably exemplify this (or a similar) form of childlessness, like the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, whose children ‘disappeared’ during the Argentine dictatorship. While some of these women might identify as currently ‘childless’, they also have given birth to and raised a child who later died or disappeared, and also identified as mothers to those children (e.g. see Bellucci 1999). In Erin O’Connor’s work on Latin American motherhood, she notes that “the women in the movement emphasized their identities as supposedly traditional mothers who were willing to sacrifice anything for their children” (2014: 2), even though some of them would likely be classified as effectively ‘childless’ in other types of research (Schroder-Butterfill & Kreager 2005). Therefore, both childlessness and parenthood are potentially transient or reversible states: most women/men will transition from childless to parent at some point, and a small minority will then become childless once again. The level to which it is or is not voluntary is also fluid, as involuntary may develop into voluntary forms and vice versa.

5. Thesis Structure

My approach draws on a multi-scalar conceptualisation of childbearing behaviour. I view this as a version of what others have referred to as ‘multi-scalar ethnography’, which expands on George Marcus’s (1995) idea of ‘multi-sited’ ethnography, and is “concerned with how social phenomena, such as transnational migration, are *constituted* through actions at different scales”¹³ (Xiang 2013: 284, emphasis in original). Like international migration, reproduction is a social phenomenon (although

¹³ Xiang defines scale as “the spatial reach of actions” specifying that “[a]ctions at different scales bear different patterns, logics, rationalities, and deploy different material mediums and discursive idioms” (2013: 284).

it arguably spans the bio-psycho-social realms, as illustrated in Table 1). Given the social embeddedness of reproduction, I find it a helpful way to approach issues around having, or not having, children.

Table 1: Conceptual-analytical schema for an anthropological demography of reproduction (and childlessness) at different scales

Scales/Levels	Actor	Relationship to reproduction/childlessness
MICRO	Individual	Self / Psyche <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physiological ability to produce biological children - Internal motivation and desire to parent - Use of contraception to prevent unwanted parenthood
MESO	Interpersonal / Relational	Other (Close) Desires of other actors and their influence on the individual: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner(s), family members, friends, professional networks
MACRO	Contextual / Structural	Other (Distant) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social and/or State support for parenthood (e.g. education for children; safety; future employment and quality of life) - Accessibility of satisfying non-parental life paths (e.g. availability of contraception/abortion; accessibility of educational and professional opportunities; availability of alternative sources of old-age support, like pensions) - Access to contraception and, conversely, to assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) or adoption, where necessary

Source: Own construction.

Reproduction is similarly multi-scalar: from the micro mechanics of biological reproduction at the cellular level to the macro national and international interest in managing ‘populations’, which acts unequally on women and men according to race/ethnicity, class, and nationality. In her work on indigenous women’s interactions with the Mexican reproductive healthcare institutions as part of conditional cash transfer programmes, Smith-Oka (2009: 2074) also employs a multi-scalar conceptualisation, preferring it to a strictly ‘multi-level’ analysis, because it “has a great notion of size (and power/authority) embedded in it” and thus emphasises “interactions between agency and structure” (Smith-Oka 2009: 2074). It is important to keep these inter-scalar dynamics in mind when examining reproduction and reproductive decision-making, as state or international policies, for example, can have profound effects on women’s (and men’s) actions and on their *ability* to act, whether in terms of using contraception, or feeling that they have the power to raise their children in a safe environment.

Keeping this contextual backdrop of the specific Colombian case in mind, this thesis is broadly structured in two halves (the quantitative overview, followed by the qualitative detail), though I try to weave these perspectives together where possible. In the chapters that follow, I start with a literature review that leads to the theoretical framework and key research questions (Chapter 1), before describing the qualitative fieldwork and analysis methodology alongside a brief description of the participants in this research project (Chapter 2). I then move on to six substantive chapters, based on both nationally-representative large-scale survey and census data, as well as original interview data, gathered during a year of fieldwork in Bogotá. Though my qualitative methods are described in Chapter 2, the relevant data sources and statistical methods are described at the beginning of the substantive chapters themselves. Chapter 3 is the first quantitative chapter, providing a demographic overview of female childlessness and how this changed between the 1980s and 2015. Chapter 4 is a quantitative examination of trends over time in women's fertility 'ideals', 'desires', and 'voluntary' childlessness. Chapter 5 is the only truly mixed-methods chapter and focuses on male childlessness (and fatherhood), combining the analysis of 2015 DHS data with in-depth interviews. Chapter 6 focuses on 'voluntary' non-parenthood from a qualitative perspective, examining 'childfree' individuals' own narratives and stated motivations for non-parenthood. Chapter 7 presents a historically-situated analysis of qualitative interview data to show how parenthood and childlessness relate to social mobility and independence, before finishing by considering the stigma and social pressure that is still exerted on non-parents by their families, friends, and others. Chapter 8 examines the present historical moment, employing the idea of social and personal 'imaginaries' of parenthood and family to compare parents and non-parents.

Anthropological demography is intrinsically multi-scalar, balancing population (macro) and individual (micro) analyses (Johnson-Hanks 2007). For example, the structure of this thesis begins with a primarily macro-level overview, in Chapters 3-5. Then, part of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 focus primarily on the micro- and meso-level 'scales', before Chapters 7 and 8 re-connect these scales to the macro-level (primarily national) scale. The basic unit of my ethnographic fieldwork and analysis takes place at an individual, narrative level, but these individuals are, of course, embedded in contexts that broaden our interest out to larger scales. These include, for example, and in increasing order: personal networks, local/regional geographies and economies (in

this case, Bogotá), and national contexts (here, Colombia). All of these shape individuals' childbearing worlds and opportunities in important ways.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Literature Review

In this chapter, I begin by introducing the concept of ‘demographic transitions’, review the major critiques of these theories, and then consider their application to Latin America. I will also introduce some more recent demographic theories that have challenged, and arguably complemented, the perspectives presented in theories of demographic transitions. Finally, I will discuss some of the literature addressing childlessness, before briefly moving on to recent work in the anthropology of reproduction and finishing with my research aims and questions.

1.1 Demographic Transition Theories

The First Demographic Transition (FDT) and some critiques

Although my work engages more with the ideas of the so-called ‘Second Demographic Transition’ (SDT), it is helpful to briefly introduce the ‘Classical’ or ‘*First Demographic Transition*’ (FDT) to understand whether and how these transitions differ. The FDT theory focuses squarely on ‘classical’ demographic topics of mortality and fertility, hinging on their relationship to one another and their respective roles in population growth, or hypothesised stasis. At its simplest, the term ‘demographic transition’, theorised by Kingsley Davis (1945), Frank Notestein (1945, 1953) and others describes a three-stage move from high to low fertility and mortality. The first stage is a ‘traditional’/pre-transitional demographic regime characterised by high levels of mortality and fertility and slow population growth, which is followed by a transitional period when mortality falls, “causing rapid population growth before fertility too begins to descend” (Greenhalgh 1995a: 5), which finally settles into an ‘industrialised’/‘modern’ regime featuring low mortality and fertility (Solsona 1998; Szreter 1993). Paul Demeny (1997: 95) adds that this fertility transition was expected to proceed toward the replacement level (TFR~2.1), which “would lead to population stabilization” and, eventually, an “age of zero population growth would beckon.” The hypothesised end-point of this transition – a population featuring slow to no growth – has, however, never been achieved.

Although originally formulated to describe the historical mortality and fertility decline in Western Europe between the late 18th and early 20th centuries, most demographers, economists and policy makers of the mid-20th century believed that a similar process

would also take place in ‘developing’ countries elsewhere, given time (Szreter 1993). The FDT has been both widely accepted as a general model and heavily criticised for reasons including the ordering of mortality and fertility declines, and for its presumed endpoint of low and stable fertility (rather than below- or above-replacement level fertility). Anthropological critiques often focus on the fact that it is fundamentally mechanistic and ethnocentric, predicated on the idea of a global evolution towards a European pattern, built on the problematic foundation of ‘modernisation theory’ (Greenhalgh 1996). Historical critiques often focus on its teleological approach to understanding change, which conflates cause and effect, and frames history as a progressive, linear pathway (Szreter 2011). As Greenhalgh (1995a) argues, a universalising theory like the FDT could never fully capture or explain the motivations (and therefore causes) of demographic change across diverse societies, each with their own complex cultural systems and logic.

While valid and important, these critiques did not detract from the FDT’s position as the defining demographic theory until the late 20th century (Greenhalgh 1996).¹⁴ Additionally, at a basic descriptive level, most countries *have* experienced a shift from high mortality and fertility to lower levels of both, albeit with notable exceptions. The order of observed changes does not always follow the presumed pattern (with mortality declining first, followed later by fertility), and the transition’s ‘endpoint’, in Europe and elsewhere, has not been ‘replacement’ level fertility, but rather below-replacement fertility (Demeny 1997). Over the long term and without net immigration, this leads not to a steady population, but rather to decline – currently, an important political preoccupation in many European and East Asian countries.

The Second Demographic Transition (SDT)

In the late 1980s, two demographers, Ronald Lesthaeghe and Dirk van de Kaa, coined the term ‘Second Demographic Transition’ (van de Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe & van de Kaa 1986 in Lesthaeghe 2014) to describe arguably novel socio-demographic trends that had begun in many European societies in the mid-1950s and ‘60s. The ‘transition’

¹⁴ Greenhalgh (1995a) summarises the post-1960s tweaks to the FDT, which pivoted away from the ‘classic’ form of the theory and developed its ideas in accordance with new evidence, which she describes as ‘post-classical’ and ‘institutional’ approaches. However, these tweaks focused on the causes and consequences of the changes, more than on the basic idea that pre-transitional fertility and mortality are high and post-transitional fertility and mortality low.

that they described was characterised not only by a statistical tendency towards a greater diversity of family formation patterns, but also sociocultural changes that led to the increasing *acceptability* of this diversity. Both van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe have defended their original ideas about the SDT in subsequent decades and elaborated many additional facets (van de Kaa 1987, 2009, 2004; Lesthaeghe 2014; Lesthaeghe & Neels 2002; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn 1988, 2002; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe 2004).

According to the first English-language elucidation of the idea, van de Kaa's seminal '*Europe's Second Demographic Transition*' (1987), the key features of the SDT include:

1. Increasing cohabitation before marriage and as an alternative to marriage
2. Later ages at marriage (for women and men)
3. Increasing divorce rates
4. Older age at childbearing (postponement) and increasing voluntary childlessness
5. More childbearing outside of marriage (e.g. while couples are cohabiting), and
6. Sub-replacement fertility (fewer than 2.1 children per couple).

All of the above features centre on changing patterns of family formation and fertility, which are the focus of this thesis. In an updated interpretation, Ronald Lesthaeghe, the SDT's co-creator, has held up certain aspects of the SDT over others, stipulating that several features *must* be present before a 'Second Demographic Transition' can be identified, while noting that these characteristics "do not necessarily occur simultaneously" and that "lags are likely to emerge" (2010: 234). These four features are:

1. A clear link between "sub-replacement fertility" and "postponement of marriage and childbearing";
2. Increasing female autonomy and "free partner choice", which should be reflected in ages at marriage (presumably in increasing age at marriage);
3. Greater social acceptance and increasing incidence of "premarital cohabitation"; and finally,
4. "At both the macro level and the individual level, connections must exist between demographic features and value orientations" (Lesthaeghe 2010: 234).

Lesthaeghe additionally argues that, when examined at an “individual level, the choice for new types of households (premarital single living, cohabitation, and parenthood within cohabitation) are all linked to individualistic and nonconformist value orientations in a great variety of spheres” (2014: 18114). Together with the fourth point above, this quote illustrates one of the key characteristics of the SDT: the essential linkage between socio-demographic trends and shifting *attitudes* and *social norms* (van de Kaa 1987).

The SDT is thus a deeply ‘culturalist’ framework for explaining changing demographic behaviours. For example, van de Kaa (1987) saw the increasingly diverse paths to family formation as being fostered by a greater sense of permissiveness across Western European societies, alongside a quest for individual ‘self-fulfilment’. This, in turn, has been linked to “the rise of higher order” post-materialist needs (Lesthaeghe 2014: 18114). Intellectually, van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe were influenced by Abraham Maslow’s theory of ‘preference drift’, from ‘lower’ to ‘higher order needs’, for which a relatively high level of socioeconomic development/security is a prerequisite (Lesthaeghe 2010, 2014; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe 2004). ‘Lower order needs’ refer primarily to subsistence (food, shelter, and other basic physical needs), while ‘higher order needs’ include “freedom of expression, participation and emancipation, self-realization and autonomy, recognition,” which Lesthaeghe links to greater sociocultural acceptance and respect for individual choices (Lesthaeghe 2010: 213). He argues that, while the FDT refers mainly to a socioeconomic ‘stage’ concerned with “the realization of basic material needs,” the SDT “is the expression of the development of higher-order, non-material needs and expressive values” (Lesthaeghe 2010: 213–214): similar to Ronald Inglehart’s (1971) opposition of materialist and post-materialist values.

Distinctive Features of the First and Second Demographic Transitions

With respect to broad trends in marriage, the FDT was marked by high proportions of women and men marrying at young ages and by low divorce rates, whereas in the SDT, all of these trends reverse. In terms of fertility, the FDT assumed a small, nuclear family norm, with low (but near or above replacement-level) fertility. Van de Kaa has argued that, while declining mortality spurred the FDT, it is declining fertility that acts as the ‘engine’ of the SDT (2004: 8). Under the SDT, the FDT trend toward lower

fertility intensifies, resulting in consistently below-replacement-level fertility. With respect to theorising changing value orientations, Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa were heavily influenced by Phillippe Ariès's work on the history of childhood and by his 1980 commentary on declining European fertility. Ariès describes the way in which the *first* demographic transition's "smaller family model" revolutionised the affective relationships between parents and children (1980: 645–646). He postulates that having fewer children who were more likely to survive allowed parents to make greater emotional and economic investments in each of their offspring (Ariès 1980). Ariès consequently terms the 19th and early 20th centuries the "king child era", which is followed by further fertility declines in the mid-20th century that he observes result in a new era of the "king pair with child" (Ariès 1980 in Lesthaeghe 2010: 213). In the SDT framework, van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe develop these ideas one step further into a model including king pairs without children. With the help of effective contraception, adults are increasingly able to plan childbearing around other aspects of life, which allow them to "blossom as individuals" (Ariès 1980: 650): an obvious influence on the SDT's theoretical emphasis on individual self-fulfilment. Whereas "during the first transition couples chose to adopt contraception in order to avoid pregnancies; during the second, the basic decision is to stop contraception in order to start a pregnancy" (Lesthaeghe 2010: 213). Under this SDT schema, some adults may not want to stop contraception at all, if they are happy to pursue forms of self-fulfilment that do not involve parenthood. The normalisation of contraception therefore leads to slight shifts in the emphasis and timing of decision-making, which have profound effects on childbearing.

Critiques of the SDT

Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa's ideas have been by no means universally accepted – within or outside of demography. The idea that Europe alone, never mind any other region, is undergoing a *Second* Demographic Transition is still a controversial one, which has attracted both critiques and attempts at refinement (Bernhardt 2004; Coleman 2004; Sobotka 2008). Sobotka (2008) and Coleman (2004: 14–16) document the ambivalence that many demographers feel towards the idea that the SDT is truly a demographic transition on par with the first, as there is limited evidence that the 'ideational changes' involved in the process are either 'sustainable', 'irreversible' or 'complete': the alleged pre-requisites for a true 'demographic transition'. Many also

feel that it is too concerned with sociocultural and psychological changes, and not focused enough on basic demographic processes of fertility, mortality and migration, particularly excluding the latter two (Coleman 2004). David Coleman (a British demographer) has taken detailed issue with the SDT, although I will only fully describe what I consider his two most important points of criticism for the present work.

First, Coleman (2004) argues that the SDT is merely a secondary phase of the FDT; that the two ‘transitions’ cannot be adequately differentiated (i.e. that the SDT is merely a continuation of the FDT), and that the behaviours outlined in the SDT are not especially novel. He does, however, concede that contemporary Europe would be the first context in which all SDT features coexist (i.e. divorce, cohabitation, very low fertility, etc.). Secondly, he contests the extension of the SDT to Central and Eastern Europe. Coleman doubts that observable SDT features in the post-Communist context are related to shifting values and norms around progressiveness or individual empowerment, rather than manifestations of acute social and economic crisis (Coleman 2004). This has been termed the ‘pattern-of-disadvantage’ hypothesis, or the idea that rising levels of cohabitation (and perhaps also childlessness/low fertility) can be linked to impoverishment, and therefore to economic factors, rather than to cultural changes and more progressive attitudes (Lesthaeghe 2014). This is an important point for the Latin American context, as the SDT and pattern-of-disadvantage hypothesis could, and likely do, co-exist, both within and between countries. Coleman himself nonetheless recognises that, with important limitations, the SDT remains a useful heuristic.

Perhaps the most important line of critique from an anthropological perspective is exemplified by Eva Bernhardt (2004: 28), who accepts the utility of the SDT for stimulating new demographic inquiry, but would prefer a more explicitly gendered focus, and argues that it would be better understood and referred to as a “‘revolution in family formation patterns” than as another demographic transition. Solsona (1998: 212) asserts that: “Behind any decision about having – or not having – children, or about getting married – or not, a negotiation process exists in which personal expectations and bargaining power are very important.” These personal expectations and power relations are, in turn, heavily influenced by socio-economic and cultural contexts (i.e. the larger fields which frame individuals’ personal choices) (Solsona

1998). Solsona (1998: 223) also nuances the Northern European foundations of the SDT, concluding that, paradoxically, in Spain, the ‘traditional’ family-oriented model assists the ‘individualisation’ process, as family support (social, emotional, financial) allows people to make ‘self-fulfilling’ choices in a context where state support is limited, and the labour market cannot provide enough jobs to enable all working-age adults to become financially independent. Ethnographic evidence on low fertility in Spain (Douglass 2005), and studies of low fertility in Italy, addressing the progression to first and subsequent births (Dalla Zuanna 2004) both support this assertion. This idea is analogous to what some call the “too much family” theory of low fertility: interdependence between generations leads younger people to stay at home longer, indefinitely delaying (or avoiding) parenthood (Livi-Bacci 2001; White et al. 2012: 57). This is especially relevant in the Latin American context, where State assistance is even more limited than in Southern European countries, where the labour market does not provide sufficient opportunities for the whole population, and where the absence of a European-style welfare state means that the sociocultural tendency towards familism provides an essential social safety net. Additionally, in Colombia, most urban, middle-to-upper-class (future) parents expect to educate their children in fee-paying schools,¹⁵ unlike in most European countries, where the free state education systems are perceived to be of a good quality.

Finally, Simon Szreter’s extensive critiques of the FDT, SDT, and all such ‘universalising’ sociological theories dispute the value of even attempting to formulate a ‘grand theory’ of something as historically and socio-culturally diverse as fertility declines, in which he frames the SDT as culturally-determinist. Szreter has argued that theoretical studies of comparative fertility declines require:

a specification which combines the quantitative virtues of demography with an acknowledged role for the more qualitative methods of disciplines such as history and anthropology to provide fully contextualised and dynamic empirical studies of all the significant, but often unquantifiable influences on reproduction (2011: 70).

In my research, I draw on both Bernhardt’s and Szreter’s critiques in approaching the SDT as a useful heuristic that can be improved by an explicit consideration of gendered (and other forms of) power relations, and which must be interpreted according to

¹⁵ Around 1 in 5 Colombian children attend private schools (Radinger et al. 2018: 16), compared to about 7% of children in England, for example, according to the UK’s Independent Schools Council (ISC 2019).

contextually-specific patterns of family-formation, rather than as a universal template for social change. I have also attempted to contextualise the broad patterns observable by examining quantitative trends over time, using interview and other qualitative data to explore the unquantifiable aspects of reproductive decisions and their outcomes.

Features of a Latin American SDT

Although originally formulated with reference to Northern and Western Europe, updates to the SDT have expanded the focus to include Southern and Central/Eastern European countries (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn 2002; Solsona 1998; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe 2004), as well as East Asia (Lesthaeghe 2010). Most recently, demographers have begun to hypothesise that features of the SDT are unfolding in parts of Latin America (Esteve, Garcia-Roman, et al. 2012; Esteve, Lesthaeghe, et al. 2012).

The SDT feature that has been best-explored in Latin America is cohabitation, particularly attempting to distinguish so-called ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, or ‘old’ and ‘new’ cohabitation (Covre-Sussai et al. 2015; Esteve, Lesthaeghe, et al. 2012). As Castro-Martin (2002) shows, Latin America has always experienced a ‘dual nuptiality system’, whereby some people cohabit in consensual unions (*de facto* marriages), sometimes with the aim of officialising their union later, and others have the resources required to enter into a formal *de jure* marriage from the start. ‘Traditional’ forms of cohabitation are characterised by socioeconomic exclusion, and they predominantly begin at younger ages, often following the birth of a child (Covre-Sussai et al. 2015). This contrasts with ‘modern’ cohabitation, which is thought to be associated with three factors consonant with the SDT: (1) it is a “conscious choice” in the pursuit of individual autonomy; (2) it represents “freedom from institutional control” (as the conscious choice can be seen as a refusal to accept traditional forms of social control and judgement regarding appropriate moral behaviour); and (3) it results from and further signals “greater gender equity” (Laplante et al. 2015: 86). The spread of SDT features in Latin America is commonly linked to the increasing educational achievement and widening professional opportunities for women across the continent over the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In Colombia, in particular, this educational transition has been steep: only 7.5% of women had completed secondary education or higher in the 1973 census, increasing to 55.8% in 2005 (Esteve, Garcia-Roman, et al. 2012: 7). With respect to cohabitation, Esteve, Lesthaeghe, et al. (2012) characterise

Colombia's "starting" level in the 1960s as low, then rising relatively late, but characterised by a "striking" boom: from around 20% of all women and men in such unions at ages 25-29 in 1973 to two-thirds of all women and three-quarters of all men of the same age group in 2005.

The traditionally negative association between higher levels of education and cohabitation (within Latin American countries) is typically understood to reflect ethnic and class-based differentials in access to and the social value of official marriage, yet this association is weakening. As a proportion of all unions among young women with more than secondary education, cohabitation exceeded 30% in Colombia, Argentina, Peru and Cuba as of the 2000 census round, rising from nearly zero in Colombia in the 1970s (Esteve, Lesthaeghe, et al. 2012: 67). The implication is that this represents 'modern' cohabitation, as it is occurring among women with at least some tertiary education.

With respect to different features of the SDT, Esteve, Garcia-Roman, et al. (2012), hypothesise that while cohabitation is spreading 'up' from women and men with less education and lower socioeconomic status (SES) to those with more education and higher SES, the evidence regarding the postponement of childbearing indicates the opposite: where postponement is occurring, it tends to spread from more to less advantaged social groups. Moreover, there is evidence of a dual transition, where one group of women (those in rural areas, with less education and fewer socioeconomic opportunities) are 'finishing' the socio-demographic changes that characterise the *first* demographic transition, while a second group of (mostly urban, highly educated) women are beginning to display characteristics of the SDT. Esteve, Garcia-Roman, et al. et al. (2012) argue that, over the longer term, this could lead to a double 'fertility squeeze' and below-replacement fertility across Latin America. This below-replacement fertility is already a reality in the Southern Cone countries and Brazil, while Mexico and Colombia hover around replacement level.

Laplante et al. (2015) looked at childbearing within cohabiting unions, and found that highly-educated women are not only increasingly likely to cohabit, they are also just as likely as married women to have children within these cohabiting partnerships. This signals a substantial shift in cohabitation and childbearing patterns among better-off Latin American women, since the 1980s. University-educated Latin American women

are also “about four times more likely to be childless than women with no education or incomplete elementary school” and the same effect is present in younger and older cohorts (Rosero-Bixby et al. 2009: 180). There is also evidence of postponement of first births among 25-29 year old women in Colombia (as elsewhere in Latin America): whereas only about 20% of these women would have been childless in the 1985 and 1993 census, this had risen to around 30% in 2005 (Rosero-Bixby et al. 2009). The question of whether this is a sign of fertility postponement or the harbinger of a future increase in completed childlessness is still somewhat open. Finally, there is an increasing acceptance of divorce, homosexuality, and other ‘non-conformist’ behaviours across all social classes, which Laplante et al. (2015) note in relation to the increasing incidence of childbearing in consensual unions.

1.2 Other Theories Addressing Social and Demographic Change

Given that the SDT is far from universally accepted, it is important to highlight some competing demographic theories that have gained prominence since 2000. All of these theories address one of the main shortcomings of the SDT, in that they deal explicitly with gender roles and recent transformations in those roles.

Shifting the Focus to Gender Equity and Inequity

Like the SDT, Peter McDonald’s (2000a, 2000b) ‘gender equity’¹⁶ theory was formulated based on European (and Australian) data, and is therefore expected to be most applicable in similar contexts. Unlike the broader theoretical reach of the SDT, McDonald’s theory focuses squarely on explaining low fertility, arguing that “very low levels of fertility in advanced countries today can be explained in terms of incoherence between the levels of gender equity applying in different social institutions” (2000a: 1). In essence, institutions that deal with individuals (e.g. education, job markets) are viewed as more gender equitable, while institutions that deal with those individuals *as* members of larger, family units (e.g. governments, families themselves, and ‘industrial relations’, or the *conditions* of employment within the aforementioned job markets) will be less gender equitable (McDonald 2000a: 1).

¹⁶ In demographic research, *gender equality* is typically defined “in terms of how outcomes in domains like education, jobs, or housework differ between men and women” whereas *gender equity* refers to the “perceptions of fairness and opportunities, irrespective of the end result” (McDonald 2013 in Esping-Andersen & Billari 2015: 7). However, since perceptions of fairness are more difficult to measure than equality of outcomes, measures of gender equality are often substituted for gender equity measures.

This theory is predicated on the opportunity costs¹⁷ of having children – primarily for women – as it postulates that women and men will be treated equally, and experience similar (individual) incentives/disincentives with respect to education and employment, up to the point at which they marry and/or have children, when they will become (and be seen as) part of a ‘family’ unit, where women are still typically expected to take on more caring responsibilities than men. This, in turn, curtails women’s professional opportunities. As a response, women will (rationally) choose to have fewer children if they are inclined to continue participating in the labour force.

In a second article, McDonald makes five propositions relating gender equality to fertility levels, the most important of which contest that: falling fertility changes the nature of women’s lives and of gender relations (Proposition 2); the transition from high fertility to “around replacement level is accompanied by an increase in gender equity within the institution of the family” (2000b: 432, Proposition 4); and, the crux of this theory, that when gender equity in ‘individual-oriented institutions’ is high, but in ‘family-oriented institutions’, it is low, fertility will also decline steeply (2000b: 437, Proposition 5). Thus, McDonald explains the low levels of fertility in most European countries as the result of “[h]igh levels of equity enjoyed by women as individuals in combination with continuing low levels of equity for women in their roles as wives or mothers” (McDonald 2000b: 437–438). This leads to women having fewer children than they would have in a more gender equitable society, as they seek to avoid too intense a ‘second shift’ at home (Hochschild & Machung 1990 [1989]), as well as potentially facing the effects of institutionalised discrimination and other structural constraints on mothers in the workplace (McDonald 2000a). Therefore, where women’s ‘individual aspirations’ clash with their future (unequal) role as wives and mothers – in both the domestic and public sphere – they may simply “opt to eschew the family role rather than the individual role, that is, they will not form a permanent relationship or they will elect to have no children or fewer children than they otherwise would have intended” (McDonald 2000b: 437). In McDonald’s own estimation, this type of fertility theory would not apply in the Colombian case, as his ‘very low fertility’ category refers to a $TFR \leq 1.5$ (2000b: 438, see Note 7). However, it could

¹⁷ Esping-Andersen & Billari (2015: 20) describe such ‘opportunity costs’ of childbearing in the following way: “When women acquire marketable skills, control their fertility, and sharply reduce the time required for domestic work, the opportunity costs of full-time housewifery become obvious, especially for women with a strong earnings potential.”

theoretically be a factor leading to below replacement level fertility amongst certain subgroups of Colombian women, but not others.

Since McDonald's 'gender equity' theory, many other demographers have adapted and built on similar ideas. For example, Frances Goldscheider, Eva Bernhardt and Trude Lappegard recently argued that:

the negative aspects of family change linked with the SDT primarily reflect the early stresses on the family imposed by the movement of women into the labor market, and that the particularly problematic elements (very low levels of fertility and union formation and high levels of union dissolution) can be reduced by increasing the involvement of men in the home (2015: 208).

This is what the authors term a two-part 'gender revolution'.¹⁸ In the first part, women take on a greater range of roles outside the home, as primary or secondary breadwinners, but continue to take on a greater share of domestic responsibilities than their (male) partners (Goldscheider et al. 2015: 207). The unachieved second part will see men take on a greater share of family, caring, and other domestic responsibilities, reducing women's 'second shift'. Therefore, like McDonald, they view late 20th-century low fertility as the result of the misalignment between women's increasingly important extra-domestic roles and their continued heavy domestic caring responsibilities. This misalignment causes tensions that result in increased divorce rates and union instability and in women and men having fewer children than they would otherwise want, or foregoing having children altogether.

Whereas the SDT explains increased union dissolution and decreased fertility through an individual-level ideational lens, Goldscheider et al. (2015: 212–213) openly judge this to be 'problematic', as it disregards the social-structural constraints that individuals face in the first part of the "gender revolution". The authors argue that, when this gender revolution is complete, "populations are likely to experience at least somewhat higher fertility and greater family stability" (Goldscheider et al. 2015: 213). This means that, in contrast with the SDT approach, which predicts continued 'heterogeneity' of family forms, or Easterlin's predicted 'fertility oscillations', these authors predict an endpoint in which 'the family' is stronger, not weaker (Goldscheider et al. 2015: 212), and fertility does not necessarily stay below replacement level.

¹⁸ Though this terminology had also previously been used by other scholars, e.g. England (2010).

A final, related contribution comes from Esping-Andersen & Billari (2015: 8), who expand on the ‘gender revolution’ concept (though they term it a ‘female revolution’), by analysing gender equality and fertility cross-nationally, and hypothesising about how gender equality and period fertility close to the replacement level might spread in future. Their model fuses both the structural factors highlighted by ‘gender equity’ theories, as well as the ideational factors prioritised by the SDT to explain the diffusion of gender equitable ideas. Their ‘female revolution’ refers to the extraordinary changes to women’s social and economic roles witnessed over the 20th century in most countries globally. Like the authors reviewed above, they argue that fertility¹⁹ will be lowest when women’s public roles have changed, but gender egalitarianism is not yet the norm (Esping-Andersen & Billari 2015: 8–9). In keeping with this idea, these authors theorise that women have driven social and family change far more than men, as their roles have transformed (increasing the ‘opportunity costs’ of having a partner and children), while men’s have stayed relatively stable. Additionally, as women’s and men’s economic roles converge, but their household labour remains unequal, the ‘private sphere’ becomes not only ‘unfair’ but also ‘inefficient’ (Esping-Andersen & Billari 2015: 14). Contrasting Northern and Southern European countries, they argue that two factors determine how quickly gender egalitarian ideas will spread through societies – first, the level of “generalized social trust” and secondly, “social stratification” (Esping-Andersen & Billari 2015: 14). Specifically, they note that intergenerational mobility and educational mixing (broadly in society and specifically in marriage markets), as well as low levels of social and residential segregation between ethno-racial groups should foster faster diffusion of gender egalitarian ideas (Esping-Andersen & Billari 2015: 16).

Colombia is a regionally- and ethnically-diverse country with a history of violence and persistent socioeconomic inequalities, which result in limited social trust and high levels of social stratification. Therefore, if Esping-Andersen & Billari’s framework is correct, then as the ‘female revolution’ unfolds in Colombia, the country could expect gender egalitarian ideas to diffuse very slowly through society, leading to a potentially prolonged period of below-replacement fertility in the country’s future, barring the influence of other factors.

¹⁹ Measured using the TFR.

All the theories presented in this section depart from the SDT in their focus on institutional/structural factors, as well as their prediction that, rather than remaining below replacement level, fertility will instead rise again in future, from well below replacement to at least near-replacement levels. More than 20 years ago, “Chesnais (1996, 1998) argued that although increased gender equity is associated with lower fertility in developing countries, in the industrialized countries of Western Europe and elsewhere gender equity is generally associated with higher fertility” (Torr & Short 2004: 112). The hypothesis that the relationship between gender equity and fertility is U-shaped dovetails with McDonald’s (2000b, 2000a), Goldscheider et al.’s (2015), and Esping-Andersen & Billari’s (2015) perspectives, as they postulate that very low fertility will increase – possibly even above replacement – once different social institutions become more gender equitable, thus reducing the personal and professional costs to women of having children.

Regardless of whether these theories turn out to be better predictors of future demographic behaviours than the SDT, their key contribution concerns the importance of integrating the many gendered dimensions of reproduction and of productive/reproductive family systems into any theoretical discussion of fertility change.

‘Preference’ Theory

British sociologist Catherine Hakim’s ‘preference’ theory is framed around personal predispositions and – importantly – only truly addresses women’s preferences. It is somewhat complementary to both the SDT and gender equity theories. In common with the SDT, Hakim emphasises ideational change, linking this directly to people’s behaviours and, following Giddens’s ‘theory of reflexive modernity’, she focuses on processes of ‘individualisation’, which free “people from the influence of social class, nation, and family” (Hakim 2006: 286). Her ideas diverge from more neoclassical economic theories of family that are popular in demography (e.g. Gary Becker’s ‘new home economics’), which often frame fertility in terms of rational choices between costs and benefits to parents and/or the quality versus quantity of children. Hakim instead views (women’s) personal preferences as the primary motivator of both fertility decisions and the existing gendered division of labour in the private and public spheres in ‘advanced’ (i.e. Euro-American) societies where women and men now have

relatively equal opportunities to pursue paid work and/or family life, due to “the contraceptive revolution, the equal opportunities revolution, the expansion of white-collar occupations, the creation of jobs for secondary earners and, finally, the increasing importance of personal values and preferences when individual choices are made” (Vitali et al. 2009: 416). As Hakim downplays any structural limitations to women’s ability to achieve their goals, individual women’s orientations towards work and/or family life become fundamental to understanding their fertility.

In Hakim’s framework, women’s innate ‘heterogeneity’ results in different orientations towards either work or the home. Her theory classifies women into three ‘ideal-type’ groups, based on their preferences. These are: (1) “home-centred” women (whom she estimates comprise about 20% of all women, and whose preference is for having and raising children over working outside the home); (2) “adaptive” women (comprising around 60%, who are less committed to either work or ‘family’ and instead might mix the two, either at the same time or in sequence, using a variety of strategies); and, finally, (3) “work-centred” women (making up the remaining 20%, whom she postulates will be highly-educated, high-achieving working professionals who are likely to forego childbearing as they prefer work over family life) (Hakim 2003: 358). Her theory is framed as most relevant to economically ‘advanced’ countries in Europe and North America, where she views her theory of ‘lifestyle preferences’ as having the greatest influence on women’s employment and fertility patterns. In this view, lifestyle preferences therefore determine “the incidence of childlessness and, for the majority who do have children, family sizes” (Hakim 2003: 361). Hakim’s ideas have been explored by some demographers (e.g. Vitali et al. 2009), and she occasionally writes for a demographic audience (see Hakim 2003), although as we will see, her ideas have been heavily criticised.

Critiques of these theories

The gender equity theories reviewed above focus almost entirely on the higher-level/macro social and economic conditions thought to constrain fertility and keep it low, yet they allow little room for the socioeconomic inequalities that are key to understanding fertility trends and diversity in many societies outside of Europe, particularly in Latin America. Esping-Andersen & Billari (2015: 16) integrate ‘social stratification’ as one factor in their theory of demographic and family change, with

more stratified (i.e. generally less equal) societies likely to experience a slower ‘diffusion’ of progressive ideas regarding gender relations. However, they conclude by postulating that, as ‘gender egalitarianism’ becomes ideationally normative, “family outcomes within all social strata will more closely match preferences” (Esping-Andersen & Billari 2015: 25). In contrast, the SDT and Hakim’s ‘preference’ theories place more emphasis on the effect that ideational change and individual orientations, respectively, have on fertility outcomes, largely disregarding the topic of gender equity and persistent inequalities.

Hakim’s preference theory has primarily been criticised for justifying a neo-liberal focus on individuals (and their personal motivations), while ignoring or oversimplifying the structural and contextual factors that might constrain or shape women’s preferences for work and/or family. Many question the causal pathway that Hakim lays out – from preferences to realities – pointing out that it is equally likely that women’s preferences are shaped by the (imperfect) realities that they face (Vitali et al. 2009).²⁰ For example, Leahy & Doughney (2014) criticise Hakim’s focus on individual choice, by arguing that women’s preferences regarding paid work cannot be isolated from their unpaid workload (i.e. from the caring and other domestic activities that they take on as partners and mothers). In addition, while Hakim occasionally mentions men, her theory focuses entirely on women’s preferences – largely ignoring the fact that these preferences are shaped not only by structural (macro-level) factors, but also by women’s individual (micro-level) relationships with (largely) male life partners, who themselves may have preferences that either clash with or are supportive of women’s professional ambitions. While gender equity theory would view non-motherhood as a rational response to a system that continues to discriminate against women *as mothers*, preference theory would instead frame it as an expression of a work-orientated personality. It is, of course, possible and even likely, that both perspectives reflect some women’s realities, and that perhaps for an even larger number of women who ‘choose’ to be childless or have just one child, this

²⁰ For a good summary of the lines of criticism that are most relevant to demographic and sociological studies of fertility (and childlessness), see the beginning of Vitali et al.’s (2009) article, which also empirically tested Hakim’s preference theory on data from across Europe, with mixed results regarding support for her theory.

both reflects an innate work-orientation and a rational reaction to the current (inequitable) gender system that they inhabit.

Finally, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that the ‘classical’ demographic transition (FDT) theory was originally formulated to fit historical European data, but then operationalised in policy terms to promote *lower* fertility in ‘developing’ countries experiencing what was viewed as too-rapid population growth. In contrast, most of the recent batch of demographic theories of fertility change aim to understand low fertility in Europe (and East Asia), with the hope that policies might be formulated to help women and men have more children, if they so wish. This is true of the ‘gender equity’ theories proposed by McDonald, by Goldscheider et al., and by Esping-Andersen & Billari, although less true of the SDT or Catherine Hakim’s work. These theories typically focus on below-replacement fertility, and especially on sustained ‘very’- and ‘lowest’-low fertility, defined by $TFRs \leq 1.5$ or 1.3 , respectively (see, e.g., Kohler et al. 2002; McDonald 2008: 19).

From a policy perspective, the ‘gender equity/equality’ theories could all be used to better advise European and Asian governments on how they might incentivise their citizens to have more children. Low fertility, and especially childlessness, are typically framed as a problem because of their “implications for the maintenance of societies” and “consequences for individuals, including circumstances in old age”, such as the risk that older people with no children will end up socially isolated or abandoned (Rowland 2007: 1311–1312). Governments fear the negative effect that population ageing is thought to have on economic growth, and therefore value new citizens (and roughly replacement-level fertility) as a way to keep economies growing and ensure that expensive public welfare and assistance programmes such as publicly funded health and social care systems, as well as pensions, remain financially viable in future. This is part of the logic of pro-natalist systems. It is questionable whether these ‘gender equity’ perspectives are truly useful in Colombia, where the TFR is far from lowest-low fertility (still hovering around replacement level), and government programmes have a more limited and less generous scope than in Europe. Therefore, while it is unlikely that any of these demographic theories on their own could provide an appropriate model for examining childlessness in Colombia, together, they raise

interesting questions regarding the relationship between social change, gender relations, and fertility/childlessness.

1.3 Childlessness

Childlessness is by no means new: in the ‘Malthusian’ demographic regime that characterised pre-FDT Europe, socioeconomic constraints on nuptiality and the unacceptability of childbearing outside of marriage meant that childlessness was relatively common, although (we assume) mostly ‘involuntary’ (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn 2004). ‘Voluntary’ childlessness *within* marriage is thought to be historically rare (Coleman 2004), and the distinctive feature of ‘childlessness’ within the SDT framework is its intentionality. Yet, despite more than 50 years of research into the topic, there are still gaps in our knowledge of childlessness. Notably, the demographic literature often leaves out men and single women, and across other social sciences, ‘voluntary’ childlessness is rarely addressed outside of Euro-American contexts.

‘Choosing’ Childlessness?

The mid-20th century invention and promotion of so-called modern forms of contraception, like the hormonal contraceptive pill, has since been termed a ‘contraceptive revolution’ (Westhoff & Ryder 1977), as birth control became more effective, reliable, and accessible than ever before. Combined with the liberalisation of abortion laws in most parts of the Global North from the 1960s onward, modern contraception allowed women to more predictably control their own fertility both before and after conception. These innovations made it possible for women – even those in long-term, sexually-active, heterosexual relationships – to avoid unplanned pregnancy and voluntarily delay motherhood indefinitely (sometimes permanently). However, there is evidence of childlessness – chosen, unchosen, and more ambiguous forms – from even before this ‘revolution’, dating back to the early twentieth century at least (Anonymous 2018 [1907]; Grabill & Glick 1959). Though childlessness in high-income settings has long attracted academic interest (Bloom & Pebley 1982; Veivers 1972), most Latin American, African, and Asian countries, were left out of this research until the 1980s (Poston, et al. 1985; Poston & El-Badry 1987; Poston & Rogers 1988). Almost all childlessness in lower-/middle-income countries is still assumed to be *involuntary*, and this assumption has rarely been tested empirically. Since I will devote two chapters to the subject of ‘voluntary childlessness’ in the

Colombian context, here, I will briefly highlight a few, general findings, mostly from reviews of the literature.

By the early 1980s, Sharon Houseknecht could identify almost 50 studies in high-income settings, in her review of the literature on voluntary childlessness, yet she argued that a ‘substantive theory’ was still lacking (1982: 459). By the end of that decade, rising voluntary childlessness would form a key pillar of the SDT, and interest in the increasing level of overall childlessness (at least some of which was assumed to be ‘chosen’) would become a Euro-American demographic and sociological preoccupation. While the number of studies exploring ‘voluntary’ childlessness in high-income countries is large enough to have filled several recent literature reviews and syntheses (see Agrillo & Nelini 2008; Basten 2009), demographers and other social scientists have paid far less attention to intentional childlessness in lower-/middle-income regions, with some early, quantitative exceptions (e.g. Poston et al. 1983; Poston & Trent 1982). Two recent studies addressing ‘childfree’ women’s choices in South Africa (Bimha & Chadwick 2016) and India (Bhambhani & Inbanathan 2018) are notable qualitative contributions to our knowledge of voluntary childlessness in the Global South, which indicate that interest in the topic outside of its traditional bounds is increasing.

Turning back to high-income settings, however, Agrillo & Nelini (2008: 352) reviewed the literature on voluntary childlessness and divided the reasons for childfree decisions into four thematic groups: (1) “lack of desire to become parents”, (2) “personal advancement”; (3) “physical and health concerns”; or (4) “belief that it is a generous act not to bring more people into the world.” The authors note that in almost four in five studies reviewed, the reasons provided were highly consistent with the SDT model – namely that women and men desired to remain free from the responsibility of childcare, which would allow them more time for self-fulfilment and “spontaneous mobility” (Agrillo & Nelini 2008: 350). They also found that women give more ‘selfless’ reasons for not having children than men do, commonly stating that it is out of concern for the welfare of the planet (e.g. ‘overpopulation’) or the potential child itself, while men were more concerned about the financial and other costs (Agrillo & Nelini 2008). This division fits into gender role expectations, with women typically conditioned to think about how they should care for others’ emotional

wellbeing (even as non-mothers), whereas men are encouraged to think as financial providers, for themselves and their family.

While the reasons above relate primarily to what could be called a ‘positive’ choice to stay childfree, research in Southern Europe has emphasised constraints, particularly financial, on people’s ability to establish their own households and have children, along with poor levels of social/governmental support for working mothers, which have arguably contributed to the low overall fertility levels in Italy and Spain (Mencarini & Tanturri 2004). In the UK, Ann Berrington’s (2015) original research into childlessness, broadly defined, provides context that Agrillo & Nelini’s (2008) focus only on explicitly voluntary childlessness does not. Whereas about a third of both married and single British women and men in their early 40s indicated that they were childless because they had never wanted to have children, amongst single people, 31% felt that they had “never met the right person,” and 12% cited health problems or having no specific reason (Berrington 2015: 17). This leads Berrington (2015: 20) to conclude that “Finding and keeping hold of an appropriate partner appears to be key.” She further cautions against viewing childlessness either as a careerist move (which ranked very low for both women and men), or in a historical vacuum, echoing Morgan’s (1991) view that we should not interpret childlessness as a new historical phenomenon, particularly in Europe, and emphasising that many people’s motivations may not be especially novel either. This provides an interesting counter-narrative to the usual SDT-focused research. With some notable sociological/qualitative exceptions (Gillespie 2003; Letherby 2002), the literature on childlessness tends to be dominated by demographic and psychological approaches, and is therefore often based on large surveys that rely on the selection or ranking of reasons from a predetermined list of motivations. Apart from the Euro-American bias, this potential drawback should be kept in mind when thinking about the literature reviewed above.

Latin American Childlessness

In Latin America, childlessness is sometimes touched upon in the context of qualitative research on domestic servants, as the historically more prevalent model of domestic labour involved ‘living-in’ with one’s employers, often from a young age, and with a strong preference for childless employees (Howell 2002). Though these forays into the topic are rarely detailed or quantitatively representative, they raise interesting

questions about biological childlessness amongst women who are paid (little) to carry out the work of social reproduction, and parallel Shellee Colen's (1995) seminal anthropological work on 'stratified reproduction', which I will return to below. There is also some relatively recent research on Latin American women's choices not to have children (see Chacón & Tapia 2017 for Chile; Quintal 2002 for Mexico), which is usually based on small, qualitative samples of voluntarily childless women only. On the demographic side, Dudley Poston and colleagues explored voluntary and involuntary childlessness in Latin America in a series of studies that tested hypotheses about the relationship between childlessness and 'modernisation', and explored the categorisation of voluntary and involuntary childlessness using survey data, although these studies are over 30 years old (Poston, et al. 1985; Poston et al. 1983; Poston & Rogers 1988). They hypothesised that, as countries industrialised, health indicators would improve and involuntary childlessness would decrease (i.e. over the course of the first demographic transition); on the other hand, they acknowledged that voluntary childlessness might eventually increase to take its place, leading to a U-shaped trend in childlessness over time, where voluntary forms replace involuntary, after a low-point for both. Susan De Vos (2012, 2014a, 2014b) has also analysed childlessness in Latin America, through the lens of elderly, biologically childless women's living arrangements, finding that the majority lived with extended family. Unfortunately, we know far less about elderly, childless men's living arrangements, and it is not entirely clear whether they would be similar to or different from their female peers. Finally, although De Vos (2014b: 265) used census data²¹ to compare multiple Latin American countries, she concluded that a lack of clarity regarding the meaning of different variables and 'ambiguous results' were exacerbated by this comparative approach, instead advising that future researchers should focus on individual countries.

Male Childlessness

Most studies still focus on both measuring women's fertility and their experiences of childbearing; however, Forsyth (1999), Berrington (2004), and Haskey (2013) have all studied men in the UK, as did Waren & Pals (2013) in the U.S., and Fieder et al. (2011) cross-nationally, with some significant findings. Most importantly, the conclusions of research on childlessness in women do not hold for men. Increasing level of education

²¹ Including the 1993 Colombian census data.

is a strong predictor of women's fertility postponement and childlessness in Europe, whereas men's educational achievement is largely unrelated to childlessness at the age of 40, and higher education may even be associated with parenthood (Fieder et al. 2011; Waren & Pals 2013). Waren & Pals (2013) argue for more focus on gender-sensitive theories of childlessness to describe and account for these differences, yet there is a serious lack of data on men, as most censuses and demographic surveys (especially in many lower-/middle-income settings) only ask women about their children, leaving men's fertility to be worked out using proxies or not at all.

1.4 The Anthropology of Reproduction

Reproduction and its relation to the construction of kinship have enduringly captured the anthropological imagination. However, it was not until the late 20th century, when the subfield moved away from classical preoccupations with lineage and systems of socio-political organisation, that it experienced a reinvigoration. This renewed interest and the emergence of so-called 'new' kinship studies was influenced by feminist scholarship, queer studies, and innovations like assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) (Rapp 2001). It integrated approaches from political economy and science and technology studies (STS) to focus on the biosocial nexus, interrogating what reproduction and kinship could contribute to contemporary anthropology, in light of changing gender roles and the use of new technologies in both Euro-American and other contexts (e.g. Carsten 2000, 2003; Franklin & McKinnon 2001; Strathern 1991, 1992).

There is now a large, and growing, body of anthropological literature on reproduction. Much of this work focuses on infertility and its treatments, alongside 'alternative' family forms (e.g. same-sex or single parenthood), and continues to question our preconceived understandings of kinship and relatedness (Franklin 2011; Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli 2008). It illustrates the creative potential inherent in the socio-cultural adaptation of new technologies, focusing on the ways in which, for example, ARTs can reconfigure 'traditional' understandings of kinship while simultaneously reinscribing old categories and divisions, like class, race, and nationality through, for example, unequal access to the benefits of reproductive tourism and commercial surrogacy, as well as their unequally-distributed costs (Franklin 2011; Pande 2011; Whittaker & Speier 2010). This research shines a new light on 'stratified

reproduction’, or the ways in which biological and social reproduction are “differentially experienced, valued, and rewarded according to inequalities of access to material and social resources in particular historical and cultural contexts”; such inequalities “are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy, and migration status and [...] are structured by social, economic, and political forces” (Colen 1995: 78).

In my discussion of childlessness, above, I deliberately excluded the anthropological literature on *infertility*, cross-border reproductive care (CBRC), and ARTs because, while infertility and childlessness are related and sometimes overlapping, they are ultimately different phenomena. While childlessness refers to not having children for any reason, infertility typically relates to biological/physiological difficulties having children that do not always result in childlessness. Given the overlap, it is still important to note here that the study of infertility and its treatments constitute a particularly vibrant part of the anthropology of reproduction, as reviews by Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli (2008), van Balen & Bos (2010), and Grebeldinger (2013) show. In contrast, childlessness that is *unrelated* to infertility, especially where no ARTs are involved, has received far less anthropological attention. This includes the study of *voluntary* childlessness, as well as the other forms of non-parenthood that are thought to be most numerically common – i.e. childlessness that is not the direct result of either involuntary (biological) infertility or of an explicit and continually reaffirmed choice, but rather, those forms that grow out of a more complex confluence of factors that combine choices, circumstances, and competing priorities.

An emergent field, which complements the scholarship on infertility and its treatments, focuses primarily on kinship beyond the human. A recent collection of essays, edited by Adele Clarke & Donna Haraway (2018), entitled *Making Kin Not Population*, again draws on feminist STS scholarship, this time to highlight interactions between humans, animals, and the ‘natural’ world that reframe our understandings of biosocial reproduction and ‘kin-making’. These authors challenge us to think beyond not only beyond notions of biological and social kinship that focus on human-to-human relationships, but also to transcend conventional barriers between species – i.e. between humans, plants, and other elements of our natural environments. This theme of human-animal-environmental interactions, and their relationship to reproduction, is

a growing field recently highlighted by, for example, Dow's (2016) work on the connections between the environment, reproduction, and everyday ethics in Scotland, and Todd's (2017) recent consideration of human 'kinship' with fish, and even with oil and other fossil fuels, which, after all, are the carbon-based product of the decomposed bodies of other (formerly) living creatures. This work pushes us to think deeply about where the boundaries of kinship might be drawn in the future, and how far we are willing to extend them to include non-human actors.

In contrast, within the Latin American anthropology of reproduction, it is gendered power relations, and reproductive rights and health that have received the most attention (Hirsch 2008, 2009), for example, through explorations of 'reproductive governance', defined by Morgan & Roberts as:

the mechanisms through which different historical configurations of actors, such as state, religious, and international financial institutions, NGOs, and social movements – use legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements to produce, monitor, and control reproductive behaviors and population practices (2012: 243).

Critical medical anthropological work has explored the important class-, gender-, and ethnically-based power differentials in consultations between doctors and their (usually indigenous or disadvantaged) female patients. These patients, or in some cases, simply beneficiaries of conditional cash transfer programmes, may be treated as unfit mothers, advised to use contraceptives against their own best interests, or to use a form of contraception that they would not have freely chosen, in interactions that sometimes border on the coercive (Smith-Oka 2009, 2015). Lara Braff's (2013, 2015) work in Mexico City fertility clinics provides rich ethnographic examples of the ways in which new technologies are used in processes of reproductive 'othering' and self-'whitening' that reinforce old racially-based class distinctions, as well as the reimagining of a 'modern' Mexican state vis-à-vis the regulation and promotion of cutting-edge reproductive technologies. Another strand of Latin American anthropology has focused on local practices of fostering and 'child circulation', as well as how these relate to transnational adoptions (Leinaweaver 2008).

All of the anthropological research reviewed here considers gender-, ethnically-, and socioeconomically-based power differentials in an explicit way that contrasts with the more abstracted demographic approach. This might consider each of those factors as

variables that potentially affect outcomes, but in a less politically-explicit way that seeks to remain ‘objective’. The recognition that unequal power relationships shape our world and our intellectual projects is something that I have sought to integrate into both the demographic and anthropological sides of my work.

Considered together, these diverse strands of anthropology have more than answered Ginsburg & Rapp’s (1995: 15) call, almost 25 years ago, to move “reproduction to the center of social theory” and push “research practices, analysis, and political interventions in new directions.” However, non-parenthood that does not result from infertility has largely been left out of this anthropological work, whether theoretical or practical. In a European context, demographer Maria Letizia Tanturri (2015) has noted that childlessness (again, in contrast with *infertility*) has received little attention from anthropologists and sociologists, and that our qualitative approach could in fact contribute to a much richer understanding of this complex phenomenon. This complexity includes studies that broach and complicate the voluntary-involuntary divide, as well as those that consider reproduction at both structural and individual levels (as is often the case in anthropology, but rarely in demography). As Natalie Sappleton (2018: 381) recently argued: “Much existing research on voluntary childlessness attributes to the childless state a solidity and immutability that privileges the sphere of individual agency and overlooks the pre-structured contexts in which actors operate.” I would like to contribute to filling the gap highlighted by both of these authors, by paying attention to the complexities, contradictions, and constraints that people face in their reproductive lives, how these fit into the wider picture of contemporary life in urban Colombia, and how they frame reproductive desires and choices, whether to have or not have children.

1.5 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

This thesis presents a detailed qualitative and quantitative case study of childlessness in Colombia within the context of demographic transitions and other, broader social and ideational changes which have occurred since the middle of the 20th century. By combining anthropological and demographic approaches to study both the prevalence and meanings of childlessness in contemporary Colombia, I intend to contribute to a richer theorisation of demographic change in relation to shifting gender roles and family formation. Through this project, I seek to understand individual trajectories to

and the implications of non-parenthood, in the context of a society where fertility and family sizes have declined continuously and substantially since the 1960s (over the course of just two generations), but where parenthood is still the statistical and social norm for most adults.

My research was broadly structured by the following **objectives**, which contribute to answering the overarching research questions detailed below. I will:

- (i) describe broad patterns of ‘early’ and ‘late’ childlessness (i.e. the ‘postponement’ of parenthood and ‘definitive’ childlessness)
- (ii) identify factors that are associated with childlessness and delayed parenthood in the Colombian context, to determine how a characteristically ‘Colombian’ childlessness and might differ from and overlap with Euro-American contexts
- (iii) seek to understand gendered experiences of childlessness and parenthood, the individual and social meanings attributed to non/parenthood and non-‘traditional’ family forms, and the life trajectories that have led people to not having children
- (iv) explore the broader social attitudes towards childlessness (i.e. stigma or acceptability) and how this relates to the perpetuation or reconstruction of gendered and classed roles, and finally,
- (v) probe the utility of demographic transition models for explaining the above.

I aim to answer the following **overarching research questions**:

1. What can the study of childlessness (broadly defined to include forms across the voluntary-involuntary spectrum) outside of Europe and North America contribute to a critical examination of demographic transition theories, to our conceptualisations of ‘childlessness’, and to our understanding of Latin American gender roles and social change, more broadly?
2. To what extent do Colombia’s socioeconomic inequalities manifest themselves in its demographic outcomes?
3. How well does the European model of a Second Demographic Transition (SDT) capture sociodemographic change in a Latin American context?

In **the quantitative part of this research**, I will explore general, age-specific, and voluntary/involuntary childlessness in Colombia, using census and survey data

collected since the 1980s. In the demographic part of this project, I will focus on my first and second overarching research objectives: (i) describing broad patterns of childlessness and delayed parenthood, and (ii) identifying factors associated with childlessness in the Colombian context. This will also contribute to my final research objective, regarding the utility of FDT and SDT models.

Breaking these overarching objectives down further, I should be able to:

- (i) Comprehensively describe the overall levels and trends in different forms of childlessness in Colombia since the mid-1980s
- (ii) Disaggregate childlessness into different sub-categories ('voluntary', 'involuntary', etc.)
- (iii) Examine the factors that are associated with women's and men's childlessness (comparing parents and non-parents).

This macro-level understanding provides essential context for my ethnographic study, and, by exploring multiple forms of childlessness and its determinants in a middle-income, Latin American setting, pushes the quantitative analysis of childlessness in new directions. In contrast, **the qualitative side of this research** focuses on analysing the unmeasurable: on understanding the personal experiences and meanings of childlessness and parenthood in an urban Colombian setting, through semi-structured interviews and unstructured observations carried out during a year of fieldwork in Bogotá. Here, I will address my third and fourth research objectives, above, as well as contributing to my final research objective (in combination with the quantitative analysis).

Finally, although anthropology and demography share a strong common interest in reproduction/fertility, they diverge dramatically in their methods. Demographic approaches to studying fertility, infertility, and childlessness tend to focus on quantification and have more functional, health-related, and/or policy-oriented aims (Rutstein & Shah 2004), whereas anthropological approaches tend towards more theoretical aims, though they can also contribute to better policy making, and are sometimes explicitly framed as such. The SDT is a deeply culturalist account of demographic change that focuses less on the classical demographic topics of fertility, mortality and migration, than on changing gender roles and social attitudes. These

social changes are arguably related to more permissive attitudes to divorce, non-marital cohabitation, childbearing outside of marriage, and, most important for my proposed study, sub-replacement fertility, childlessness, and the postponement of childbearing (Lesthaeghe 2010).

While SDT emphasises the singular importance of changing *individual values* and *social norms* (van de Kaa 1987), making it an interesting topic for anthropology, it is remarkable that there are still few in-depth, qualitative studies exploring ideational change in relation to fertility (and childlessness). In the next chapter, I will discuss the interconnections between anthropology and demography further, describing my methodological orientation, as well as my quantitative data sources and qualitative field site, data collection methods, and a broad overview of my interview sample.

Chapter 2: Methodological Considerations & Anthropological Fieldwork

2.1 Introduction

I will start this chapter by discussing anthropological demography and the ‘mixed’ methods orientation I have adopted. Secondly, I describe my demographic data sources. Third, I introduce my anthropological field site (Bogotá), to contextualise my approach to fieldwork. Fourth, I describe the methods I used for primary, qualitative data collection and analysis, particularly focusing on the recruitment of interviewees and interview strategies. Finally, using the results of a small, sociodemographic survey carried out with each interviewee, I introduce my interview sample, as I will return to these data in Chapters 5-8.

2.2 Mixed Method Research Orientation & Theoretical Framework: Anthropological Demography and Reproduction/Fertility

There are many reasons why researchers use ‘mixed’ methods, particularly those integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, as in most anthropological demography. My own rationale for adopting such an anthropological and demographic framework is largely pragmatic and relates to their complementarity. One of many approaches to mixed methods research (see Plano Clark & Ivankova 2016), the complementary approach seeks to address the same phenomenon from multiple angles. On one hand, the statistical analysis of large, nationally-representative datasets has allowed me to establish how common childlessness is in Colombian society, to explore trends over time, make comparisons between women and men, and to understand what characteristics are associated with childlessness at a macro-level (i.e. to explore the socio-demographic profiles of childless women and men in Colombia and how they depart from or are consonant with what is known in other contexts). On the other hand, qualitative interviews and other ethnographic methods allow for an ‘experience-near’ approach to the phenomenon of non-parenthood, where I was able to explore emergent themes, unconstrained by the pre-given nature of large-scale, secondary data. This meant I could dig deeper into women’s and men’s family backgrounds, personal histories, worldviews, and how they themselves described their journeys to parenthood or non-parenthood, which is impossible using quantitative analysis alone. Combining quantitative methods from demography with in-depth anthropological fieldwork

involves constant shifts between macro- and micro-level perspectives, and between different research paradigms (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Characterising the contemporary approaches towards social research and reproduction in Social Anthropology and Demography

	Social Anthropology	Classical Demography
Methodological orientation	Largely qualitative (little, if any, quantification); Inductive methods	Quantitative (little, if any, qualitative/textual data); Deductive methods
Level of Analysis	Micro-, individual-level understanding; focus on in-depth work in small areas (typically villages, towns, or cities, sometimes comparing practices in different small areas)	Macro-, population-level understanding; national or international focus, with room for considering subnational variation (though rarely down to the village/town-level)
Type of data	Mostly primary with some secondary	Mostly secondary with some primary
Favoured data collection techniques	Ethnographic fieldwork (participant-observation; field notes; unstructured and semi-structured interviews)	Surveys, censuses, questionnaires (structured interviews with closed questioning; 'routine' data sources; vital registers)
Favoured analytical techniques	Textual analysis, case comparison	Statistical analysis
Desired result	In-depth, highly descriptive, contextualised understanding of a specific case study	Statistically generalizable, standardised information that can be defined, counted, and compared across time and space (e.g. multiple survey rounds in different countries, all using the same questions)
Differences in fieldwork styles	Open-ended, long-term engagement with research participants; potential for 'co-production' of new ideas and re-definition of old ones	Highly structured, closed forms of questioning; short-term involvement with each respondent; very limited potential for any 'co-production'
Conceptual differences	Search for particular explanations; Emphasis on internally-coherent, locally-relevant terminology and understanding	Search for universal explanations; Emphasises cross-contextual comparability of concepts and terminology defined externally, by demographers (not by research participants)
Broadly interested in	Social/biological reproduction; gender and power relationships; emotional/affective kinship relations; childlessness (usually related to infertility)	Fecundity/fertility; biologically-defined sex differences; measures of trends in nuptiality (marriage) and divorce; nulliparity

Source: Own construction.

For example, what might we overlook when we treat women and men with distinct histories, circumstances, and perspectives as individual building blocks towards a population-level view that aims to neutralise the effects of most of those distinctions? Likewise, what can we gain from such an aggregate overview that might otherwise be missed? I adopted an iterative approach to quantitative data analysis and qualitative

data collection/analysis, wherein the former influenced the latter and vice versa. My qualitative fieldwork was also iterative, integrating new themes and ideas as they emerged, rather than adhering strictly to *a priori* areas of interest.

Demographic transformations, particularly changing patterns of fertility and family-formation, are both deeply personal and heavily influenced by broader structural factors. Despite their macro-level focus, demographers inevitably use explanatory models that include ideas of culture to explain these changes, yet they often draw heavily on economic theories that conceptualise ‘culture’ in relatively uncritical terms and envision people as rational decision-makers (Johnson-Hanks 2007). Thus far, most anthropological demography has employed ethnographic methods to re-conceptualise demographic processes and theory, whereas demographic methods have not been widely adopted in anthropology. The different research orientations and interests summarised in Table 2.1 are part of an “epistemological divide between the two disciplines” (Childs 2008: 24). Johnson-Hanks (2007: 17) describes those working at the nexus of these two epistemologically-opposed disciplines as: “[w]orking in the fault line between the social science discipline that is the most quantitatively exacting and the one that is most experientially rich” and argues that, because of this, “anthropological demography has exceptional material for rethinking social action and its consequences.” In essence, rather than being irreconcilable, the epistemological tension between the two disciplines can be mutually enriching and complementary. By mixing disciplinary approaches and methods, my aim is to address childlessness in a ‘situated’ way, exploring how this particular reproductive behaviour makes sense for Colombian women and men in their specific socioeconomic, historical, and political context.

A relatively new inter-discipline (Greenhalgh 1995b; Kertzer & Fricke 1997), most of the existing body of anthropological demography focuses on Africa (Bledsoe 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2005) or South Asia (Childs 2008; Jeffery & Jeffery 1997), with relatively few Latin American examples. Jennifer Hirsch’s (2009; 2006) work on marital relations in Mexico and Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s (1993) ethnography of poverty, child mortality, and stratified reproduction in North-eastern Brazil perhaps come under this umbrella, yet both Hirsch and Scheper-Hughes tend more towards traditional medical anthropology. They use primarily anthropological, qualitative

methods to explore demographic phenomena: what Scheper-Hughes (1997: 201) terms ‘demography without numbers’. In contrast, I have used quantitative, demographic approaches to analyse survey/census data, as well as sociocultural anthropology to gather and analyse ethnographic data.

Over the past 30 years, feminist (and other) scholars, like Susan Greenhalgh (1995a) and Alison Mackinnon (1995) have repeatedly critiqued the macro-level nature of demographic work, as its depersonalised, disembodied, and largely de-contextualised regional- or national-level orientation obscures gender and power dynamics. Greenhalgh (1995a: 19) argues that such work frames the interplay between individual agency and cultural contexts binarily, as either ‘passive’, envisioning “people as mindlessly adhering to cultural rules”, or ‘active’, wherein they are “conscious decision makers who deliberately choose their fertility levels through abstract rationality.” Instead, Greenhalgh has argued for more holistic fertility studies that aim to create what she terms ‘whole demographics’. Such studies would “contextualize reproductive behaviour not only in the social and economic terms of conventional demographic theory, but in political and cultural terms as well”; rather than relying on the ‘universalising’ and ‘quantifying’ impulses found in demography, she argues for a demography that integrates narratives, focusing on issues of gender and power, which are often downplayed in our usual “empirical models of demographic behavior” (Greenhalgh 1995a: 12). On the anthropological side, an over-focus on micro-level interactions can obscure broader patterns and overstate or miss the broader significance of specific phenomena or events. Although anthropology has experienced its own disciplinary reckoning, integrating influences from postcolonial, historical, and queer studies, amongst many others, this has not led to a greater openness to quantitative methods. If anything, anthropology has moved in the opposite direction. We have endeavoured to critically deconstruct our ‘traditional’ research objects and practices, applying anthropological methods to new settings, for example in two approaches on which I have drawn: urban anthropology and anthropology ‘at home’. The latter typically refers to studying “one’s own society” rather than ‘exotic’ settings (Peirano 1998: 122–123), which, for Western researchers, means working in largely Westernised, if not entirely ‘Western’, settings, where the distance between researcher and researched is reduced.

In addition to a methodological orientation towards a multi-scalar anthropological demography, my research was informed by an intersectional feminist perspective, which embraces gender as an important analytical category, but one that interacts with other socially-perceived categories, such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, nationality, etc. Gender alone is insufficient for understanding women's experiences of life events, whether traumatic or celebratory. In reproductive research, this might recognise that motherhood (and non-motherhood) is experienced differently by women of different social classes and ethnic/racial backgrounds, and that these factors cannot be separated from each other. As a critique of classical feminism, based on Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) work, "intersectionality insists that multiple, co-constituting analytic categories are operative and equally salient in constructing institutionalized practices and lived experiences" (Carastathis 2014: 307), and that these categories, or 'multiple systems of oppression', all have important and inseparable effects on women's experiences the same events. Taking abortion in Colombia²² as an example, a wealthy, white woman living in Bogotá will have access to a safe and legal abortion without having to travel far (usually on mental health grounds, if not on any others), whereas a poorer, Afro-Colombian or indigenous woman from a rural area near the Pacific will have far greater difficulty accessing a legal abortion if she needs one, and would likely have to resort to a clandestine, potentially unsafe procedure that could threaten her life or future fertility. Understanding what is nominally the *same* event in two women's lives, but is in fact, a "qualitatively different" experience is an essential part of an intersectional feminist approach to research (Crenshaw 1991 in Carastathis 2014: 306). There is also substantial overlap between anthropological and feminist epistemologies, as elaborated Stanley & Wise (2002 [1993]: 200), in terms of valuing researchers' 'reflexivity',²³ or the agentic nature of the social researcher; insisting that research 'objects' "are also subjects in their own right"; understanding that researchers are not

²² In 2006, the Colombian Constitutional Court legalised abortion in certain circumstances, but in 2008, out of over 400,000 induced abortions, under 1% (only 322) "were reported as legal procedures" (Prada et al. 2011: 6). Prada et al. (2011: 7) report that "an estimated one-third of all women having a clandestine abortion develop complications that need treatment in a health facility" and, unsurprisingly, poor, rural women are most likely (53%) to experience post-abortion complications.

²³ This usually refers to reflecting on how we, as researchers, shape data collection, or "the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings" (Salzman 2002: 806). However, there is a broader conception of reflexivity, which overlaps with the idea above, but applies outside of research as well, and is defined by McNay (2000: 5) as "the critical awareness that arises from a self-conscious relation with the other."

“intellectually superior” their research participants; and that representations (i.e. “opinion[s], belief[s], and other construction[s] of events and persons”) should be interpreted through a critical, analytical lens rather than read as “reality”. Finally, I view gender and socioeconomic status/social class (and how they intersect) as two essential, cross-cutting themes for studying childlessness and parenthood, which are considered in some form in each chapter.

2.3 Demographic Data

Data Sources

The quantitative analysis presented here is based on a series of Colombian Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and censuses. For more details regarding DHS and census data, see Appendix 2A. Analysing both census and survey data allows for the cross-checking of estimates from the same years/periods against one another, as well as for complementary analyses. Briefly, there are seven DHS rounds, from 1986, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015. The DHS collects very detailed information from a nationally-representative sample of women aged 15-49²⁴ years old every five years, using a multistage probability sampling procedure. DHS surveys are conducted around the world by ICF International, with funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international donors. In Colombia, since 1990, they have been administered by *Profamilia* (the ‘Asociación Probienestar de la Familia Colombiana’), an affiliate of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), and a major Colombian non-governmental provider of sexual and reproductive health services since the mid-1960s.

DHS sampling is based on a two-stage clustered design, which is used to identify eligible households. Data collection is carried out in two stages. First, the household questionnaire collects basic sociodemographic information on each household member (i.e. age, sex, education), and information regarding the household’s physical characteristics (i.e. dwelling type/materials, access to utilities and ownership of durable goods, which are used to calculate a ‘wealth index’ score). Secondly, each household’s ‘roster’ is used to identify and administer additional surveys with eligible

²⁴ From 2005-2015, it included women aged 13-49; however, I restricted the sample to include only women 15-49, for comparability across all survey years. In 2015, men aged 13-59 were included, but I also restricted this sample to only 15-59-year-old men.

women (13-49-years-old), men (13-59-years-old), and children (0-59-months-old). The women's individual interview is the 'core' of the DHS and includes questions on number of children and child deaths, complete reproductive histories, contraceptive use histories for the previous five years, partnership status, education, ideal/desired number of children, knowledge of fecundity, sexual activity, attitudes regarding gender roles, and many other topics (Corsi et al. 2012). Eligible men are asked similar questions, though their interview is more limited in scope.

The Colombian DHS tends to achieve high survey response rates, at both the household and individual levels, though it is typically lower in Bogotá, amongst men, and in cities/urban areas (see Appendix 2A). Sample weights allow analysts to adjust estimates for the complex sample design, including the oversampling of minority groups and sparsely-populated areas, as well as adjusting for both household and individual non-response (Vaessen et al. 2005: 500). Early DHS sampling frames (until the 2000s) were based on the *Colombian National Statistics Department's* (DANE) and *Profamilia's* 'Master Sample' of households for surveys, though the 2010 DHS used the same sampling frame as the 2005 census, and the 2015 DHS used the *Ministry of Health and Social Protection's* 'Master Household Sample for Health'. This changing sampling frame and slight changes to the sample universe over time could affect the comparability of estimates from different DHS rounds.

The DHS may also fail to adequately capture mobile populations, like Colombia's numerous internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other rural-urban migrants. It does, however, attempt to include them, and features questions that allow researchers to identify whether an interviewee has recently migrated and why, including answers related to violence and forced displacement (e.g. see Wald 2014 for an example of such research). In comparison with the census, though the individual DHS provides more detailed information and is carried out more frequently, it is limited by its smaller sample size, exclusion of older adults and (until 2015) men, and by a response rate that varies between regions, urban/rural areas, and for men and women (see Appendix 2A for details).

In contrast, the census gathers more limited information on the whole population, roughly every 10 years. I used Colombian census data extracts from 1985, 1993, and 2005, from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International, or IPUMS-I

(Minnesota Population Center 2017). Men are unfortunately not directly asked how many children they have. While it is possible to estimate male childlessness from census data on household co-residence with children (see Fieder et al. 2011), this produces crude and potentially heavily biased estimates, especially in countries like Colombia, where childbearing outside of unions and single motherhood are both common. Many men do not therefore reside with their offspring. For this reason, I have chosen to rely on estimates of male fertility gathered from direct questioning in the 2015 DHS only. Census data were only used to cross-check DHS-based estimates of overall levels of female childlessness and changes over time. DHS data were used for all other analyses, due to the larger number of variables available for analysis, the availability of more recently-collected data, and more reliable/detailed data for men, particularly regarding their actual, desired, and ideal fertility.

I describe the specific quantitative analysis methods in the relevant quantitative chapters, so that they can be referred to more easily when reading the results. This includes a description of the outcomes of interest, explanatory variables and hypotheses investigated, and the specific analytical strategies employed in each chapter.

Software

IBM SPSS Version 24 (IBM Corp 2016) and *R* version 3.4.3 (R Core Team 2017) with *RStudio* (RStudio Team 2016) were used for data management and analysis. Unless otherwise indicated (i.e. specified as ‘unweighted’), results presented in this thesis are based on survey-weighted data analysed using the *R Survey* package (Lumley 2004, 2017).

2.4 Anthropological Data Collection and Analysis

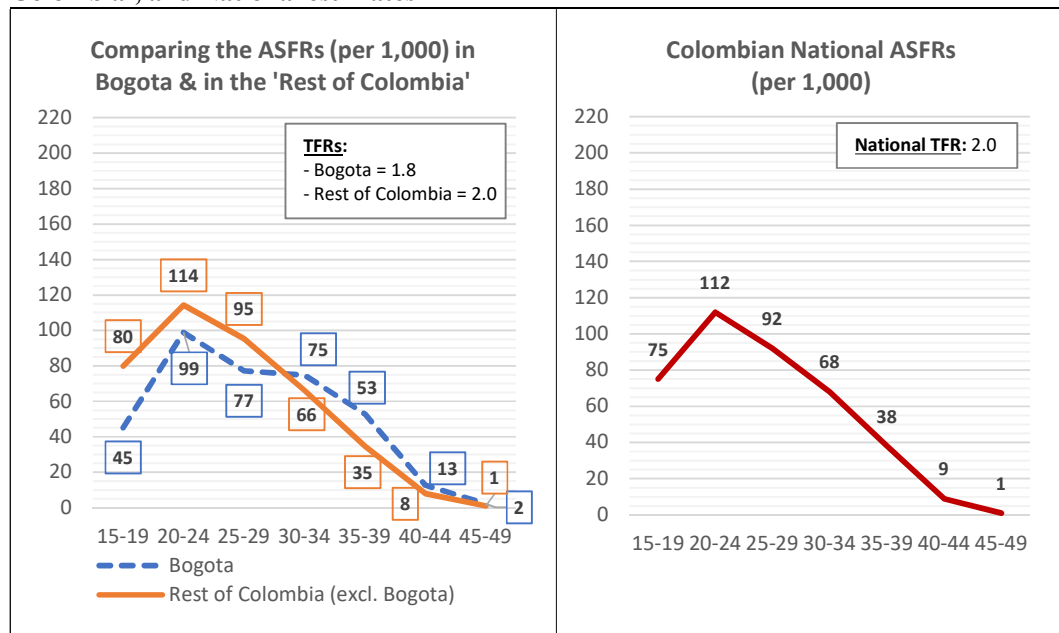
In this section, I start by introducing Bogotá and laying out the rationale for focusing my fieldwork on the capital city, before describing the fieldwork itself, and then moving on to briefly introduce the basic characteristics of the people I interviewed.

Bogotá as Urban Field Site

As of 2017, Bogotá was home to over 7 million people and growing. The city sprawls across a highland, Andean plateau, spreading primarily North-South, and its outskirts

blur into rural and semi-rural areas. Although it is by far the largest city in Colombia (the second city of Medellín has around 2.5m. residents), my rationale for doing this work in Bogotá is more complex. Though ethnographic work in urban areas presents special challenges (see Georgiadis 2007, for a European example), there were several good reasons to focus my fieldwork in an urban centre. On a demographic level, approximately 80% of the Colombian population now lives in urban areas; urban-dwellers tend to have lower fertility and slightly higher rates of childlessness; and finally, I hypothesised that many of the changes that characterise the ‘Second Demographic Transition’ were likely to emerge first in urban areas. However, finding appropriate field sites for ‘participant-observation’ presented significant challenges: first, as Colombian adults without children are spread throughout the city, I could neither focus on one geographical area, nor on a relatively self-contained community or institution. The people I spent extended periods of time with came from different neighbourhoods, though all were Stratum 4-6 areas, i.e. upper-middle class and above (see below for an explanation of the stratum system).

Figure 2.1: Graphs of age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) comparing Bogotá, ‘Rest of Colombia’, and National estimates



Source: Own calculations analysing 2015 DHS women's individual microdata with the R ‘DHS.rates’ package (Elkasabi 2019).

Source: Own construction using calculations from the DHS StatCompiler website (ICF 2012).

Fertility in Colombia (and in Bogotá) is concentrated in women aged 20-29 and peaks in 20-24-year-olds. However, as Figure 2.1 shows, fertility amongst women aged 15-

29-years-old in Bogotá is much lower, and higher amongst women aged 30-39-years old. Though ASFR is not a parity-specific measure (meaning it takes all births, not just first births into consideration), Bogotá's women are delaying more of their fertility to later ages than the 'average' Colombian. I therefore believed it would be home to more childless women and 'postponers' than elsewhere.

Figure 2.2: Series of Bogotá Mayor's Office Posters displayed on bus shelters across the city (Autumn 2017), reading "I'm from... [Colombian city/region]. #I love you, Bogotá"



Source: Own photos from Bogotá, October 2017.

Bogotá is, moreover, arguably more of a microcosm of Colombia than Medellín, Cali, or Barranquilla (the three other major cities), which have stronger regional identities. While all these cities attract rural-to-urban migrants, as the national capital and largest city, Bogotá is more likely to draw people not only from the surrounding rural areas, but from across the country, particularly those seeking its historically better educational and professional opportunities. Although most of the people I interviewed were from Bogotá originally (see Table 2.5), very few of their parents were. There is

a conscious effort to promote Bogotá as a cosmopolitan city that welcomes Colombians from across the country and foreigners from around the world, and where people from different life paths can mix in a socially-inclusive, progressive environment. Figure 2.2 shows a promotional campaign (from late 2017), run by the Bogotá mayor's office. The posters emphasise the idea that, regardless of where you are from originally, you can 'love' the capital city as home. The Colombian national government promotes a similar image in its international tourism campaigns (see Williams-Castro (2013) for a critical analysis of this official discourse).

One important way in which the capital is not as diverse as either the country as a whole, or other major cities, is in its ethnic/racial makeup. As of the 2005 census, Afro-Colombians comprised an estimated 10.6% of Colombia's population and indigenous people 3.4% (Hernandez et al. 2007: 33), whereas in Bogotá just 1.5% of the population was Afro-Colombian and less than 0.5% was indigenous (Hernandez et al. 2007: 38). Additionally, Afro-Colombian organisations argue that the black population of Bogotá is consistently underestimated, particularly given its growth since the 1990s (Mosquera (1998) in Williams-Castro 2013: 110), and this issue may affect the country as a whole. For example, given widespread racism and discrimination, and since the census uses self-identification, official numbers of Afro-Colombians are likely to be depressed by some people's reluctance to self-identify in this way. Many academics believe that, until more Afro-Colombians across the country are encouraged to identify themselves as such, we will continue to underestimate their numbers (see Medina 2018). However, race and ethnicity are far from the only features used to stratify people in Colombian society, and socioeconomic inequalities are also deeply entrenched.

Bogotá's inequality lends it a diversity that makes it difficult to categorise along the usual binary lines, as either developing/developed, Western/non-Western, etc. Like many capital cities, it is noisy, polluted, and chaotic, but it also hosts parks and other more tranquil spaces, and many attractions aimed at children and families. A series of 'progressive' mayors have introduced initiatives such as the Ciclovía, which pedestrianizes several main thoroughfares from 7AM-2PM every Sunday, and the city hosts annual film, book, and art festivals and fairs. While it has higher crime rates than London or New York (see Llorente et al. n.d.), and most residents are perpetually on-

guard against muggings, car thefts and other similar breaches of personal space and security, Bogotá is home to upscale enclaves that feel calm, (relatively) orderly, and like they have more in common with Europe or North America than other parts of Bogotá itself. However, these areas are typically small and highly guarded by private security personnel. The environment inside fancy shopping centres, like the *Centro Andino*, in an affluent neighbourhood,²⁵ evokes the feeling of any upscale shopping centre, with the only distinguishably Colombian features being the Spanish signage, the ubiquitous private security guards, and the local shops interspersed with international chains like Levi's, Esprit, and Nespresso, as well as outposts of luxury brands like Dolce & Gabbana and Burberry. As Arlene Dávila (2016) notes in her ethnographic study of Bogotá's many shopping centres, the balance of foreign and domestic chains varies according to the expected clientele, with offerings in working and lower-middle class areas of the city focused on more affordable domestic shops.

While middle-to-upper class Colombian women and men might spend much of their time in polished, clean, and orderly spaces that feel like the *Andino*, and part of the rest of it consuming largely American and European cultural products through satellite/cable television, the internet, foreign movies, and trips abroad, these habits and spaces are not equally accessible to all *Bogotanos/as*. However, nor are social groups completely segregated, as shopping centres draw people from far beyond their neighbourhoods, and the nexus of employee/employer relationships in domestic labour also brings people of different social classes into close and repeated contact, through the large Colombian service and security industries (see Dávila 2016). This diversity based on unequal social and economic relations characterises urban centres in Colombia (and much of Latin America), and is essential context for understanding experiences of parenthood and non-parenthood.

Social Class, Socioeconomic Strata and Geographical Segregation in Bogotá

Bogotá is geographically divided into six socioeconomic strata, with Stratum 1 being the poorest and Stratum 6 the richest. There is also a category of 'no stratum', which

²⁵ Located in the 'Zona Rosa', a semi-pedestrianised area with upscale shops, restaurants and night spots in the mid-northern part of Bogotá.

generally refers to informal settlements, in Colombia often called ‘*invasiones*’²⁶ (literally, ‘invasions’). City projects seek to formalise these informal settlements, thereby bringing them into the system (usually as Stratum 1 areas). The District Secretary for Planning (*Secretaría Distrital de Planeación*) oversees the system in Bogotá, although it exists across the country and began, in its current form, as a national government initiative in the 1990s (through Law 142 of 1994). The original intention was to stratify the costs of public services, like water, sewerage, energy, and gas bills, to provide subsidies for poorer people, funded by surcharges for the richest. Rural and urban classifications differ, and not all areas have six strata like Bogotá. Residents of Strata 1-3 receive subsidised rates for public services like water, gas, and electricity bills, while Stratum 4 receives no subsidy (paying the ‘actual’ cost of the services) and Strata 5 and 6 pay a surcharge (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Details of Bogotá’s Six-stratum System for Administering Public Payments

Stratum	Socioeconomic Classification	Percent Subsidy / Surcharge ¹	Estimated Proportion (%) of Bogotá’s Total Population ²
1	‘Low-low’ (‘Bajo-bajo’)	Up to 50% subsidy	10.4%
2	‘Low’ (‘Bajo’)	Up to 40% subsidy	41.3%
3	‘Lower-middle’ (‘Medio-Bajo’)	Up to 15% subsidy	36.0%
4	‘Middle’ (‘Medio’)	No subsidy or surcharge	7.8%
5	‘Upper-middle’ (‘Medio-Alto’)	Up to 20% surcharge	2.6%
6	‘High’ (‘Alto’)	Up to 20% surcharge	1.9%

Sources and Notes: Information in the first 3 columns refers to Law 142 of 1994, and was taken from Cuadro 2.1, Alzate (2006: 17). Information in the final column is the distribution of socioeconomic strata in 2014, and the proportions apply to an estimated city population of 7,794,463. This information was extracted from Tabla 5, Secretaría Distrital de Planeación Bogotá (2015: 29).

The system does not depend on an individual’s or household’s actual income, but instead on the physical characteristics of the building and neighbourhood in which they live; for example, the construction quality of the houses or apartment blocks, the condition of the streets, the presence of sidewalks, greenery and garages, and the materials used for building frontages and rooves (Alcaldía de Bogotá 2018). In theory, it is buildings and neighbourhoods that are being classified, rather than people. Although the system was originally intended as a redistributive force, it has also served to reinforce the geographical and social segregation of rich and poor. It has been described as a ‘caste’ system (Wallace 2014), and the categories are applied to the

²⁶ For examples of this usage, see: <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/impacto/articulo/invasiones-en-bogota-un-problema-preocupante-y-de-inseguridad/38603> or <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1297294> (Spanish only). [Accessed: 12/Dec/18].

people who live in the areas, rather than just the areas themselves. Table 2.3 shows the idealised break-down of stratum against income deciles, with Stratum 1 representing the bottom 20%, Stratum 3 including the median income, and Stratum 6 the top 20%.

Table 2.3: Idealised functioning of the stratum system

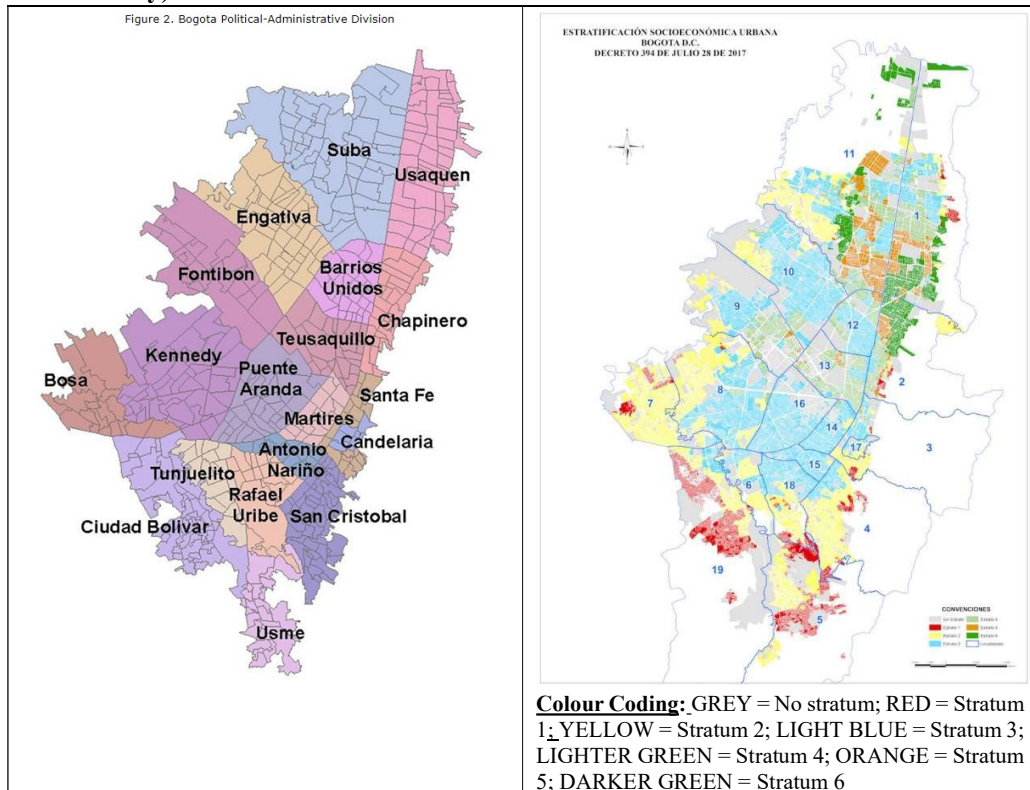
Stratum	Income Deciles									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										

Source: Adapted from Gráfico 3.1, Alzate (2006: 34).

The first map in Figure 2.3 shows Bogotá’s 19 urban localities, and the second illustrates how the city’s stratum system maps onto these localities geographically, as of 2017. The city’s different areas have their stratum category updated periodically, to account for changes to the character of an area or building, including the formalisation of informal settlements. The maps do not explicitly show the mountains that run along the eastern edge of the city (on the right-hand side), limiting the city’s growth in that direction, but they show how this eastern limitation has instead led to miles of urban sprawl to the west, south, and north.

The Candelaria locality is the historic city centre, home to: the central market square (*Plaza de Bolívar*), the presidential palace (*Casa de Nariño*), the Congress, and the judicial branch of government (in the *Palacio de Justicia*). There is a widely-perceived north-south/rich-poor divide: “[b]y and large, neighborhoods in the northeast area of the city are much more affluent than those located in the south of the city, [...] the most affluent neighborhoods are located in the Usaquén and Chapinero localities and the least affluent in the San Cristobal, Rafael Uribe, Tunjuelito, Ciudad Bolivar, Bosa, and Kennedy localities” (Escobar 2012: 44). This general socio-spatial division is visible in the distribution of the red and yellow (Stratum 1 and 2) areas on the second map in Figure 2.3, though the southern localities of Rafael Uribe, Antonio Nariño, Puente Aranda and Kennedy also contain a large number of middle class (light blue, Stratum 3) neighbourhoods. Inevitable exceptions to this pattern include small pockets of poorer neighbourhoods built into the eastern foothills (the ‘edge’ of the city on that side) in northern parts of Bogotá, where very low-income areas (Stratum 1 and 2) perch directly next to new, luxury (Stratum 6) high-rises.

Figure 2.3: Maps of Bogotá’s 19 Urban Localities (excluding *Sumapaz*, a 20th, mostly rural locality)



Source: Escobar (2012: 46).

Source: Marcos (2018).

Although the current system is relatively recent, it has acquired a deep cultural valence in Colombia, where people use hyperbolic terms like ‘Stratum 100’ or ‘Stratum -2’, to describe the opposite ends of the income spectrum. While the stratum system is meant to apply to the built environment of specific geographical areas, it is also commonly used to describe people, too. As elsewhere, certain styles of dress, accessories and other visual signifiers become associated with specific social classes;²⁷ however, in Colombia, these signifiers are then mapped onto the stratum system, identifying (or misidentifying) a person with where they live, long after they leave the confines of their neighbourhood (see Dávila 2016, for examples). This was confirmed by Colombian friends and interviewees on multiple occasions.

²⁷ E.g. tight women’s jeans without back pockets (known colloquially as ‘sin bolsillos’/‘sin-bol’ – literally ‘without pockets’) that, at worst, have become associated with a ‘narco-aesthetic’ (see Andrade Salazar et al. (2017) for more on this), which alters women’s bodies through investing illegal drug money in breast augmentations, buttock implants, etc., while, at best, they are associated with local Colombian fashions that characterise provincial towns and cities, but are shunned by Bogotá’s upper classes, who favour more preppy, ‘European’ styles.

Fieldwork in Bogotá

I spent just over one year living in Bogotá, from October 2016-October 2017, focusing on the qualitative, ethnographic part of this study. Prior to fieldwork, I sought and gained ethical approval from the UCL Department of Anthropology Ethics Committee. My fieldwork was not immersive in a classically anthropological way. It was based in an urban area and centred on interactions and interviews with mostly highly-educated people from largely urban backgrounds. I also did not have a singular field ‘site’ (or sites), instead moving around the city for interviews and other meetings and social events. I lived alone,²⁸ in a privately-rented apartment in a relatively new, upper-middle-class (Stratum 4) building in the Chapinero neighbourhood of Bogotá. Chapinero is a mixed, middle- and upper-middle class area, which is primarily home to young professionals, and, compared to greener areas to the north, it is not considered a family-friendly neighbourhood.

Despite these peculiarities, which in some ways were limitations, I have described my fieldwork as ethnographic because of my approach to the time I spent living in Bogotá. Although most of the qualitative data that I analyse in the following chapters comes from semi-structured interviews (discussed below), even when exploring the city alone, I viewed everyday life as an opportunity to deepen my understanding of Bogotá, trying to pay careful attention to what was going on around me (and taking photographs, when possible), and to otherwise collect information that I felt could be at all relevant to my core research. For example, in Chapter 8, I discuss people’s close relationships to their pets, which grew only out of my formal interviews and informal interactions with friends, as well as from seeing ads and discount coupons for doggy daycare everywhere from the signboard in the lobby of my apartment building to enclosed in my monthly utility bills. Mobile pet grooming vans and doggy daycare buses/vans (picking up or dropping off their charges) were also a regular feature in my neighbourhood.

²⁸ Solo living is still relatively unusual in the Colombian context, even in urban areas, though it is growing. For example, single-person households increased from 13% of all households in Bogotá in 2005 to 21.7% in 2018 (Source: DANE (2019c)). Similarly, about 20% of my interviewees lived alone. Many others lived with their romantic partner only, or with family (either parents or siblings). Though it does happen, no one I knew lived only with unrelated flatmates.

Participant-Observation and Other Non-interview Activities

During fieldwork I repeatedly confronted one question: how does one observe and participate in being childless (whether voluntary or involuntary)? Whereas infertility has been thoroughly ‘biomedicalised’ (Clarke et al. 2003, 2009; Moyer & Nguyen 2016), *voluntary* childlessness requires no medical treatment, which precluded a clinic-based study. Another reason for not conducting clinically-based ethnographic research with *involuntarily* childless individuals relates to the problematic narrowing of focus not only to biological/physiological infertility, which constitutes just a small fraction of involuntary forms, but also to those with the financial means to access infertility treatment.²⁹ Instead, I spent as much time as possible with people who had no children (whether by choice or not), accompanying them in the activities that constitute their daily lives and discussing a wide range of issues, from recent politics to issues with the Colombian employment, health and educational systems to personal histories and other matters. In this section, I will briefly describe some of those activities.

Without a defined geographical base, my fieldwork strategy had to be multi-pronged. First, I tried to become as involved as possible in academic life in the city. This was helpful for two reasons: because highly-educated women tend to have fewer (if any) children and because I myself ‘fit in’ with these groups relatively well, as a current PhD student. I attended an Urban Studies meeting group that met every month, bringing together anthropologists, geographers, architects, urban planners, and others, to discuss issues that often focused on the Colombian context (usually on the largest cities of Bogotá and Medellín). During term-time, I also attended a fortnightly Urban Anthropology reading group. I found the academic community in Bogotá to be open and welcoming to me as a foreign PhD student, and I met two of the women who would become close friends throughout my time in Bogotá in academic settings. I also occasionally visited and assisted with group meetings of elderly adults that were part of a friend’s fieldwork in a low-income Bogotá neighbourhood. This introduced me to an older generation of largely rural-to-urban migrants whose life experiences were vastly different to those of most of the other people I knew in Bogotá. All these groups

²⁹ E.g. some U.S.-based evidence indicates that men seeking infertility treatment are older, more educated, and more likely to be married than those who did not seek care (Hotaling et al. 2012: 123).

and activities helped contextualise my work in its broader, local context, while also serving as important meeting places.

During my year in Bogotá, I developed important relationships with several key informants. All knew about my research topic, and the fact that they ‘fit’ a similar profile to many of the women and men that I formally interviewed. None of these friends had children, and most were adult women in their thirties or older, although I also spent time with male friends in Bogotá, who offered slightly different perspectives on life in the capital city. All were incredibly helpful and generous with their time – introducing me to their wider groups of friends and/or colleagues, inviting me out with them and, in one case, even inviting me to a baby shower thrown for a close friend of a friend. As this shower happened to be thrown by a group of (mostly young) academics, who had been told that I was an anthropologist working on gender issues, childlessness and parenthood in Colombia, all seemed to actively try to give their opinions on these issues. Much of this was for the benefit of the expectant mother – advice on what parenthood would be like, from the small number of parents in attendance, offers of support, thoughts on how she and her partner might both be treated once the baby arrived – whereas other things appeared to be engineered specifically for my benefit by the friend who was hosting the party. I always carried a small notebook, for fieldnotes, but never took them publicly, in the middle of activities. Instead, I would note everything I remembered following each activity, and later transfer these notes to a typed document, expanding on what I had written where I remembered additional details.

Additionally, I attended regular Spanish-English conversation exchanges and other ‘meetup’ groups. This was useful in terms of having more general conversations with a wider range of people than I would otherwise have encountered. Although I did not formally interview anyone from these groups, I met with them less formally in non-meetup settings – for coffee on the weekend or after-work drinks – as I did with other friends and acquaintances. I also learned about a different side of Bogotá through frequent conversations with my building’s doormen, who were always keen to know what I thought of living in Colombia, and how it was different from ‘where I came from’ (i.e. Canada/the UK). They also shared their opinions and observations about Colombian society, including what they felt had changed for the better or grown worse

over time, as well as how Bogotá differed from their cities of origin in Northeast Colombia, nearer the Venezuelan border.

Finally, I repeatedly tried looking for special-interest groups focused on ‘childfree lifestyles’, as such groups exist in Europe and North America. However, I was unable to find any in Colombia. I spent a few hours each week searching the internet for new research articles and media coverage of parenthood, non-parenthood, gender/women’s issues, and topics related to family formation that perennially pop-up in the news, like conflicts over voluntary sterilisation. Following fieldwork, I continued to do this every few months.

Through these different sources, I have sought to contextualise and expand on my demographic analysis, using semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes to assemble a narrative that approaches contemporary Colombian childlessness and parenthood from multiple angles. I used the National Library and Bogotá’s many university libraries (e.g. at the National University and the Pontifical Xavierian University), searching for theses, books and other resources addressing family life, parenthood, gender relations, reproduction, and childlessness. I also formally interviewed a policy expert at the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (*ICBF: Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*), before spending the afternoon shadowing one of their colleagues, who shared different aspects of their gender-awareness strategy around masculinity, femininity, and family with me, alongside some of the materials they use for their community engagement work. Finally, I also informally interviewed an analyst at *Profamilia*, who provided helpful background regarding their history, goals, and current work.

Semi-structured Interview Sampling Strategy & Inclusion Criteria

Most of my original data emerged from semi-structured interviews. Studying a phenomenon, like childlessness, in an urban environment, and without focusing on a specific activist group or institutional setting, like a hospital, proved challenging at first. It required recruiting people relatively at random, though not a statistically ‘random’ sample. Because this resulted in fieldwork and interviews scattered across the city, rather than centred on a particular neighbourhood (as is common in urban anthropology), I needed a strategy based on networks, and chose a fairly informal, semi-purposive ‘snowball’ sampling method, wherein many of the people I

interviewed suggested other friends or acquaintances I might also interview (Bernard 2006). I ended up with six snowball ‘nodes’, or groups, of varying sizes, with the two primary nodes containing 13 and 10 people each (see Appendix 2B for diagram).

Early on, I decided that I would carry out all interviews myself, rather than employing a research assistant, so that I could get to know each interviewee personally (and vice versa). However, being a lone researcher, whose first language is not Spanish, limited the number of recorded life history-style interviews I could do (though I also spent time with other people and some of my interviewees on more than a one-off basis, and I carried out additional, informal interviews and repeated discussions with people that I met in other ways, as described above). I had hoped that my status as a childless, university-educated, (technically) Colombian woman in her early thirties would help me gain access to the social groups and spaces that other non-mothers and mothers around my age inhabit (e.g. workplaces, cafes, restaurants, shopping centres, private get-togethers), and it did allow me to relate better to childless friends, acquaintances and interviewees, who were always curious about my own family life. I had neither research nor ethical reasons to obscure the truth, and always answered personal questions as openly and honestly as I could.

With my qualitative data collection, I never sought to recruit a statistically-representative group, as this is not usually the frame for qualitative work, especially in anthropology (e.g. see Hirsch et al. 2006: 114). However, I did wish to interview a relatively diverse group of people, loosely stratified according to gender, parental status, age/generation, and socioeconomic background (using a proxy measure of their neighbourhood/building’s ‘stratum’). By seeking out older and younger women and men, parents and non-parents, partnered and unpartnered adults, and people of different social classes, I sought to understand how the pathways to and experiences of family with and without children might differ (or resemble each other) across a diverse group.

My primary inclusion criterion consisted of only interviewing people aged 25+, since most Colombians will likely have been confronted at least by talk of having children amongst friends and family by this age. Although most interviewees were of ‘reproductive’ age (i.e. below age 50), I also spoke to some older women (50+), in order to identify and contextualise historical changes in gender roles and experiences

of family. I concentrated on people who identified as heterosexual or who were in current relationships with someone of the opposite sex, as, although adoption by gay couples and single people is legal, the Colombian context of childbearing is quite different for gay and straight couples.³⁰ Finally, I limited my study to Colombians, rather than foreigners living in Colombia, which unfortunately excluded several people who were otherwise interested in being interviewed.

Participant Recruitment Procedures & Positionality

In the end, I carried out 35 semi-structured, life history-style interviews with women and men, as well as a structured, socio-demographic questionnaire with each interviewee. I followed the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity throughout. Except in a few cases, with people who were the starting contact of a snowball sample node, I was never the first person to approach individuals about participating in the study. Instead, others acted as gatekeepers with their own friends and other potential contacts. Once I had each potential interviewee's contact information, I would phone and/or email them, to explain who I was, why I was in Colombia and had contacted them, alongside a thematic outline of the interview, and how long it usually lasted. I would then ask if they were still interested and would set-up a meeting at a time and in a place that was most convenient for interviewees.

With respect to informed consent, I brought printed copies of a Spanish-language information sheet for each person, as well as two copies of the written consent form (one for me and one for them to keep), which we went over, discussed, and signed/dated together. Whenever possible, I also emailed people a copy of the information sheet, following our initial phone discussion, and prior to meeting in-person. All formal interviews were digitally voice recorded. Though given the option, no one opted-out or objected to the voice recorder, nor did it appear to make them uncomfortable. All the participants in this study were highly literate, except for one person who was able to write simple information, like her signature, but whose level of schooling did not give her the confidence to do more than that. I therefore read the

³⁰ Additionally, none of the parents I interviewed were 'single parents by choice', though some of the interviewees' own parents could themselves be labelled in this way, and it was an idea that emerged organically in interviews multiple times.

entire information sheet and every part of the consent form to her carefully, prior to discussing questions and receiving her written, informed consent.

As a childless, educated, technically Colombian woman in her 30s, I had a fair amount in common with many of the people I interviewed, but there were also important differences and potential power asymmetries between us. The most obvious, and arguably most important, difference lies in my dual Canadian-Colombian nationality and the fact that I grew up in North America and have permanently settled in Europe. In social settings, this meant I felt very foreign and was perceived as such by others. Some interviewees and many other people I met in Bogotá were investigating emigration to North America or Europe, and all who had travelled to the US or UK, for example, had intimate experience of the long-winded, intrusive application process for even a tourist visa. As a Canadian, I have never experienced this. Secondly, being a native English-speaker is another huge advantage for travelling and working internationally, although being an outsider and *not* a native Spanish-speaker was a disadvantage in interviews. In other senses, my interviewees were themselves privileged within Colombian society, as most of my work was far from what has been called an anthropology of the ‘suffering subject’, or people who are “living in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression” (Robbins 2013: 448). I worked primarily with people who could be considered elites either socioeconomically, educationally, or professionally. Finally, I was junior to many interviewees, who were largely older, and mostly had postgraduate qualifications (80%), alongside impressive professional histories. Most had also travelled, if not lived, abroad.

Socio-demographic Questionnaire

Following an initial chat and the informed consent procedures, and prior to starting the digital voice recorder and qualitative interview, I would gather basic information using a short socio-demographic questionnaire. Although I designed the questionnaire to be completed by the person her/himself, I almost always asked the questions orally, as this helped me carry out questionnaire quality control (e.g. where a question was unclear) and gave me a basic sketch of the person that helped better-tailor probes/prompts in the more open-ended life history interview. The sociodemographic questionnaire asked basic questions about the person’s age, gender, birthplace, history of living outside of Bogotá, and their neighbourhood of residence/the stratum they

lived in. Then, I asked about their educational history, their work history and any current studies, their partnership status and basic information about their current partner, and their children (if they had them) and fertility desires/ideals, before finishing on their family of origin, including parents' marital status and how many siblings each person had.

My questions regarding fertility desires and ideals were taken from the 2010 DHS questionnaire, but when asking about 'ideal' number of children, I added a section to emphasise that it was counterfactual. For 'desired number of children' I asked non-parents: "Would you like to have a child or would you prefer not to have any children?" and parents: "Would you like to have another child or would you prefer not to have any more children?" followed by a question regarding how many (more) children they would like to have in future. To establish fertility 'ideals', I asked all interviewees: "If you could choose exactly the number of children that you could have in all your life (without considering practical, economic or social limitations [and without considering the number of children you already have, if you have children]), how many would you have?" See Appendix 2C for the full (Spanish-language) socio-demographic questionnaire.

Interview Topics & Settings

Although the ordering of some interviews varied, I tried to address four main areas with the in-depth life history interviews. Following roughly the same interview guide for all interviewees, I significantly tailored questions according to parenthood status, and, to a lesser degree, by age and gender. Given the personal, and potentially sensitive, nature of interviews which explicitly take an interest in romantic relationship histories and childbearing desires, intentions and experiences, I specifically ordered my interview guide so that it would neither start nor end with the most personal questions, instead sandwiching them between what I viewed as less emotive topics. First, I asked for self-descriptions and educational/professional histories, as well as what people enjoyed doing in their free time and whether they would change anything about their life if they could. By starting this way, I tried to build rapport and put people at ease (a process which usually started prior to the recorded interview). I also saw this as a way to give interviewees some space to guide the conversation, by framing their self-descriptions however they saw fit. Secondly, we would move on to questions

regarding family background, childhood, and a description of their parents and other relatives. Regarding family background, I asked a mix of demographic questions (e.g. how many siblings and uncles/aunts they had, and how many siblings their grandparents had, if they knew), alongside more anthropological questions, concerning the nature of their relationships with their family of origin. This focused on nuclear family, but also included questions regarding extended family up to the grandparents' generation. In most cases where someone had a relationship with their extended family, they would mention this spontaneously (though I asked in other cases). I would also usually probe for information regarding siblings' children, and family members with no children. The purpose of these oral family trees was to try to explore whether my interviewees, especially those who had no children, were from smaller or larger families, and whether this had resulted from positive choices (as far as interviewees knew), or from other circumstances. Many family trees were complicated, illustrating the persistent diversity of Colombian family forms, with parental divorces/separations not uncommon, and premature grandparental widowhood also well represented. As a result, although most of my interviewees came from nuclear families with siblings, several had maternal and/or paternal half- and/or step-siblings, and some were raised by single parents (usually mothers). This was typically correlated with a close relationship to their parent's family of origin (i.e. to aunts/uncles and grandparents), and many grandparents helped raise grandchildren while parents worked.

Only in the third part of the interview would we explicitly move on to relationship history and experiences of having or not having children (though it would often come up earlier, initiated by interviewees, whereby this section provided a chance to revisit themes or topics we had already briefly discussed). When asking more personal questions, I reiterated the fact that interviewees were in control of the questions they did or did not want to answer, by saying the equivalent of 'Is it OK if we talk about X...?' or 'If you don't mind me asking you about... ' and 'It's OK to say 'No'.' Finally, I guided the conversation to more general topics and opinions on Colombian society and gender roles, including a question regarding people's definition of a 'family' (which I integrated part-way through fieldwork). In this last section, I typically asked people to consider how they thought gender roles and family life had changed over time, as well as asking them to reflect on their own life histories, in comparison with

those of their mothers/grandmothers or fathers/grandfathers. I finished interviews (and often, each interview section), by asking people if they had anything more they would like to add. Finally, to acknowledge and try to address some of the intrinsic asymmetry of the life history interview situation, I asked people if they had any questions for me, about either the interview or my own situation/life.

Several interviewees spoke excellent English (not uncommon amongst urban elites, but highly atypical more generally); however, as all were native Spanish-speakers, all recorded interviews were carried out in Spanish. The shortest interview lasted slightly less than an hour (around 50 minutes), while the longest interviews were over three hours. The average length was around an hour and a half, but I would often spend more time with each person, either in their houses, or in a café, where we would chat over coffee, juice, or lunch. As a small token of appreciation, I would pay for refreshments, and similarly, when invited to people's houses, I would bring a small gift to present to them as a thank you at the end of the interview, usually a small bag of loose tea or box of chocolates. I did not pay any of my interviewees in cash and my informed consent sheets made it clear that anyone who spoke to me could withdraw their consent at any time, refuse to answer questions, or redirect the conversation. In most cases, interviews followed less formal introductory chats/small talk, and they always followed the informed consent procedure and questionnaire. Similarly, in some cases, I continued talking to interviewees for up to an hour (or more) after the recorded interview finished. In these cases, I would try to remember any important additions and note them in my fieldnotes following the interview. For example, in the case of my shortest (50-minute-long) interview, we chatted for an hour, post-interview.

With respect to setting, I interviewed eight people in their homes (two men, six women); one person in my home (a male friend); eleven people in their offices or in a private space at their workplace (two men, nine women); and fifteen people (two men, thirteen women) in public spaces, like cafés/restaurants or shopping centres. In some cases, the interviews unfolded over multiple spaces: for example, I met one interviewee in an open-air shopping centre, where we had lunch together and began the interview, before retreating to her car to continue the interview there when it started raining.

Qualitative Data Processing, Management and Analysis

I personally carried out all data processing (i.e. recording transcription and sociodemographic questionnaire data entry), management, and analysis, which was facilitated by QSR International's NVivo 11 software. By data management, I mean the safeguarding of participants' confidentiality and the anonymisation process, as I used study numbers and assigned pseudonyms throughout, minimising the use of identifiable data and keeping it separate from the interview audio files and transcripts, and from the questionnaire data. I used Excel spreadsheets for contact management, pseudonym assignment, and questionnaire data management. All original audio files, transcripts, and spreadsheets with either study numbers or any individuals' names are password protected, as are my NVivo analysis files.

For the analysis phase, I followed the principles of thematic analysis and case comparison within and across *a priori* groups (i.e. parents and non-parents, women and men, voluntarily and involuntarily childless individuals), reading and re-reading transcripts and listening to audio repeatedly, to identify themes (Guest et al. 2012). All translations from the original Spanish to English are my own. Although I carried out recorded interviews with just 35 people, there is no real agreement on how many interviews are necessary to reach what qualitative researchers call data or theoretical 'saturation', an idea from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967), which essentially refers to the point at which new themes and ideas are unlikely to emerge from additional data collection, and the researcher can be confident in their findings. Guest et al. (2006) carried out an experiment regarding the point at which researchers will reach saturation based on non-probabilistic sampling. With semi-structured interviews and relatively homogeneous participants, they found that few new codes emerged after the first 6-12 interviews. Using a corpus of 60 interviews with women at high risk of HIV in Ghana and Nigeria, Guest et al. (2006: 66) found that, despite the binational nature of their data, 73% of all of their 'content-driven codes' were identified within the first six interviews analysed, and 92% by the time they analysed 12 transcripts (all from Ghana). If they were interested in higher-level themes, rather than detailed codes, six interviews would have been sufficient (Guest 2006: 79). Although these results may not be generalisable to all studies, they suggest that even relatively small numbers of interviews can generate useful new knowledge.

Finally, these life history-style interviews present personal narratives, offering partial snapshots of people's lives. This includes their own interpretations and 'narrativisation' of their personal histories, from a particular vantage point. Although semi-structured, I tried, as much as possible, to let people speak for long periods of time, listening actively and asking clarifying questions or changing course when it seemed appropriate to do so, but otherwise trying not to interrupt. Although some story tellers offer a more coherent 'plot' than others, narratives and recollections of past events are subject to substantial changes over time, with retellings, and due to omissions, unclear memories, or personal reinterpretations of previous life events. While personal narratives could never 'accurately' reflect the messy, iterative nature of human experience or of our decision-making processes, as Cheryl Mattingly argues, neither do they represent a perfect narrative, "governed by a coherent, unifying plot" (Mattingly & Garro 2000: 204). Additionally, when addressing something as personal and complicated as whether or not to have a child (and the life and family history that contextualise this), experiences and opinions are likely be revisited by people again and again over the course of people's lives, with perspectives changing according to age, relationship status, and a vast array of other important internal (psychological) and external factors. For this reason, I find anthropologist Ann Miles's (2013) use of narrative 'subjectivities', particularly helpful. Miles explored Ecuadorian women's experiences of living with lupus, and borrows from Sherry Ortner (2005), as she notes that:

the focus on subjectivities includes a concern for inner feelings and affect but also for the ways that cultural formations, including local and global configurations of power, frame and constrain individual agency (2013: 144).

Even the life 'snapshots' provided by interviews can help us better understand social norms and values, by reading between the lines and analysing what interviewees choose to highlight and the modes they use to narrate (and 'narrativise'), their stories. By adopting the multi-scalar approach described in the Introduction, I have tried to balance this recognition of each interviewee's agency and their status as empowered decision-makers (regarding fertility and other areas of life) with the larger picture of constraints and contextual factors that shape and sometimes impinge upon this agency.

Demographic Description of Interviewees

My interview sample is largely skewed towards non-parents and women. While my main interest was in experiences of non-parenthood, I would have liked (and did try) to interview more men. Unfortunately, men seemed less willing and/or interested in being interviewed, and I was only able to recruit a small number. This is not uncommon, and as Bell (2015: 443) notes, citing previous studies: “recruiting men to participate in research, particularly on reproductive issues such as infertility, is a difficult task.” Given that I was interested in aspects of reproduction, perhaps men were simply less interested in the topic itself or were less keen than other women to speak to me about their lives. While I did not sense, in my interviews with men, that they held back more than women, the men I interviewed were potentially a more self-selecting group, given their small numbers. In the interviews themselves, non-mothers spoke of being confronted by others about their childlessness far more than men, suggesting that the topic was more salient to their life experience, with some commenting that the interview was ‘like chatting to a friend’, and while the men were all friendly and open, none shared similar observations with me.

Table 2.4: Demographic Summary of 35 Life History Interviewees

	Women (N=28)	Men (N=7)	Total (N=35)
Age Range (Mean), in years	27-73 (42.9)	36-48 (41.7)	27-73 (42.7)
Stratum of Residence (Range)	2-6	3-5	2-6
Parental Status			
Non-parents (N)	21	6	27
Parents (N)	7	1	8
Originally from Bogotá	79% (22/28)	71% (5/7)	77% (27/35)
Currently employed?	89% (25/28)	86% (6/7)	89% (31/35)
Currently studying?	25% (7/28)	29% (2/7)	26% (9/35)
Has lived outside of Colombia?	61% (17/28)	71% (5/7)	66% (23/35)

Table 2.4 summarises interviewees’ socio-demographic characteristics. While three-quarters of interviewees were originally from Bogotá, those who were not came from: the Atlantic Coast; the Central region that includes Medellín; or the North-eastern region that includes the provinces/departments [*departamentos*] of Boyacá and Santander. Only three women and one man were not employed when we met. Two of these women were retired and one was a stay-at-home mother. The one non-employed man was a full-time student with a scholarship, and though about one-quarter of the people I interviewed were studying, the rest also worked at least part-time alongside their studies. Two-thirds had lived outside of Colombia (in other Latin American,

North American, and/or European countries), for at least a few months of their lives, often related to past or present educational or professional pursuits. This makes the group very internationally-oriented, giving them personal exposure to other cultures, beyond travelling, which likely influenced their personal goals, fertility desires, and the way they see Colombia. Many interviewees referred to their own travels and experiences, for example, frequently comparing Colombia to Mexico or Peru, while others who had no personal experience of international travel made references to Venezuela, as a neighbouring country that was constantly in the news during my fieldwork. Of those who had not lived abroad, all mentioned at least one family member (siblings, parents, and uncles/aunts) who had emigrated, reflecting Colombia's status as an emigrant 'sending' country, and one which still receives relatively few immigrants, though numbers have increased with the Venezuelan refugee crisis. I found that this influences the way that Colombians think of their place in, and connections to, the rest of the world, given the sizeable international diaspora with still-close links to home.

Table 2.5 introduces each person's basic characteristics in greater detail. With respect to 'ideal' family size, the 28 women had an average ideal of 1.68 children³¹ whereas the seven men's average was 2.14 children. While this is consistent with my analysis of the DHS data, which shows that Colombian men have higher average ideal family size than women (see Chapter 4), the small number of men in my sample limits the usefulness and comparability of any averages or proportions based on just seven people. None of the mothers or fathers – not even the youngest or those with only one child – expressed a desire for more children in future, although all parents had an 'ideal' family size that matched or exceeded their actual number of children. Some non-parents gave both personal and general ideals (i.e. 'zero for me, but two for others'), and some parents said that, in other circumstances, they would love to have a larger family, but given practical constraints, they were happy with the number they had. With respect to partnership status, only five women and two men had never lived with a previous partner, though only two of these women and one man were strictly 'single' (i.e. had no current boyfriend/girlfriend when interviewed).

³¹ When given ranges (e.g. 2-3) or ideals of 2+, I used '2', so these averages could be slight underestimates.

Table 2.5: Individual Interviewees' Basic Characteristics

Names ¹	Age	Child-less? (# kids)	Ideal # kids	Desired No. kids (future)	Partnership Status ³	Living Arrangements	Stratum	Highest Educat. Level	# Sibs ⁴
WOMEN									
Andrea	25-29	Yes	0	0	Single	W/ family	3-4	Postgrad	0
Mariana	25-29	Yes	0	0	Married	W/ family	3-4	Undergrad	1
Daniela	30-34	Yes	2	Unsure	Single	Alone	3-4	Postgrad	0
Camila	30-34	Yes	0	0	Prev. cohab.	Alone	3-4	Postgrad	0+
Paola	30-34	Yes	2	Unsure	Married	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	1
Diana	35-39	Yes	0	0	Single	W/ family	3-4	Undergrad	1
Susana ²	35-39	Yes	3	0	Married	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	1
Gabriela ²	35-39	Yes	0	0	Married	W/ partner	5-6	Postgrad	4+
Isabel	35-39	Yes	0	0	Married	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	0
Natalia	40-44	Yes	0	0	Single	Alone	5-6	Postgrad	1
Eva	40-44	Yes	2	0	Prev. cohab.	Alone	3-4	Postgrad	1
Mónica	40-44	Yes	2	Unsure	Prev. cohab.	Alone	3-4	Postgrad	1
Virginia	40-44	Yes	0	0	Prev. marr.	Alone	3-4	Postgrad	1
Adriana	40-44	Yes	0	0	Cohab.	W/ partner	5-6	Postgrad	2
Rocío	40-44	Yes	2	'Open'	Cohab.	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	3
Alejandra	40-44	Yes	1	1-2	Marr.	W/ partner	5-6	Postgrad	0
Amalia	45-49	Yes	2	1-2	Prev. cohab.	Alone	3-4	Postgrad	1
Maritza	45-49	Yes	0	0	Marr.	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	3
Elisa	50-54	Yes	2-3	0	Marr.	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	3
Luz María	50-54	Yes	6	0	Marr.	W/ partner	5-6	Postgrad	5
Teresa	65+	Yes	0	N/A	Single	W/ family	3-4	Postgrad	2
Sara	25-29	No (2)	2	No more	Cohab.	W/ family	3-4	Undergrad	1+
Catalina	35-39	No (1)	2	No more	Cohab.	W/ family	3-4	Postgrad	3
Luisa	45-49	No (2)	2	No more	Prev. cohab.	W/ family	3-4	Postgrad	4
Juliana	45-49	No (1)	3	No more	Married	W/ family	5-6	Postgrad	3
Marta	55-59	No (5)	5	N/A	Married	W/ family	5-6	Postgrad	5
Dora	60-64	No (1)	2	N/A	Cohab.	W/ partner	3-4	Undergrad	3+
Mercedes	65+	No (5)	5+	N/A	Prev. marr	W/ family	1-2	Primary	9
MEN									
Nicolás	35-39	Yes	2	2	Cohab.	W/ partner	3-4	Postgrad	2
David	35-39	Yes	2	Unsure	Married	W/ partner	3-4	Undergrad	1+
Sebastián	40-44	Yes	2	1	Single	Alone	5-6	Postgrad	2
Camilo	40-44	Yes	2	1	Single	W/ family	3-4	Postgrad	2+
Daniel ²	40-44	Yes	2+	0	Married	W/ partner	3-4	Undergrad	4+
José ²	45-49	Yes	0	0	Married	W/ partner	5-6	Postgrad	4
Francisco	40-44	No (2)	5	No more	Married	W/ family	3-4	Postgrad	8

¹All 'names' are pseudonyms.

²Gabriela & José and Susana & Daniel were the two married couples I interviewed.

³'Cohab'='Cohabiting'; 'Prev. cohab.'='Previously cohabited'; 'Prev. marr.'='Previously married'; 'Single'='Never cohabited or married but does not mean that the person has never had a non-coresident boyfriend/girlfriend.

⁴Number of siblings: a '+' indicates that the person has one or more half-siblings (not counted in the number given), with whom they did not grow up.

My sample was more highly educated and economically better-off than the average Colombian. All the men and 26 of the 28 women I interviewed had at least an undergraduate degree. Although 11 interviewees lived in Stratum 2 or 3 areas (considered ‘low’ [*bajo*] and ‘lower-middle’ [*medio-bajo*] within the socioeconomic class hierarchy), a majority lived in Stratum 4 (‘middle’ class) areas or higher, placing them in the top 10% of the population of Bogotá. Fifteen people lived in a Stratum 4 area, and a further 9 lived in Stratum 5 or 6 (truly elite) areas of the city. The lack of representation of more working-class perspectives is an important limitation to this research, which was partly the result of the mixed-methods study design. I planned to target university-educated, middle- to upper-middle class women and men because my pre-fieldwork statistical analysis of childlessness in Colombia (using DHS data), identified that such women were statistically most likely to postpone parenthood and to be childless.³² However, I also tried to interview and spend time with women and men living in different stratum areas, including those living in more working-class neighbourhoods, to specifically explore social inequalities and ‘stratified’ experiences of reproduction. Most of my interviewees were nonetheless unusually highly educated and, in cases where their family origins were working-class, they themselves had transitioned to middle- or upper-middle class. Interviewees’ families of origin were diverse, ranging from working- to upper-class and interviewees had an average of 2.4 siblings (Range: 0-9). Five non-mothers (all under age 45) were only children.

³² Unfortunately, the 2015 DHS data (the first year including men) were not released until about half-way through my fieldwork, and I did not have a chance to analyse them until afterwards.

Chapter 3: Overview of Female Childlessness in Colombia

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the basic quantitative background for the rest of this thesis, focusing on female childlessness from the 1980s to the present. Since the literature review presented in Chapter 1 addressed childlessness as theme, I will focus here on the methods and results of the analysis. Using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and census data introduced in Chapter 2, I first adopt a comparative cross-sectional approach, to assess whether childlessness amongst Colombian women has increased at all between the mid-1980s and 2015. Secondly, using DHS only, I address the ‘profile’ of childless women in this context, by analysing the relationship between childlessness and a series of hypothesised explanatory variables. Finally, I explore the statistical significance of changes to childlessness over time in two groups: amongst all women, as well as only amongst those who have ever cohabited or married.

Specific Research Questions

I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the age-specific level of overall childlessness amongst Colombian women, and how has this changed since the mid-1980s?
2. How comparable are estimates gained from census and DHS data?
3. What individual and contextual factors are associated with female childlessness in Colombia around ages 30 (25-34-year-olds, representing motherhood ‘postponement’) and 40 (35-44-year-olds, representing ‘definitive’ childlessness)?
4. Has female childlessness around ages 30 and 40 increased over time, controlling for other sociodemographic changes?

3.2 Methods

Comparing DHS & Census Estimates of Overall Childlessness

This chapter uses data from seven rounds of women’s individual DHS datasets (1986-2015), alongside the IPUMS-I 10% sample extracts from three Colombian censuses

(1985-2005).³³ Although men are excluded from this chapter, I used the 2015 DHS to address their voluntary and overall childlessness in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. Census data were only used for basic descriptive statistics, to cross-check DHS-based estimates of overall levels of childlessness and change over time. Using the number of children ever born (CEB), I calculated the proportion of women aged 15-49 (in 5-year age groups) who reported being childless. The DHS does not allow entry of an ‘unknown’ number of CEB; therefore, there are no missing data for that DHS variable (*V201*). In contrast, the census is subject to relatively substantial amounts of missing data, particularly in the 1985 and 1993 rounds. Therefore, because more than 2% of all census CEB data was missing, I followed the methods outlined by Moultrie, *et al.* (2013), to assess the quality of the parity data from each census each round and apply the el-Badry correction³⁴ to the 1985 and 1993 data. I will present a series of three estimates for the proportions childless: the ‘crude’ proportion (including only those women with zero CEB); what I have called the ‘aggregated’ proportion (adding all women with an ‘unknown’ number of CEB to those with zero CEB); and finally, the (el-Badry) ‘corrected’ estimates.³⁵

DHS Analysis

Using only DHS data, I focused on age-specific childlessness in two groups: ‘younger’ women (25-34-years-old) and ‘older’ women (35-44-years-old), in order to capture whether factors associated with motherhood postponement (childlessness around age 30) differed from those for definitive female childlessness towards the end of the fertile years (around age 40). Ten-year age groups were used to increase robustness, particularly in the older age group. ‘Childlessness’ was defined as a binary outcome (yes/no), with women who reported zero children ever born (CEB) (DHS *V201*), and who were not pregnant (DHS *V213*) at the time of survey classed as ‘childless’, irrespective of partnership status. Focusing on the 2010 DHS data only (the largest

³³ Both data sources were introduced in Chapter 2.

³⁴ Briefly, the el-Badry method is a way correct “errors in data on children ever born caused by the enumerator or respondent failing to record answers of ‘zero’ to questions on lifetime fertility and, instead, leaving the response blank. [...] The method apportions the number of women whose parity is recorded as ‘missing’ between those whose parity is regarded as being truly unknown, and those women who should have been recorded as childless but whose responses were left blank” (Moultrie 2013: 35). Where the proportion of CEB data missing exceeds 2% and there is a linear relationship between proportions of women reported childless and those whose parity is missing, the correction can be applied.

³⁵ See Appendix 3A for a summary of the corrected and uncorrected census estimates.

female dataset, to date), and on postponement around age 30 and definitive childlessness around age 40, I explored how the proportions childless varied according to age, and six hypothesised ‘explanatory’ (independent) variables. These are:

1. Union status (V502) – Whether a person has ever been married or cohabited; consisting of three groups: *Never in union*, *Currently in union/living with a man*, and *Formerly in union/living with a man*. I recoded this as a binary measure: *Ever* or *Never in union*.
2. Education (V106) – The highest level of education a woman/man has attended;³⁶ divided into four groups: *No education*, *Primary*, *Secondary*, and *Higher*. Very few women have ‘no education’, so I regrouped the lowest levels together: *Primary or less*.
3. Wealth index (V190) – A measure of economic status, constructed using answers to questions regarding ownership of assets (TV, refrigerator, agricultural land, etc.) and access to services (water supply, sanitation, electricity, etc.). For details regarding its construction, see Rutstein & Johnson (2004). The wealth index is divided into quintiles, from low to high: *Poorest*, *Poorer*, *Middle*, *Richer*, *Richest*.
4. Currently working (V714) – Whether or not the respondent was working outside the home when interviewed; two categories: *No* or *Yes*.
5. Place of residence (V102) – Whether the respondent lives in an *Urban* or *Rural* area.
6. Region of residence (V101) – The Colombian region in which the respondent lives; grouped into six categories: *Bogotá*, *Atlantic*, *Central*, *Eastern*, *Pacific*, and *National Territories* (in 2015, labelled *Orinoquia/Amazonia*).

For more information regarding the DHS and its variables, see Corsi et al. (2012). The *DHS Program* itself also provides invaluable information regarding data collection and variable coding/recoding across different survey rounds, such as their survey manuals, maps, and other guides (e.g. ICF 2018; Rutstein & Rojas 2006), alongside the Colombia DHS Final Reports (available from ICF 2019), which I consulted extensively.

³⁶ Note that, unlike in the Colombian census, this does not refer to highest level of education *completed*. For example, a woman who has attended one year of post-secondary education will be classed as having a ‘higher’ level of education, alongside other women who might have completed an undergraduate degree (usually lasting five years).

Given the positive association between education and childlessness and the fact that Colombia has experienced a massive educational expansion, especially amongst women, I originally hypothesised that childlessness would have increased over time. Based on the literature presented in Chapter 1, I further hypothesised that both postponement and ‘definitive’ childlessness would be positively associated with: having never been in union; higher levels of education and socioeconomic status (both usually amongst the strongest individual factors³⁷); working outside the home; and with urban residence. Regionally, although low overall fertility (e.g. the TFR) and high levels of childlessness are not always associated, I hypothesised that childlessness would be relatively higher in Bogotá and the ‘Central’ region than in the other four regions, given that they had the lowest TFRs in the country, as well as being relatively prosperous. Finally, I introduced several interactions between union status and the other hypothesised explanatory variables, as it is likely that, e.g., the relationship between area or region of residence, education, or work status and childlessness is different for women who *have* ever been in a union compared to those who have not.

My modelling strategy used bivariate logistic regression models to test the statistical significance of associations between independent variables and the binary outcome of childlessness, and to calculate unadjusted odds ratios (ORs), before formulating multivariate logistic regression models to probe the relative importance of each explanatory variable, adjusted for the effects of the other variables in the model. Continuous age was included as an *a priori* confounder, since overall childlessness tends to decrease with increasing age, as more people enter parenthood. In order to arrive at a ‘final’ explanatory model, I iteratively compared a series of multivariate logistic regression models using likelihood-ratio test (LRT), and the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) values. AIC and BIC are used for judging relative goodness of fit (comparing models, which do not have to be nested), and both measures include a penalty for overfitting. Lower AIC and BIC values indicate better model fit and are therefore preferred (Agresti 2007: 141). The BIC has a higher penalty for superfluous information than the AIC does,

³⁷ Although higher education is associated with higher levels of female childlessness in many contexts, like Brazil (Cavenaghi & Alves 2013), France (Köppen et al. 2017) and the UK (Berrington 2017), this is no longer always the case in other contexts, like Finland (Rotkirch & Miettinen 2017), and there is evidence of a complex relationship between education and childlessness/motherhood. However, in the Colombian context, I expect that higher education will mean more, rather than less, childlessness.

meaning that it tends to favour more parsimonious (simpler) models. The ‘variable importance’ function in the *R caret* package (Kuhn et al. 2018) was also used to assess the importance of individual variables in each model. Apart from some data management in SPSS and Excel, all analyses were carried out in *R* with *RStudio*, using the *Survey* package (Lumley 2004, 2017), to produce nationally-accurate point estimates, as well as standard errors/confidence intervals, and statistical significance tests adjusted for the DHS’s complex survey design.

After modelling using only the 2010 DHS, to explore the broad profile of childless women in contemporary Colombia, I created a pooled DHS dataset, merging all seven survey rounds (after carefully checking and harmonising the data and variable formatting and creating a new, unique individual identifier), following guidance in Vanderelst & Speybroeck (2014) and Croft et al. (2018). I used this dataset to assess the statistical significance of trends in ‘postponement’ and ‘definitive’ childlessness over time (from a period perspective). After excluding the 1986 DHS due to its limited comparability with subsequent rounds (e.g. it lacks wealth index information), I regrouped the remaining surveys into decades: 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, with the 1990s as the baseline/reference group. Using simple logistic regression models, I tested whether the odds of childlessness had changed significantly over time (unadjusted for anything but age), before adding other independent variables, to control for the potentially confounding effects that the changing profile of Colombian women (e.g. increasing education) could have on the relationship between survey period and childlessness. I examined changes across two groups. First, amongst all women and, then, only amongst those who had ‘ever’ been in union, adding independent variables regarding the nature of unions:

1. Current marital status (V501) – A more detailed version of *V502*, which consists of six categories: *Never in union*, *Married*, *Living with partner*, *Widowed*, *Divorced*, *No longer living together/separated*. I collapsed *Widowed*, *Divorced*, and *No longer living together/separated* into ‘*Former union*’.
2. Number of unions – Created by joining information on *Never in union* (from *V502*) with *V503*, a binary variable only for women who have ‘ever’ been in a union, specifying whether this was *Once*, or *More than once*. This new ‘Number of unions’ variable has three levels: *One* (reference group); *Two or more*; *None*.

3. Years since first union (V512) – For women who have ‘ever’ been in a union, only: number of years elapsed since the start of her first cohabitation/marriage.

Instead of binary yes/no *Currently working (V714)*, I used:

4. Occupational group (V717) – A more detailed variable categorising the nature of a respondent’s current or former work: *Not working (& have never worked)*; *Agricultural (self-employed)*; *Agricultural (employee)*; *Skilled manual*; *Unskilled manual*; *Sales*; *Services*; *Clerical*; *Professional/technical/managerial*. I collapsed *Manual (skilled and unskilled)*, *Agricultural (employee/self-employed)*; and *Sales/Services* together.

Who is ‘childless’? Current First Pregnancies and the ‘Childless’ Group

Definitions of ‘childlessness’ vary across the literature, sometimes including women who are currently pregnant with their first child and sometimes excluding them. Logical arguments can be made either way. On one hand, women who are pregnant for the first time have never given birth, and technically fit into the category of women who have ‘no children ever born’ (no CEB), so by this measure can still be considered ‘childless’. On the other hand, these women know they will soon be transitioning out of ‘childlessness’. Therefore, from a social perspective, it arguably makes more sense to exclude currently (first-time) pregnant women from the childless category, since they are mothers-to-be and are likely already preparing for this major life change.

Although the most philosophically-sound definition would therefore exclude currently pregnant women from the ‘childless’ category, this introduces certain data issues. First, it is not possible to separate currently-pregnant women from others using Colombian census data (but this can be done with the DHS). Therefore, any comparison of childlessness in the DHS and census could be biased by the exclusion of pregnant women from one source but not the other. For this reason, my definition of ‘childlessness’ varies slightly according to the purpose of different analyses. For example, the overall proportions ‘childless’ from the 1986, 1995, and 2005 DHS, presented in Table 3.1, do *not* exclude pregnant women from the ‘childless’ category. However, the following sections, focusing on factors associated with childlessness amongst women aged 25-34 and 35-44 in the 2010 DHS *does* exclude currently pregnant women from the ‘childless’ category, as does the subsequent section, which

uses the pooled dataset to test the statistical significance of changes over time. Despite this, considering first-time pregnant women to be childless is unlikely to have a substantial effect on the analysis (see Appendix 3B for a summary of how accounting for pregnancy affects overall estimates).

3.3 Exploring Period Trends in Childlessness Since the 1980s Using Seven Rounds of DHS Data

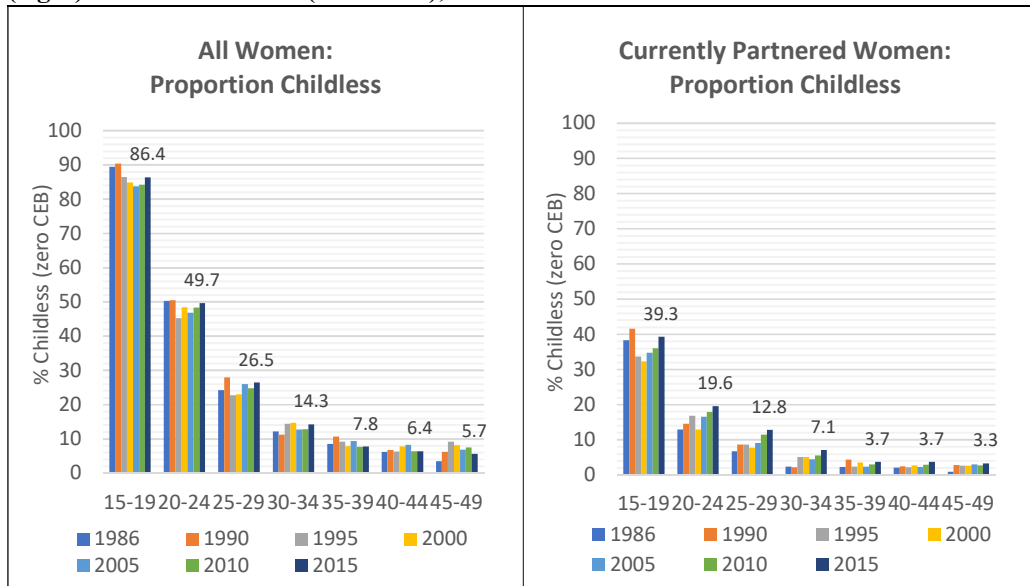
Background Characteristics

Between 1986 and 2015, the proportion of all women in the Colombian DHS sample who ‘currently’ worked outside the home more than doubled from 24% to 57%. This pattern was reflected at an even higher level amongst women aged 35-44, with an increase from 28 to 70% working in the same period (and from 30% to 66% of 25-34-year-olds). Women’s educational attainment rose at a similarly dynamic rate: whereas in 1986, only 8% of women aged 25-34 had a ‘higher’ level of education, by 2015 this had more than quintupled to nearly one in two (45.1%), as well as one-third of 35-44-year-olds. Meanwhile, amongst women aged 35-44, the proportion who never married or cohabited remained stable and relatively low, between 8-9% (and 20% of 25-34-year-olds). The changing characteristics of Colombian DHS respondents reflect the broader socio-demographic transitions in Colombian society in this 30-year period.

Childlessness from the 1980s through 2015 in the DHS

The graphs in Figure 3.1 display the change over time in the proportions of women who were childless (declaring that they had zero ‘children ever born’, or CEB) when interviewed for the DHS. The left-hand graph shows that, overall, age-specific childlessness does not appear to be increasing over time in Colombia, despite continuously declining fertility with a national TFR that is now below replacement level, as well as substantial increases in women’s education and work outside the home. Over approximately the past 30 years, from 1986 to 2015, childlessness around ages 30 and 40 has varied within a relatively narrow range without displaying a consistently increasing or decreasing pattern over time. Instead, we see slight fluctuations with each DHS round, likely due to sampling variation. This indicates that there has been a relatively stable level of childlessness among all women (in union and single) in Colombia from the 1980s through to the present.

Figure 3.1: Age-specific Proportions of all Women (left) & Currently Partnered Women (right) who are Childless (zero CEB), DHS 1986-2015



Note: Data labels refers to proportions childless in 2015 DHS.

Source: Own construction, using data from the DHS StatCompiler website (ICF 2012).

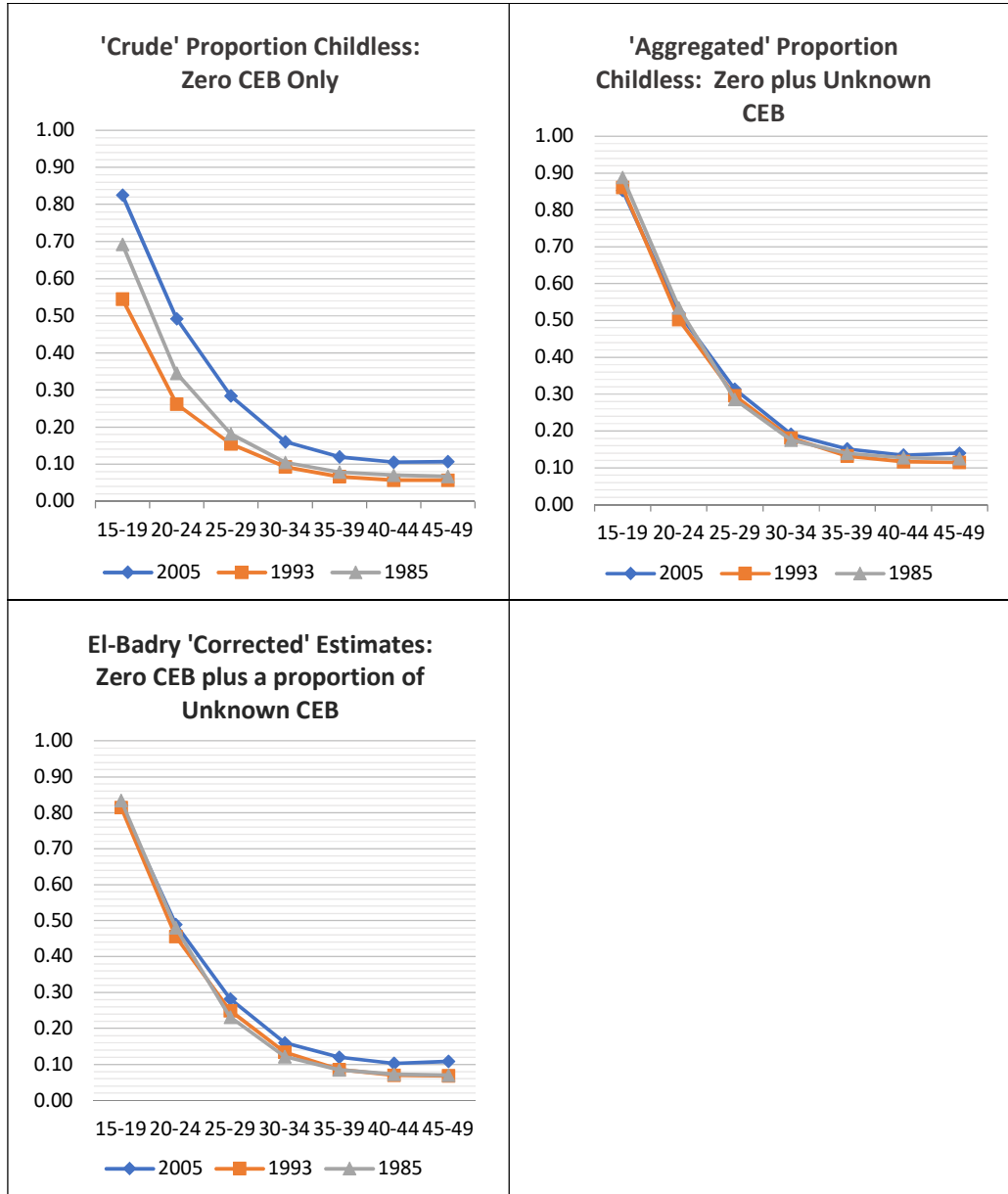
In contrast, when we look at women who are *currently in union* only, as in the right-hand graph above, the numbers again fluctuate slightly, but there does appear to be a modestly increasing pattern amongst women in their 20s and early 30s. When comparing the figures from 1986 with those from 2015, they rise from 15% to 20% of women aged 20-24, from 7% to 13% of those aged 25-29, and from 2.5% to 7% of those 30-34. These figures are, however, still relatively low and should be interpreted with caution. I will return to these data later in the chapter.

Childlessness in Three Rounds of the Colombian Census (1985-2005)

Unlike the DHS, the Colombian census is subject to missing/unknown data regarding number of ‘children ever born’ (CEB). This missing data ranges from relatively low values of around 3% across all age groups in 2005 to highs of around 32% for 15-19-year-olds (declining to around 5 or 6% in the older groups) in the 1993 census. As el-Badry (1961) noted, when census data include large numbers of women (over 2%) with ‘unknown’ or missing information regarding CEB, we can assume that at least some of them are actually childless. Because of this, Figure 3.2 presents ‘childlessness’ in three different ways: (1) the ‘crude’ proportion of women who are childless, based only on women with zero CEB, ignoring all missing data; (2) the ‘aggregated’

proportion of women who are childless, which assumes that all women with missing CEB data in fact have zero CEB; and (3) the ‘corrected’ estimate.

Figure 3.2: Contrasting Three Measures of the Proportion of All Colombian Women Aged 15-49 Who Were Childless Across Three Census Rounds, 1985-2005



Source: Own calculations, using Colombian census data (10% sample) from IPUMS-I.

The ‘corrected’ estimate uses the el-Badry correction to estimate what proportion of women with missing CEB data are likely to actually be childless and adds *only these women* to the ‘childless’ category, leaving some of the rest as missing.

In the first graph in Figure 3.2, the ‘crude’ estimate of childlessness is obviously flawed, as it is very unlikely that only 54% of 15-19-year-olds were childless in 1993. This provides an estimate of adolescent motherhood that is far too high. In contrast, the second graph, displaying the ‘aggregated’ estimate of childlessness (which added all women with an ‘unknown’ CEB to those with zero CEB) most likely *over*-estimates childlessness in the earliest rounds (1985 and 1993), as there was substantially more missing data in these years than in 2005. This second graph shows very little change in the proportions childless over time in the youngest groups, and even in the older groups (35+), the change appears negligible, as all estimates are tightly clustered between approximately 11 and 15% childless.

Finally, turning to the trends in childlessness over time in the graph of the el-Badry ‘corrected’ estimates, these seem to display some divergence between the earlier 1985 and 1993 rounds (which are clustered together) and the most recent census in 2005, especially in the oldest groups (35+), where it appears that childlessness has risen from around 7-8% in the 1980s and 1990s to 10-12% in the early 2000s. As we will see next, based on the comparison of DHS and census data, it is not entirely clear whether this is a ‘real’ increase or an anomaly.

3.4 Comparing Period Estimates from the DHS & Census

Table 3.1 compares the point estimates for the proportion of women in each five-year reproductive age group who were childless in the DHS and census. Except for 2005, the census and DHS years do not match exactly, so I roughly compare the 1993 census to the 1995 DHS and the 1985 census with the 1986 DHS. This table provides point estimates of the proportions childless (women with zero CEB), alongside the percentage point differences between the DHS and census estimates for each five-year age group. Appendix 3A provides further details, including the overall numbers of women in the DHS and census and a comparison of the different estimates of childlessness for the census only.

Census and DHS estimates differ slightly in two respects: first, in the overall level of estimated childlessness and, secondly, in terms of the trend over time. With respect to levels, Table 3.1 shows that, for all women over age 35 in 2005, childlessness is over 10% in the census and under 10% in the DHS, with a difference of three to four

percentage points. In the 1980s and 1990s, the figures for older women were more similar (mostly around a one percentage-point difference). For 25-34-year-old women, the discrepancy in all rounds is relatively large, at around two to three percentage points.

Table 3.1: Age-specific proportions childless from the census (el-Badry adjusted in 1985 & 1993) and the DHS

Census or DHS Round	5-year Age Group						
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
1980s							
Census 1985	83.4	48.0	23.1	12.2	8.5	7.3	7.0
DHS 1986	83.8	46.9	26.1	12.8	9.4	8.2	6.9
Difference (Census - DHS)	-0.4	1.1	-3.0	-0.6	-0.9	-0.9	0.1
1990s							
Census 1993	81.4	45.6	24.9	13.4	8.6	7.0	6.8
DHS 1995	86.5	45.3	22.7	14.5	9.2	6.3	9.2
Difference (Census - DHS)	-5.1	0.3	2.2	-1.1	-0.6	0.7	-2.4
2000s							
Census 2005	82.5	49.1	28.4	16.0	12.0	10.6	10.7
DHS 2005	83.8	46.9	26.1	12.8	9.4	8.2	6.9
Difference (Census - DHS)	-1.3	2.2	2.3	3.2	2.6	2.4	3.8

Source: Own calculations, using 1985, 1995, & 2005 women's individual DHS microdata and IPUMS-I 10% sample of Colombian census data (1985, 1993, 2005).

The census and DHS also exhibit different patterns of change over time. In the DHS, childlessness appears to be low and relatively stable (under 10% of women over age 35) across all rounds. However, in the census estimates, between 1993 and 2005, childlessness appears to have increased in all five-year age groups over 25 (by around three to four percentage points). As this pattern of increase relies on change between just two data points, it will be interesting to examine whether this increasing trend will continue into the 2018 census.

Due to the greater detail provided by the DHS, the availability of more recent surveys and of data on male childlessness, the rest of this chapter focuses on DHS data. We should keep in mind, however, that DHS estimates of overall childlessness, particularly for the 2000s, tend to be lower than those for the equivalent census years for all but the youngest (15-19-year-old) women. Finally, and regardless of the discrepancies in the DHS and census estimates presented above, it should be obvious that the level of childlessness in Colombia at all reproductive ages (around or below 10%) is still far lower than that of Euro-American countries (for example, 20% of 40-44-year-olds in the UK had 'not had a live birth' (OECD Family Database 2018: 2)),

and the pattern over time amongst all women of reproductive age is one of *relative* stability to very modest increase.

3.5 Multivariate Analysis of the 2010 Colombia DHS: What Factors are Associated with Overall Female Childlessness?

Although establishing the overall proportion of women who are childless in Colombia and assessing broad change over time is an important first step, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of non-motherhood, it is also helpful to analyse the individual and contextual factors associated with childlessness. Table 3.2 displays the distribution of women according to specific characteristics in three groups: all women (aged 15-49); women aged 25-34 only (the group whose childlessness represents modest ‘postponement’ of motherhood); and women aged 35-44 (whose childlessness is understood as ‘definitive’, or likely to be permanent, at least in the Colombian context, where little first-time motherhood occurs after age 35. Table 3.2 deserves a brief explanatory note: the first two columns (labelled ‘Total’) for each of those three groupings of women presents the numbers of women in each category (e.g. there are 9,100 women in the 15-19-year-old age group) alongside the *column* proportion (e.g. that 18.3% of all women surveyed in the 2010 DHS were in the 15-19-year-old age group). The second two columns present the numbers of women out of that total who are childless (7,324 of the 9,100 15-19-year-olds are childless), alongside the *row* proportion (that makes 80.5% of all 15-19-year-olds childless). This table presents data from the 2010 DHS only, but for graphs of period trends in the proportions of childless women according to each characteristic across all DHS rounds (1986-2015), see Appendix 3C.

In Table 3.2, we start to see some of the variation according to the hypothesised individual and contextual characteristics. For example, amongst 25-34-year-olds (‘younger’ group, representing postponement of motherhood) and 35-44-year-olds (‘older’ group, representing ‘definitive’ childlessness), a substantially higher proportion of women who have ‘never’ been in union are childless than either those ‘currently’ or ‘formerly’ in union. This is in line with the hypotheses presented in the Methods section.

Table 3.2: Sociodemographic Characteristics of all women aged 15-49 and of women aged 25-34 or 35-44 only

Independent Variables: Participant Charact's.	All Women: 15-49-years-old (N=49,818)				Younger: Women 25-34 (N=14,114)				Older: Women 35-44 (N=12,773)			
	Total		Childless only		Total		Childless only		Total		Childless only	
	N	Col %	N	Row %	N	Col %	N	Row %	N	Col %	N	Row %
Age Groups:												
15-19	9,100	18.3	7,324	80.5								
20-24	7,760	15.6	3,499	45.1								
25-29	7,327	14.7	1,686	23.0	14,114	100.0	2,526	17.9				
30-34	6,787	13.6	840	12.4								
35-39	6,290	12.6	469	7.5					12,773	100.0	879	6.9
40-44	6,483	13.0	410	6.3								
45-49	6,071	12.2	455	7.5								
Partnership Status:												
Never in union	15,719	31.6	12,450	79.2	2,762	19.6	1,716	62.1	1,116	8.7	519	46.5
Currently	26,247	52.7	1,705	6.5	9,002	63.8	638	7.1	8,878	69.5	251	2.8
Formerly	7,852	15.8	528	6.7	2,350	16.6	173	7.4	2,778	21.8	108	3.9
Education:												
None	848	1.7	57	6.8	175	1.2	15	8.6	345	2.7	15	4.4
Primary	11,065	22.2	910	8.2	2,927	20.7	149	5.1	4,213	33.0	143	3.4
Secondary	25,753	51.7	8,375	32.5	6,622	46.9	737	11.1	5,555	43.5	299	5.4
Higher	12,152	24.4	5,340	43.9	4,391	31.1	1,624	37.0	2,661	20.8	422	15.9
Wealth Index:												
Poorest	8,135	16.3	1,784	21.9	2,318	16.4	162	7.0	1,994	15.6	61	3.1
Poorer	9,714	19.5	2,376	24.5	2,779	19.7	332	11.9	2,446	19.2	104	4.3
Middle	10,728	21.5	2,985	27.8	3,182	22.5	473	14.9	2,634	20.6	166	6.3
Richer	10,873	21.8	3,509	32.3	3,129	22.2	641	20.5	2,812	22.0	214	7.6
Richest	10,369	20.8	4,028	38.8	2,706	19.2	919	34.0	2,887	22.6	334	11.6
Currently Working:												
No	23,537	47.2	8,692	36.9	5,498	39.0	610	11.1	4,224	33.1	202	4.8
Yes	26,281	52.8	5,991	22.8	8,617	61.0	1,916	22.2	8,549	66.9	677	7.9
Area of Residence:												
Urban	39,264	78.8	12,263	31.2	11,123	78.8	2,238	20.1	10,011	78.4	780	7.8
Rural	10,554	21.2	2,420	22.9	2,992	21.2	288	9.6	2,762	21.6	99	3.6
Region:												
Atlantic	9,602	19.3	2,749	28.6	2,765	19.6	463	16.7	2,481	19.4	154	6.2
Bogotá	9,370	18.8	3,020	32.2	2,674	18.9	610	22.8	2,361	18.5	196	8.3
Eastern	9,035	18.1	2,432	26.9	2,542	18.0	351	13.8	2,369	18.5	125	5.3
Central	12,497	25.1	3,789	30.3	3,453	24.5	635	18.4	3,155	24.7	237	7.5
Pacific	8,207	16.5	2,434	29.7	2,346	16.6	428	18.3	2,136	16.7	158	7.4
National Territories	1,107	2.2	259	23.4	335	2.4	39	11.6	270	2.1	8	3.0
Totals	49,818	100	14,683	29.5	14,114	100	2,526	17.9	12,773	100	879	6.9

Note: All numbers and proportions in this table are weighted, to adjust for the survey's complex sampling design.

Source: Own calculations using 2010 women's individual DHS microdata.

Additionally, in 2010, almost no women have ‘no education’: only 1.7% overall. For this reason, I merged the ‘no education’ and ‘primary only’ groups for subsequent analyses. I also collapsed the ‘currently’ and ‘formerly’ in union groups into an ‘ever’ in union group. In both the younger and older groups, education is positively associated with childlessness. Taking the younger women as an example, only 5% of primary educated women in their late 20s/early 30s are childless, compared to 37% of those with higher education. There is a similarly positive correlation between childlessness and increasing wealth amongst both younger and older childless groups (e.g. from 7% of the ‘poorest’ younger women to 34% of the ‘richest’). Being in work also appears to have a positive relationship with childlessness (22% of currently-working younger women were childless versus 11% of those who were not working). With respect to contextual factors, there are notable urban/rural differences, especially for younger women, as well as some regional differences, with the National Territories (12%) and Eastern (14%) regions home to the lowest proportions childless and Bogotá the highest (23%). Given the relatively low level of overall childlessness amongst ‘older’ women (just 6.9% overall), there are smaller differences in childlessness according to most personal characteristics, other than partnership status.

Table 3.3, below, presents the unadjusted and adjusted odds ratios (OR), respectively, from bi- and multivariate logistic regression models testing the strength of the associations between each hypothesised explanatory variable and childlessness around ages 30 and 40. The ‘full’ model includes all explanatory variables, while the ‘final’ model presents the model that provides the best explanation of childlessness in each of the two age groups, by eliminating superfluous factors through iterative model-building and the comparison of model AIC and BIC values (lower values indicate a better model), or by introducing a relevant interaction, which similarly improves a model.

Several independent variables stand out as highly important to childlessness in both younger and older women (around ages 30 and 40, respectively), namely: partnership status, education, and wealth index. Partnership status exhibited by far the strongest association with childlessness. Both younger and older women who had never married or cohabited were significantly more likely to be childless than their peers who had. Even when adjusted for other factors, like education and socioeconomic status, ‘never’

partnered women in the younger group had odds of childlessness 15 times those of 'ever' partnered women, while the equivalent figure in the older group was nearly 27, indicating that a large proportion of childlessness may result from circumstance rather than choice.

Even when adjusted for the effects of partnership status and all the other variables in the 'Final' models, having a higher level of education was another strongly significant factor increasing the odds of childlessness for women around ages 30 and 40 (OR=4.3 in the younger group and 3.6 in the older group), compared to those with primary education or less. Although women with secondary education were also more likely to be childless than those with lower levels of education, the effect was much smaller (and not statistically significant in the older group). Wealth quintiles (a proxy for economic status), also had a significant effect in both age groups: the richest women were more likely to be childless than the poorest women (OR~2), even after adjusting for education and other important covariates, although its unadjusted relationship to childlessness was much stronger. While these three factors were the best predictors of childlessness around age 40, the final model for the younger group also included current work and area of residence. Working women, those living in rural areas, and women in places other than the Bogotá and Central regions displayed higher levels of childlessness around age 30, potentially indicating that these factors are associated with postponement, but not definitively with childlessness later on.

Additionally, amongst younger women, the direction of the relationship between the contextual variables (area and region of residence) and childlessness reversed from negative to positive, when adjusted for the other variables in the full and final model. For example, women living in rural areas had an *unadjusted* OR=0.42, when compared to urban, indicating significantly decreased odds of childlessness for rural dwellers. However, in the full model, the adjusted OR for rural residence increased to 1.5. This suggests that, at an overall level, childlessness is less common in rural than urban areas. Yet, once we adjust for the effects of other individual characteristics (i.e. when comparing more educated, or richer individuals to one another), if we compared a woman living in rural Colombia to an urban woman with roughly the same personal profile, the rural woman is more likely to remain childless than her urban counterpart.

Table 3.3: Logistic regression models of childlessness around ages 30 and 40 (2010 DHS)

Independent Variables	Younger: Women Aged 25-34 Only (N=14,114)			Older: Women Aged 35-44 Only (N=12,773)		
	Unadj. ORs	Full Model: Adj. ORs	Final Model: Full + Interaction Adj. ORs (95% CI)	Unadj. ORs	Full Model: Adj. ORs	Final Model: Adj. ORs (95% CI)
Age (Contin.)	0.86 ***	0.90 ***	0.90 (0.87-0.92) ***	0.96 *	0.99	
Partnership: Ever in Union	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never in Union	21.3 ***	15.7 ***	11.0 (7.8-15.5) ***	27.4 ***	27.2 ***	26.7 (21.6-33.1) ***
Education: Primary or Less	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Secondary	2.2 ***	1.3 *	1.4 (1.1-1.8) *	1.6 ***	1.1	1.2 (0.86-1.6)
Higher	10.5 ***	4.0 ***	4.3 (3.3-5.5) ***	5.3 ***	3.4 ***	3.6 (2.7-4.9) ***
Wealth: Poorest	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Poorer	1.8 ***	1.4 *	1.3 (1.0-1.8) .	1.4 .	1.0	1.1 (0.74-1.6)
Middle	2.3 ***	2.0 ***	1.7 (1.2-2.3) **	2.1 ***	1.3	1.4 (0.93-2.0)
Richer	3.4 ***	2.0 ***	1.6 (1.1-2.2) **	2.6 ***	1.4	1.4 (0.97-2.1) .
Richest	6.8 ***	3.1 ***	2.3 (1.6-3.3) ***	4.2 ***	1.8 *	1.9 (1.3-2.8) ***
Currently working: No	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	
Yes	2.3 ***	1.3 ***	1.3 (1.1-1.5) **	1.7 ***	1.1	
Residence: Urban	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	
Rural	0.42 ***	1.5 **	1.4 (1.1-1.9) *	0.44 ***	0.93	
Region: Bogotá	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	
Atlantic	0.68 ***	1.8 ***	1.2 (0.9-1.7)	0.73 *	1.3	
Central	0.76 *	1.4 *	1.3 (0.9-1.8)	0.90	1.2	
Eastern	0.54 ***	1.0	0.8 (0.5-1.1)	0.61 **	0.77	
Pacific	0.76 *	1.5 **	1.2 (0.9-1.8)	0.88	1.0	
Natl. Territories	0.44 ***	1.4 *	1.2 (0.8-1.8)	0.36 ***	0.7	
Interaction: Union*Region						
Never*Atl.			3.1 (1.9-5.0) ***			
Never*Cent.			1.1 (0.7-1.8)			
Never*East.			1.8 (1.1-3.0) *			
Never*Pacif.			1.4 (0.9-2.2)			
Never*Natl. Territories			1.5 (0.8-2.6)			
Intercept	--	0.28 **	0.34 *	--	0.02 ***	0.01 ***
Rao-Scott F-Test for Interaction			Working 2logLR= 29.83; p<0.001			
AIC	--	8675.2	8645.7	--	4415.2	4413.6
BIC	--	8777.2	8780.7	--	4522.9	4467.7

Statistical significance: '***'p<0.001 / '**'p<0.01 / '*'p<0.05 / '.'p<0.10.

It is also important to note the interaction between partnership and region in the *Final* model for younger women in Table 3.3, above. Since partnership exhibits the strongest association with childlessness, it is interesting to explore how the relationship between other hypothesised independent variables and childlessness might differ between women who have been married or cohabited and those who have not. I explored interactions between partnership status and: education, wealth, current work, area of residence, and region, as well as between education and the other independent

variables, for both younger and older women. Though none of these interactions significantly improved the final model for ‘definitive’ childlessness amongst older women (therefore they are not presented here), there were some important interactions for ‘postponement’ of motherhood amongst younger women. The interaction between ‘union’ and ‘region’ presented in the *Final* model, above, proved to be a statistically-significant improvement on the simpler (*Full*) model. It also had the lowest AIC of all models tested, though it slightly increased the BIC value, indicating that, on this measure, it is not as parsimonious as the *Full* model. Additional interactions for younger women are presented in Appendix 3D.

Because the *Final* model in Table 3.3, above, includes an interaction between ‘partnership’ and ‘region’, it is no longer possible to calculate a summary OR for the relationship between these two variables and childlessness. Instead, their ORs now refer to the change between their respective levels *only* in the baseline (reference) category of the other variable. For example, ‘partnership’ no longer represents the overall comparison of women who have never been in a union to those who have, controlling for the effects of all other variables in the model. Instead, it represents the comparative partnership OR *only* for women in *Bogotá*, as the regional *reference group*. Here, we see that the odds of childlessness amongst women in Bogotá who have never cohabited/married are 11 times higher than those of women who have.

Similarly, the ORs for the region variable in the final model also represent ORs for childlessness *only amongst women who have ever been in union*, comparing different regions to Bogotá. So, we can see that there are no statistically significant regional differences between Colombian women who have ever cohabited or married, as all ORs are around 1.0. Finally, the ‘Interaction’ ORs at the bottom of Table 3.3 are not straightforward ORs, but instead represent multiplication terms for the change between the baseline group and other comparison groups. Therefore, to calculate the true odds ratios in other groups, they must be multiplied by the ORs in the baseline groups. These stratified ORs are presented in Table 3.4 & Table 3.5.

In keeping with the overall (national) OR of 15.7 for ‘never’ in union from the *Full* model in Table 3.3, Table 3.4 shows that, when compared to younger women who have cohabited or married, those who have never done so still have greatly increased odds of childlessness, regardless of their region of residence. However, the *magnitude*

of this association varies between regions. Regionally, women in Bogotá (OR=11) and the Central region (OR=12) who have never married/cohabited are least likely to be childless, while those in the Atlantic region are most (OR~34).

Table 3.4: Region-stratified Odds Ratios for Union and Childlessness amongst Younger Women (from the interaction of ‘partnership’ & region in the *Final Model* in Table 3.3)

	Region-Specific ORs (and 95% CI) for Relationship between Union Status and Childlessness					
	Bogotá	Atlantic	Central	Eastern	Pacific	National Territories
Ever in Union (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never in union	11.0 (7.8-15.6)	33.7 (23.8-47.7)	12.0 (8.6-16.7)	19.9 (13.7-28.9)	15.3 (11.3-20.9)	16.0 (10.0-25.8)

Note: Statistically-significant differences highlighted in bold. **Source:** Own calculations, using women’s individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R “svycontrast” command.

Finally, the union-stratified ORs presented in Table 3.5 display some real effect modification, whereby women who have ever been in union exhibit no statistically-significant regional variations in childlessness (i.e. postponement of maternity), when compared to the reference group of women in Bogotá. However, there is significant regional variation in childlessness amongst younger women who have *never* been in union. Compared to Bogota, young women living in the Atlantic region are four times as likely to be childless, and women in the National Territories (Amazonia/Orinoquia) and Pacific regions have almost double the odds. In contrast, women in the Central and Eastern regions that are geographically closer to Bogotá do not have significantly increased odds of childlessness if never they never married/cohabited.

Table 3.5: Union-stratified Odds Ratios for Region and Childlessness amongst Younger Women (from the interaction of ‘partnership’ & region in the *Final Model* in Table 3.3)

	Union-Specific ORs (and 95% CI) for Effect of Region	
	Ever in Union	Never in Union
Bogotá (ref)	1.0	1.0
Atlantic	1.2 (0.9-1.7)	3.7 (2.4-5.7)
Central	1.3 (0.9-1.8)	1.4 (1.0-2.1)
Eastern	0.8 (0.5-1.1)	1.4 (0.9-2.0)
Pacific	1.2 (0.9-1.8)	1.7 (1.2-2.5)
National Territories	1.2 (0.8-1.8)	1.8 (1.1-2.8)

Note: Statistically-significant differences highlighted in bold. **Source:** Own calculations, using women’s individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R “svycontrast” command.

3.6 Testing the Statistical Significance of Changing Childlessness Across Time Period: 'All' Women and Women 'Ever in Union' Only

In this section, I use the pooled DHS dataset, excluding 1986. To simplify the comparison over time, data are grouped by decade, coinciding with six DHS rounds: 1990-1995; 2000-2005; and 2010-2015. I first address 'postponement' (around age 30) before moving on to 'definitive' childlessness (around age 40).

Postponement of Motherhood

With respect to postponement, and as shown at the beginning of this chapter, the proportion of all women aged 25-34 who are still childless has not changed substantially over time: Table 3.6 confirms that, regardless of the decade, around 18% of these women had not yet had children.

Table 3.6: Proportion of women still childless around age 30 (all women aged 25-34, by union status) & change over time since the 1990s

Period	All Women			Ever in union			Ever in Union (First started 5+ years go)			Never in Union		
	Childless		Total	Childless		Total	Childless		Total	Childless		Total
	%	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N
1990-95	18.4	1,117	6,076	5.0	242	4,891	2.2	85	3,954	73.8	875	1,185
2000-05	18.6	2,626	14,117	5.7	630	11,031	2.7	244	9,076	64.7	1,997	3,087
2010-15	18.6	4,637	24,912	7.9	1,574	20,009	3.8	623	16,424	62.5	3,062	4,903
Total	18.6	8,380	45,105	6.8	2,446	35,931	3.2	952	29,454	64.7	5,934	9,175

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual Colombia DHS microdata, 1990-2015.

However, breaking this overall figure down according to partnership status nuances the picture. Amongst women who have 'ever' been in a union and amongst those whose first union started more than five years ago, there is a small but consistent rise from the 1990s to the 2010s. This is accompanied by declining childlessness amongst women who have 'never' entered a cohabiting or married union. Across all periods, more than 60% of these women are still childless, but more of them are having children while still technically 'single' (though some likely have non-cohabiting long-term partners). Given this, it is important to analyse the statistical significance of the change between the 1990s and the 2010s, separately exploring the increase amongst women who have ever cohabited or married.

Table 3.7 presents a series of logistic regression models still using the pooled DHS dataset. Models 1-3 address all women (regardless of union status). Model 1 shows

that, when controlling for continuous age (without adjusting for the effects of any other controls), childlessness overall has been very steady over time, neither increasing nor decreasing. Models 2 and 3 control for the effects of either union type (Model 2) or number of unions (Model 3) plus several other important variables: education; wealth index; occupational group; and urban/rural residence.

I also used the more fine-grained variable for current work: rather than looking simply at whether a woman is working or not, 'occupational group' specifies the type of work she does (or has done in the past). Additionally, 'union type' separates women who are 'currently married' from those who are cohabiting, formerly in union, or never in union. Number of unions compares women who have had one union to those who have had 'two or more' or 'none'. 'Years since first union' is a measure of the number of years elapsed between the start of a woman's first union and her interview. Once the effects of all these factors are controlled for, childlessness has experienced a statistically significant *decrease* over time: all other factors being equal, the odds of being childless in the 2010s were lower than in the 1990s.

When we assess the relationship between the other independent variables and overall childlessness around age 30: in the pooled data, as in the 2010 DHS analysis only, 'never' having been in union exhibits the strongest, positive association with childlessness, followed by education (especially higher education), wealth index (displaying a consistently increasing pattern, from poorest to richest), and then occupational group. Compared to women who have never worked, women in professional/technical/managerial occupations are more likely to be childless, as are those doing clerical work, though to a lesser extent. In other words, higher-status, white-collar female workers are most likely to have delayed motherhood.

Table 3.7: Assessing the statistical significance of changes in motherhood ‘postponement’ (amongst women aged 25-34) between DHS Rounds (1990-2015)

Independent Variables	All Women Aged 25-34 (N=44,948)						Ever in Union: Women Aged 25-34 (N=37,007)					
	Model 1: Period only (Control for Age)		Model 2: Period + All Controls (Union Type)		Model 3: Period + All Controls (Number of Unions)		Model 4: Period only (Control for Age)		Model 5: Period + All Controls		Model 6: M5 Reduced	
	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p
DHS Round:												
1990-95	1		1		1		1		1		1	
2000-05	1.0		0.82	**	0.82	**	1.2	.	1.1		1.1	
2010-15	1.0		0.74	***	0.76	***	1.7	***	1.4	***	1.4	***
Age (Contin.)	0.86	***	0.89	***	0.89	***	0.89	***	1.0			
Number of Unions: One					1				1		1	
2 or more					0.6				1.6	***	1.6	***
None					17.9				--		--	
Union Type:			1						1		1	
Curr. Married												
Curr. Cohab.			1.0						0.92		0.91	
Former Union			1.1						1.3	**	1.3	**
Never Union			19.6	***								
Yrs since first union (Contin.)									0.75	***	0.76	***
Education:			1		1				1		1	
Primary or Less												
Secondary			1.4	***	1.4	***			0.98		0.97	
Higher			3.4	***	3.3	***			1.9	***	1.9	***
Wealth:			1	***	1				1		1	
Poorest												
Poorer			1.3	**	1.3	**			1.3	*	1.3	*
Middle			1.6	***	1.6	***			1.6	***	1.7	***
Richer			1.7	***	1.7	***			1.8	***	1.9	***
Richest			2.2	***	2.1	***			2.2	***	2.2	***
Occupational Group: Never worked			1		1				1		1	
Agricultural			0.87		0.88				1.3		1.3	
Manual			1.1		1.1				1.5	*	1.5	**
Sales/Services			1.0		1.0				1.4	**	1.4	**
Clerical			1.2	*	1.3	*			1.4	*	1.4	*
Prof. / Technical / Managerial			1.8	***	1.8	***			1.7	***	1.8	***
Residence:			1		1				1		1	
Urban												
Rural			1.2		1.1				1.2		1.2	
Intercept	18.3		0.91		0.97		1.73		0.09	***	0.13	***
AIC	41932.2		26940.7		26885.4		18065.1		14663.4		14660.3	

Note: All ORs = ‘Adjusted’. OR>1 indicates increased odds of childlessness. Empty cells indicate variables were excluded from model. Statistical Significance: . p<0.10 / * p<0.05 / ** p<0.01 / *** p<0.001

Models 4-6 in Table 3.7 focus only on women who have ‘ever’ been in union (excluding those who have ‘never’ cohabited or married from consideration). Here, again, Model 4 seeks to explore change over time, controlling for nothing but age at interview. In contrast with Model 1 (all women), Model 4 shows that, for women with any history of marriage or cohabitation, the odds of childlessness around age 30 has increased over time, though only when comparing the 2010s to the 1990s. In other words, the odds of ‘postponement’ amongst women who have ‘ever’ been in a stable union are slightly higher now than historically (OR=1.7, comparing 2010s to 1990s). Controlling for other factors, including the length of union, union type, and years since first union, weakens this association (Adjusted OR=1.4), but does not change its direction or statistical significance. See Appendix 3E for a supplementary table, analysing these effects amongst women whose first union started at least 5 years prior to their interview as a robustness check. Restricting the sample in this way did not change the results.

With respect to the profile of childless women who have ‘ever’ cohabited or married (across all time periods), Models 5 and 6 show that, compared to women who have only ever married/cohabited once, those with two or more such partnerships are modestly more likely to be childless (OR=1.6), though this effect is highly statistically significant. Additionally, those who were ‘formerly’ in union have higher odds of childlessness (OR=1.3) than those who are ‘currently married’, and the longer it has been since the start of a woman’s first marriage/cohabitation, the less likely she is to be childless. Additionally, there does not appear to be a statistically significant difference in childlessness around age 30 between women who are currently married versus cohabiting, indicating that cohabitation and marriage are equally likely to result in a birth in the Colombian context. Again, as amongst all women, childless women who have ever been in a union are more likely to be highly educated, richer, and to be professional/technical/managerial workers. This analysis confirms that, across all periods studied, Colombian women in their late 20s/early 30s who have postponed motherhood fit a socioeconomically ‘advantaged’ profile. Unfortunately, the cross-sectional nature of the DHS data cannot provide answers to causal questions, therefore it is unclear whether an advantaged socioeconomic position in Colombian society leads to female childlessness or whether childlessness helps women attain a more

advantaged position (e.g. as part of a strategy to achieve upward social mobility), though both are feasible, and could in fact be co-occurring.

Definitive Childlessness

Turning now to ‘definitive’ childlessness amongst women aged 35-44, Table 3.8 shows that, as for postponement, as a proportion of all women, childlessness did not increase between the 1990s and 2010s. The same is true for women who have ‘ever’ been in a union, and for those whose first union began more than five years prior to interview. Again, in common with postponement, in the 2010s, fewer of the women who had ‘never’ been in union were childless than in the 1990s: this declined from around 60% to 42%. Singlehood and female childlessness in Colombia have become *less* strongly associated over time, and, by the 2010s, a majority of older women who had never cohabited or married were, in fact, mothers nonetheless. However, it is important to note that only about 10% of all Colombian women aged 35-44 in the 2010s had ‘never’ been in union, meaning that these always-‘single’ mothers constitute a small proportion of the overall population.

Table 3.8: Proportion of women still childless around age 40 (all women aged 35-44, by union status) & change over time since the 1990s

Period	All Women			Ever in union			Ever in Union (First started 5+ years ago)			Never in Union		
	Childless		Total N	Childless		Total N	Childless		Total N	Childless		Total N
	%	N		%	N		%	N		%	N	
1990-95	8.1	349	4,291	2.9	113	3,897	2.4	91	3,799	60.1	236	393
2000-05	8.4	1,083	12,852	2.7	303	11,394	2.2	249	11,126	53.6	781	1,456
2010-15	6.9	1,496	21,808	3.2	629	19,732	2.7	524	19,180	41.8	867	2,076
Total	7.5	2,928	38,950	3.0	1,045	35,024	2.5	864	34,105	48.0	1,884	3,926

Source: Own calculations, using women’s individual DHS microdata, 1990-2015.

Table 3.9 presents the results of multivariate logistic regression models exploring changes to ‘definitive’ childlessness over time, amongst all women (Models 1-3) and only amongst those who have ever been in a union (Models 4-6). Model 1 confirms the apparent decrease (OR=0.84, $p<0.05$) in ‘definitive’ childlessness between the 1990s and 2010s that appeared in Table 3.8, and shows that it is weakly statistically significant. Controlling for the effects of additional variables, including either union type (in Model 2) or number of unions (in Model 3), actually increases the effect size and statistical significance of the decrease in overall childlessness between the 1990s and 2010s (OR~0.65, $p<0.001$).

Table 3.9: Assessing the statistical significance of changes in ‘definitive’ childlessness (amongst women aged 35-44) between DHS Rounds (1990-2015)

Independent Variables	All Women Aged 35-44 (N=38,355)						Ever in Union: Women Aged 35-44 (N=34,990)					
	Model 1: Period only (Control for Age)		Model 2: Period + All Controls (Union Type)		Model 3: Period + All Controls (Number of Unions)		Model 4: Period only (Control for Age)		Model 5: Period + All Controls		Model 6: M5 Reduced	
	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p
DHS Round:												
1990-95	1		1		1		1		1		1	
2000-05	1.05		0.83	.	0.87		0.91		0.71	*	0.70	*
2010-15	0.84	*	0.65	***	0.68	***	1.1		0.79		0.78	.
Age (Contin.)	0.96	***	0.99		0.99		0.98		1.1	***	1.1	***
No. of Unions:												
One					1				1			
2 or more					0.75	.			1.3			
None					26.3	***			--			
Union Type:												
Curr. Married			1						1		1	
Curr. Cohab.			1.5	***					1.3		1.3	*
Former Union			1.7	***					1.8		1.8	***
Never Union			37.4	***					--		--	
Yrs since first union (Contin.)									0.85	***	0.85	***
Education:												
Primary or Less			1		1				1		1	
Secondary			1.4	***	1.3	***			1.1		1.2	.
Higher			2.7	***	2.6	***			1.9	***	2.6	***
Wealth: Poorest			1		1				1			
Poorer			1.2		1.1				1.1			
Middle			1.3		1.2				1.1			
Richer			1.7	**	1.5	**			1.4			
Richest			1.8	***	1.6	**			1.3			
Occupational Group:												
Never worked			1		1				1			
Agricultural			0.60	*	0.62	*			1.1			
Manual			0.50	***	0.54	***			0.8			
Sales/Services			0.58	***	0.63	***			1.0			
Clerical			0.70	*	0.76	*			1.2			
Prof. / Technical / Managerial			0.89		0.94				1.3			
Residence:												
Urban			1		1				1			
Rural			1.11		1.05				0.92			
Intercept	0.50	.	0.03	***	0.04	***	0.06	***	0.002	***	0.002	***
AIC	20408.1		13938.0		13978.2		9386.4		8071.8		8058.7	

Note: OR>1 indicates increased odds of childlessness. Empty cells indicate variables were excluded from model. Statistical Significance: . p<0.10 / * p<0.05 / ** p<0.01 / *** p<0.001

As with postponement, in both Model 2 and 3, when examining the relationship between definitive childlessness and additional variables, ‘never’ having been in union again exhibits the strongest association with childlessness, followed by education. Women with either secondary or higher education are significantly more likely than those with primary or less to be ‘definitively’ childless. Wealth is also important, as the odds of childlessness increase consistently across quintiles from poorest to richest. Finally, and in contrast with the pattern observed for postponement, having any occupation, compared to having ‘never’ worked, is associated with decreased odds of childlessness, except amongst women in professional/technical/managerial occupations.

Turning to results restricted to women who have ‘ever’ been in a union, Model 4 confirms that ‘definitive’ childlessness has been stable over time, with no statistically-significant trend up- or downward. Once controls are introduced (in Model 5), there appears to be a weakly statistically-significant decrease in ‘definitive’ childlessness between the 1990s and 2000s. Though there is a decrease in the 2010s, too, it is not significant. Model 6 is a ‘reduced’ version of Model 5 excluding statistically-insignificant controls (number of unions, wealth index, and occupational group), and it confirms the results of Model 5. See Appendix 3E for a supplementary table confirming this analysis amongst older women who entered their first union more than five years before interview.

Table 3.9 shows that ‘definitive’ childlessness amongst women (aged 35-44) who have ‘ever’ cohabited or married declined slightly between the 1990s and 2000s, and though this decline held through the 2010s, it was no longer statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Amongst women in union, therefore, definitive childlessness has been relatively stable over time (whereas amongst all women aged 35-44 the decline between the 1990s and 2010s was strongly statistically significant). With respect to the relationship between definitive childlessness and other independent variables amongst women who have ‘ever’ been in union only, Model 6 shows that, as amongst all women, ‘higher’ education remained significantly associated with increased odds of childlessness, alongside increasing age, and cohabiting or having formerly been in union, compared to being ‘currently married’. Finally, and unsurprisingly, the more

time elapsed since a woman's first union, the less likely she is to be 'definitively' childless, which was also the case for 'postponement'.

In conclusion, between the 1990s and 2010s, when controlling for other factors that could affect the relationship between childlessness and time period, childlessness amongst both younger women (aged 25-34) and older women (aged 35-44) declined statistically significantly. Women today do not appear to be postponing motherhood any longer than they did thirty years ago, nor are they more likely to be childless towards the end of their reproductive lifetimes. However, amongst younger women who have ever cohabited/married, the postponement of motherhood did increase modestly, but statistically significantly. In contrast, 'definitive' childlessness amongst older women who have 'ever' been in a union has remained stable to slightly decreasing over time. In contrast with the experience of many European countries over the past 30 years, Colombia does not (yet) appear to be experiencing a generalised increase in either postponement or definitive female childlessness.

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I showed that, although the DHS and census present slightly different estimates of age-specific overall childlessness for 15-49-year-old women, both sources suggested that overall female childlessness has remained low and relatively stable from the 1980s to the 2010s. This ran counter to my hypothesis that childlessness would have increased over time in Colombia. Despite other important social and demographic changes, like sharply declining fertility since the mid-20th century, and increasing female education and labour force participation since the 1980s/90s, women in the most recent DHS appeared to be neither 'postponing' motherhood (around age 30) nor more likely to be 'definitively' childless (around age 40). Childlessness amongst all Colombian women displays no statistically-significant increase over time. In fact, once adjusted for the changing sociodemographic profile of Colombian women, overall childlessness appears to have *decreased* between the 1990s and the 2010s, amongst both younger and older women.

Amongst ever-partnered women, however, there was a small but statistically-significant increase in childlessness, though only in 'postponement' around age 30, in the 2010s. The effect size was small, and it is not present amongst older women;

therefore, any observable post-union postponement amongst younger women may be ‘caught up’ later, or it may simply take more time for in-union childlessness to increase amongst older women (as younger groups age). After analysing the factors associated with overall female childlessness, I found that having ‘never’ been in a union exhibited the strongest association with childlessness around ages 30 and 40. As expected, educational attainment and socioeconomic status are also important: postponement and definitive childlessness are both more common amongst women with a higher level of education and greater wealth. Colombian female childlessness appears to be associated with social privilege, unlike some other contexts, like the Nordic countries, where it is associated with disadvantage (see Rotkirch & Miettinen 2017). Whether a woman worked outside the home, and her occupational group (e.g. manual or professional), appears to have a stronger relationship to postponement than to definitive childlessness, and women with professional/technical/managerial occupations have higher levels of childlessness, in common with previous research (see Bloom & Pebley 1982). I also found evidence of regional variation in childlessness amongst younger women only. However, the relationship between postponement and region is modified by union status. While there are no significant regional differences in postponement amongst women who have *ever* married/cohabited, amongst young women who have *never* done so, those living on Colombia’s Atlantic and Pacific coasts and in Amazonia/Orinoquia are more likely to postpone motherhood than their peers in Bogotá.

There are also some important limitations to this analysis. The DHS are sample surveys with variable coverage across different rounds and between regions. Until 2005, they excluded the so-called ‘National Territories’ of Orinoquia and Amazonia altogether, on the premise that these regions accounted for less than 2.5% of the national population. Additionally, although the DHS sampling weights adjust for non-response, it is possible that the consistently higher rate of non-response in Bogotá than in other areas has affected regional results. The sheer length of the DHS questionnaire, which includes hundreds of questions, may be a disincentive to participation for many women. Additionally, Bogotá has a higher proportion of single-person households than other regions and, if women who live on their own and work during the day were not at home when an interview was attempted, they might be underrepresented. If such women were more likely to be childless, then it is possible that childlessness is

underestimated by the DHS. However, given that Bogotá also attracts substantial numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and that such ‘floating’ populations (who are more likely to settle in ‘informal’ housing) are difficult to capture in a survey, these women may also have been underrepresented. If recent migrants and IDPs have been missed, it would likely bias fertility estimates downward, as displaced women tend to have higher fertility, on average, and poorer access to contraception and reproductive health care (Quintero & Culler 2009). Despite these important shortcomings, the DHS provide the best available data for studying Colombian fertility, given their detailed reproductive and partnership histories, alongside a wide range of other variables of interest. The long series of data, collected every five years since 1990, is another strength, unlike the less-detailed and more sporadically-timed census.

Taken together, the analyses in this chapter paint a picture of a society where motherhood and childlessness are relatively stable, despite other important sociodemographic transformations. The association between partnership status (singledom) and childlessness suggests that circumstances, rather than choice, likely play an important role. On the other hand, evidence of a modest increase in post-union postponement, where women do not have children despite having entered a cohabiting/married relationship could be interpreted as a form of voluntary non-motherhood. Therefore, it makes sense to build on this by exploring other possible definitions of voluntary childlessness. In Chapter 4, using DHS data to analyse voluntary childlessness amongst Colombian women and men, I will probe these issues further.

Chapter 4: Changing Fertility Ideals and ‘Voluntary’ Childlessness

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I addressed childlessness broadly, without distinguishing between women who may have chosen childlessness from those who have not. However, there are good policy and intellectual reasons to distinguish between chosen and unchosen childlessness. For example, identifying childless women and men who would like to have children but cannot – whether due to infertility or for ‘social’ reasons, such as feeling they cannot afford to have a child or in the absence of a partner – can help societies provide better support and interventions to help these individuals or couples transition to desired parenthood, wherever possible. Conversely, understanding who is voluntarily childless is important for theories like the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), which posits that not only will childlessness increase over time (as in Europe), but that much of this childlessness will be chosen, based on a greater acceptance of different lifestyles and decreasing social sanctions against non-parents, giving women and men more freedom to decide against parenthood, if they wish. Additionally, the SDT highlights the role of ‘self-fulfilment’, as women and men trade parenthood for other enriching life goals, like educational and professional growth, and new experiences, like travel. Given the importance of discerning the intentionality of childlessness, the topic has received substantial demographic and sociological attention.

Early Demographic Research on Childlessness (Voluntary and Involuntary)

Non-parenthood has attracted demographic attention since at least the 1930s. This early (US-based) research recognised the importance of intentionality, though dichotomised this into ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ forms (Kiser 1939; Popenoe 1936), motivated by questions related to eugenics (Popenoe 1943). Grabill & Glick’s (1959) slightly later, and more rigorous, analysis of childlessness amongst white, ever-married women using 1950 U.S. census data did not attempt to separate different forms of childlessness, but did acknowledge that some of the ‘childless wives’ they studied might be voluntarily so. A substantial body of research from the 1970s, again primarily in North America, focused largely on partnered, ‘voluntarily’ childless women, and to a lesser extent, men, either qualitatively (see Houseknecht 1979; Movius 1976;

Veevers 1973, 1975) or quantitatively (see Gustavus & Henley 1971; Poston 1976). Most of this early research focused exclusively on currently or ever married women, though an exception is Houseknecht's (1978: 381) study contrasting single, young women whom she identifies as 'early articulators' of a desire to remain childless with their peers. Although the reasoning behind the usual exclusion of single people is unclear, in a socio-cultural context where single parenthood was socially frowned upon, demographers perhaps assumed that unpartnered women/men would not be contemplating parenthood seriously enough to render them either 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' non-parents, but instead an entirely distinct (and usually excluded) group. In early quantitative studies, practical constraints may also have focused issues on childless married women only, as they may have been the only ones asked about their fertility in older surveys. These assumptions do not apply in the contemporary Colombian case, where single motherhood is highly, and increasingly, common. Finally, the early quantitative research tended to emphasise the *decrease* in childlessness over time (both voluntary and involuntary), compared with earlier historical periods, given that, for scholars working in the 1970s, the youngest cohorts analysed typically referred to women of childbearing age during the mid-century 'baby boom' (Veevers 1971, 1972).

This early work contrasts with more recent European and North American research in at least two ways. First, Euro-American studies have proliferated, especially since the 1990s, highlighting the recent *increase* in overall childlessness in many countries, at least some of which is thought to be voluntary (Miettinen et al. 2015; Tanturri et al. 2015; Tanturri & Mencarini 2008). Secondly, this research has sought to include more unpartnered women (and men), whether voluntarily or involuntarily childless (Basten 2009). There is relatively little research that addresses these issues by integrating both qualitative and quantitative perspectives in the same study, with some notable exceptions (Debest et al. 2014). Scholars nonetheless increasingly recognise that, rather than a dichotomy of strictly chosen or unchosen, childlessness should instead be understood as a 'continuum' (Berrington 2015; Letherby 2002; McAllister & Clarke 1998, 2000), "with some individuals being definite in their place at each end of the continuum and a group in the middle whose position is likely to change over time" (Letherby 2002: 8). This recognises that fertility ideals, desires, and intentions are changeable and that "there is often not a clear boundary between 'voluntary' and

‘involuntary’ childlessness” (Letherby 2002: 8). The proliferation of research on childlessness in all its forms has been sufficient to engender multiple reviews. These focus primarily on European and North America countries where childlessness has risen since the end of the mid-century ‘baby boom’ (Agrillo & Nelini 2008; Basten 2009; Bloom & Pebley 1982).

Far less demographic research focuses on childlessness in Latin America (Cavenaghi & Alves 2013; Linares Bravo et al. 2017; Poston, et al. 1985; Poston et al. 1983; Poston & Rogers 1988; De Vos 2014a). Although some small, qualitative studies of voluntarily childless women in Colombia exist (mostly Master's theses: Grisales Naranjo 2015; Muñoz Pallares 2016), to my knowledge, this issue has not been explored demographically using nationally-representative data, since Poston et al.’s (1983) work. This used World Fertility Survey (WFS) data from the 1970s (now over 40 years old) and a decision-tree approach to separate voluntary from involuntary and temporary forms of childlessness amongst currently-married women in 14 developing Asian and Latin American nations. Their work included Colombia, where they estimated that 2.7% of all partnered women were ‘voluntarily’ childless (though this was based on only four women out of a total of 148 childless married women of all ages). Although ground-breaking, this analysis was limited by the relatively small WFS sample size, and especially by the small number of childless married women. Given that childbearing amongst unpartnered women is rising in Colombia (Laplante et al. 2018), single women are obviously ‘at risk’ of having children, thus the assumption that they are not contemplating their fertility potential seems unreasonable. Therefore, instead of focusing on currently- or ever-partnered women, I will explore voluntary childlessness amongst all women, as I did for childlessness overall.

Multiple Approaches to Categorising Childlessness Using Survey Data

Many quantitative studies of voluntary childlessness relied on demographic methods to estimate the proportion of married/partnered women who were infertile, and then estimated the proportion of women in partnerships who were ‘voluntarily’ childless based on a series of assumptions about the remaining women or couples (e.g. Toulemon 1996a). A contrasting conceptual approach relies much more heavily on stated fertility intentions, where these data exist. Given that expressing “negative reproductive intentions” (not desiring children) is socially difficult in generally

pronatalist societies, such as the US, France, or indeed, Colombia, Susan Rovi (1994: 344) argues that we should take “‘no’ for an answer.” Using this approach, Rovi showed that negative fertility intentions were a far better predictor of childlessness than positive fertility intentions were of parenthood.

Poston et al.’s (1983: 443) aforementioned analysis of WFS childlessness data exemplifies an intermediate approach, and one of the earliest attempts to study voluntary childlessness in lower-income countries. Addressing only currently-married childless women (excluding all others), these authors argued for a measure that employed both ‘cognitive’ and ‘behavioural dimensions’, “using women’s knowledge of their fecundity, the length of time they have been married and their actual contraceptive behaviour” to separate voluntary, involuntary and other forms of childlessness (Poston et al. 1983: 444). To develop their classificatory decision tree, they combined this information with basic demographic details, such as the women’s age, children ever born (CEB), and their fertility desires, to distinguish between four basic groups of women. The authors recognised that married childless women could not be divided simply into ‘voluntary’ or ‘involuntary’ groups without further nuance; however, given the nature of survey data, they had to make assumptions regarding intentionality. From the total population of currently-married women, the authors’ outlined method first excludes all pregnant women; then, all women who have any history of live births. Finally, the married, childless women are classified as either voluntary, involuntary, temporary or uncommitted (Poston et al. 1983: 445). These classifications combined biological, cognitive, behavioural, and temporal considerations. For example, voluntarily childless women are married non-mothers who are: fecund (biological); want no children (cognitive); and use contraception (behavioural). Involuntary, temporary, and uncommitted childlessness all involve additional age or temporal constraints (i.e. being over/under age 40; being married 2-5 years). Their system essentially classifies all women over age 40 as involuntarily childless, based on the idea that, even where they want to have children in future, this wish is ‘improbable’ (and so they will most likely be ‘involuntarily’ childless), whereas for younger women it is deemed more realistic (and therefore their childlessness is viewed as ‘temporary’). The women Poston et al. (1983: 445) deemed ‘involuntarily’ childless, based on their age and length of marriage are conceptualised as such because they “represent a group in which childlessness apparently is unwanted

but unavoidable.” Though I disagree with some of their assumptions, as well as their exclusion of single women, and how complicated their groupings are, this study’s approach is valuable for integrating a multifaceted conceptualisation of voluntary, involuntary and other forms of childlessness.

Finally, Rutstein & Shah (2004) used WFS data, like Poston et al. (1983), but compared it to the latest DHS data available at the time (for Colombia, this was 2000), in a report analysing childlessness, infertility, and infecundity across 47 countries. Unlike Poston, they did not seek to explore ‘voluntary’ childlessness specifically and focussed more on infertility and infecundity. Their approach is useful because they highlight the conceptual and terminological complexity of defining and studying different forms of childlessness. These authors defined ‘childlessness’ as the “[p]ercentage of women who are currently married, have been so for at least five years, and who have no living children” (Rutstein & Shah 2004: 7). Like Poston et al. (1983), they excluded unmarried women from consideration, perhaps for consistency across childless categories, as they defined ‘primary infertility’ as the “[p]ercentage of women who have been married for the past five years, who have ever had sexual intercourse, who have not used any contraception during the past five years, and who have not had any births,” and finally, ‘self-reported infecundity’ as the “[p]ercentage of women who report having had a hysterectomy, or say they have gone through menopause, or report not having had a menstrual period in the past five years, or have never had a menstrual period” (Rutstein & Shah 2004: 7). With respect to infertility, or the percentage “of currently married women age 40-44 who have been married for at least five years but have not had a live birth”, they found it had declined across all countries in that period. In Colombia, it decreased from over 3% to about 2.5%, whereas the proportion of women aged 25-49 who have been married for 5+ years but had no living children/no live births increased very slightly in the same period, though was still only around 3%. Their result regarding married childless women is consistent with the in-union postponement trend I reported in Chapter 3. Rutstein & Shah (2004: xiii) also highlighted countries where more than 5% of sexually experienced women in their late 40s are childless and those where proportions of “women with no living children and whose ideal is to have no children” ranged from 4-6%, both of which applied to Colombia. Unlike Rutstein & Shah (2004) and Poston et al. (1983), I do not limit the sample to currently- or ever-married/cohabiting women, since always ‘single’

women are also ‘at risk’ of childbearing in this context. I also prefer Rovi’s (1994) more cognitive approach to defining voluntary childlessness, and Rutstein & Shah’s (2004) focus on ideals within the ‘childless’ category, both of which focus on women’s own expressed fertility desires/ideals, and have adapted them, below.

The following chapter is structured in several parts. I first define what is meant by ‘voluntary childlessness’ in the methods section. Secondly, I address the issue of women’s fertility ideals and desires, and two different, but related measures of ‘voluntary’ non-motherhood, exploring trends over time. These measures are then used in two descriptions of the trends in non-motherhood, first, with a denominator of ‘all women’ (including mothers), and then excluding mothers and analysing trends amongst childless women only. Thirdly, I expand the focus to include men’s fertility ideals and desires, comparing them to the established figures for women, though limiting the analysis to 2015, as the only year with available data for men. Finally, I present preliminary models to identify the characteristics associated with women’s and men’s ‘voluntary’ childlessness: are such women/men substantially different from mothers/fathers and involuntarily childless adults?

Research Questions

1. What types of families do Colombian women envision themselves having (whether childless or not, assessed using ‘ideal’ fertility)? How has this changed over time?
2. How has female voluntary childlessness, in particular, changed over time?
3. How does men’s ‘voluntary’ childlessness compare to women’s?
4. What characteristics are associated with voluntary childlessness amongst women and men?

4.2 Data Sources & Methods

Data Sources & Analysis

I will use data from a series of DHS for women (1986-2015) and from the 2015 DHS for men to explore childbearing ideals and desires, focusing on women and men who were childless when interviewed. There are now multiple rounds of Colombian DHS, which can be used to follow-up on Poston et al.’s (1983) findings. Most of the recent DHS benefit from larger sample sizes than the WFS, including more than 8,600

women in 1990, and rising each year to over 53,000 women in 2010. In 2015, the DHS surveyed around 36,000 women and nearly 33,000 men aged 15-49/59.

To the extent that it is possible, I tease out different types of childlessness amongst women and men. All women (and, in 2015, men in union) in the DHS, whether parents or non-parents, are asked questions about their desire to have children in future and their ideal number of children (i.e. their ‘ideal family size’). For more details regarding the phrasing of these DHS questions, as well as a grid which describes the differences between surveys in the way the questions were phrased or applied to the survey populations of women and men, see Appendix 4A.

The analysis presented here is primarily descriptive, though the last section of the chapter presents bi- and multivariate logistic regression models. These models were constructed in the same, iterative manner as for overall childlessness, described in Chapter 3, though they integrate a wider range of hypothesised independent variables, across individual, contextual, and attitudinal groups. *Individual* variables include: age; partnership status; education; work status; occupational group; wealth index (see Chapter 3, for description); and ethnicity. I regrouped the original ‘*Ethnicity*’ (V131) categories, a women-only variable, to make it binary: *Non-minority* refers to white/mestizo individuals, while *Minority* includes all ‘Indigenous’, ‘Rom/Gypsy’, and ‘Afro-Colombian’³⁸ individuals. *Contextual* variables were: urban/rural residence and region. Finally, there were four *attitudinal* variables, which are Colombia DHS-specific:

1. Approves of gay rights (S1314, women’s & SM1114, men’s) – “Perception [of] gays: Approves to grant rights to couples of the same sex”; responses: *Disagree* or *Agree*.
2. Gay adoption OK (S1315 & SM1115) – “Perception [of] gays: Approves that gay couples should adopt children”; responses: *No* or *Yes*.
3. Women take care of house (S1301A & SM1101A) – “Agrees on gender relations statement: Most important role for women [is] tak[ing] care of house”; original responses: *Agrees*, *Neither agrees nor disagrees*, and *Disagrees*. Regrouped as: *Agrees/Neither* and *Disagrees*.

³⁸ In the original V131 variable, several distinct groups of Afro-Colombians are identified: “Raizal”; “Palenquero”; and “Black/Mixed/Afro-Colombian”

4. Childcare is for women (SI301E & SM1101E) – “Agrees on gender relations statement: Tak[ing] care of children is women[‘s] responsibility”; original responses: *Agrees*, *Neither agrees nor disagrees*, and *Disagrees*. Regrouped as: *Agrees/Neither* and *Disagrees*.

I hypothesise that voluntarily childless women and men will be more educated and more socioeconomically-advantaged than other women/men (as childless women are generally). With respect to contextual variables, I expect that they will be overrepresented in urban areas and in Bogotá and the Central region. Based on the SDT theory, I hypothesise that they will also have more open-minded/accepting attitudes to others, meaning that they are more likely to agree with progressive statements regarding gay rights and women’s rights, when compared to mothers/fathers and involuntarily childless individuals. *R* with *RStudio* was used for all analyses, particularly the *Survey* package (Lumley 2018) for complex survey samples.

The Definitions of ‘Voluntary’ Childlessness Used in this Research: Two Conceptualisations

While my time series data are cross-sectional Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), people’s ideas about childlessness are not, as research suggests that the extent to which non-parenthood is truly voluntary may vary across the life course. As indicated above, fertility desires may increase or decrease as people age, as well as with other life events, such as the start of a new relationship, when they may be influenced by a new partner’s desires, or the end of an existing relationship, when they may re-evaluate their life goals as well as the chances of achieving them, in the context of their changed circumstances. It follows, then, that I do not necessarily conceptualise different forms of childlessness as being entirely discrete from one another. I have tried to separate *more* ‘voluntary’ forms of childlessness from those I have described as ‘involuntary’/ ‘temporary’ or ‘unclear’, in an attempt to operationalise the so-called ‘continuum of childlessness’.

I present two quantitative measures approximating the ‘intentionality’ of childlessness. These measures are: (1) *ideal childlessness*; (2) *‘strictly’ voluntary childlessness*. For both, I first separated mothers/fathers, defined as individuals who have given birth to/fathered one or more biological children (called ‘children ever born’, or CEB),

regardless of whether those children have since died, moved away, and whether the person currently or has ever co-resided with these children. In both measures, only the sub-categorisations of *childless* individuals differ, while the group of ‘mothers/fathers’ is always the same, regardless of the measure used.

First, for ‘**ideal childlessness**’, the simplest measure, childless individuals were separated into two groups, based on their stated ‘ideal’ number of children (their answers to the question for DHS variable *(M)V614*). Whether or not they would like to ‘have a(nother) child’ (in *(M)V602*) was not considered when delineating who is ‘ideally’ childless or not.

1. Ideally childless: women/men who have an ‘ideal’ of zero children; and
2. Non-ideally or temporarily childless: women/men who have an ‘ideal’ of one or more children.

Secondly, ‘**strictly voluntary childlessness**’ separates individuals based on both their childbearing ideals *and* desires, into three childless groups:

1. Involuntarily/temporarily childless: women/men who have an ‘ideal’ of 1+ children (*(M)V614*) *AND* declare that they would like to ‘have a(nother)’ child, are ‘infecund’, or they/their partner have been ‘sterilised’ (*(M)V602*). In 1995,³⁹ this also includes women who have an ideal of 1+ children but have ‘never had sex’.
2. Voluntarily childless: women/men who have an ‘ideal’ of zero children (*(M)V614*) *AND* declare that they want ‘no more’ children, that they/their partner have been ‘sterilised’, or that they are ‘infecund’ (*(M)V602*). In 1995, this also includes women who have an ideal of zero children but have ‘never had sex’.⁴⁰
3. Unclear: all remaining childless women/men who fall outside the above two categories. Namely, those who declare that they are ‘undecided’ as an answer to *(M)V602* and those who gave contradictory answers, i.e. that they wish to have ‘no

³⁹ This was the only survey year in which ‘never had sex’ was provided as a valid answer to the question that is used to create *V602* (the variable addressing desire to have children in future).

⁴⁰ For men in 2015, this category is also defined slightly differently, and is more analogous to the categorisation method used for the women’s data in 1995. This is because ‘man has no partner’ and ‘never had sex’ were valid answers for men, but not women, meaning that women and men were not strictly comparable on this measure, unlike for ‘ideal’ childlessness. Therefore, men who are ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless are those who have an ideal of zero children (*MV614*) *AND* declare that they: want ‘no more’ children; that they/their partner have been ‘sterilised’; that they/their partner are ‘infecund’; that they have ‘never had sex’; or that they have ‘no partner’ (*MV602*).

more' children, but they have an ideal of 1+ children or that they have an 'ideal' of no (zero) children (*V614*), but they declare that they would like to 'have another' (*V602*).

For a visual breakdown of the different responses to (*M*)*V605*, a more detailed version of the future fertility desires variable ((*M*)*V602*), which adds time reference periods, see Appendix 4B.

4.3 Changing Attitudes toward Family Size: Fertility Ideals, Desires and Measures of Voluntary Childlessness Amongst All Women

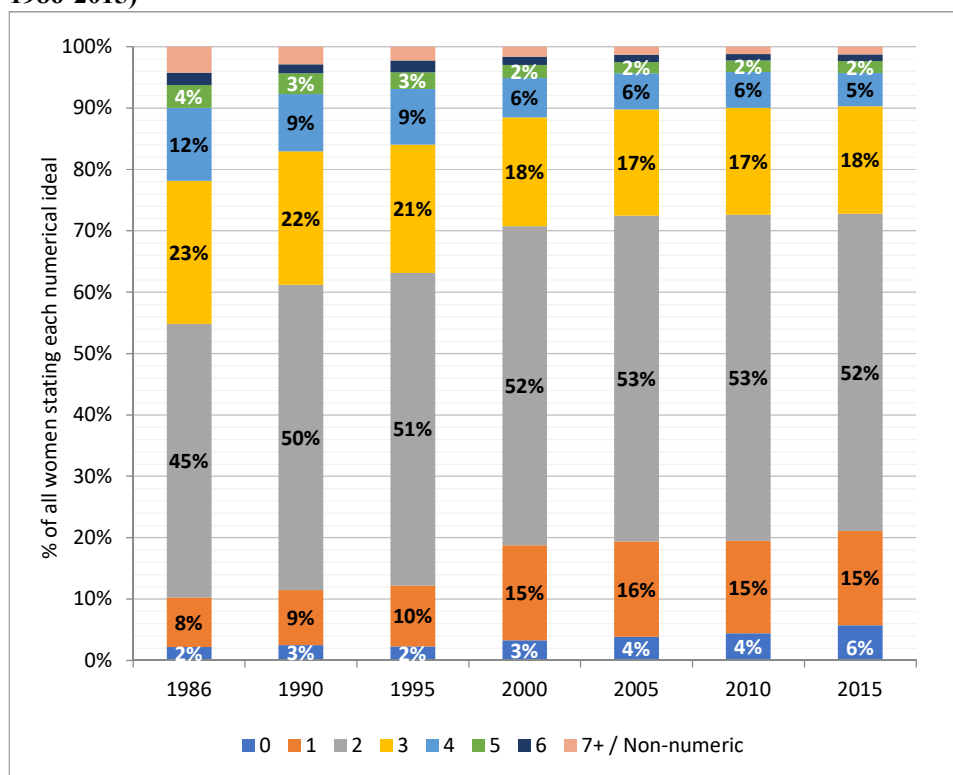
Here, I first examine fertility 'ideals' (for all women), before considering 'ideal/voluntary' forms of childlessness and how common these are in the Colombian population overall, as well as what proportion of all childless individuals can be considered 'voluntarily' so, in one form or another.

Fertility Ideals: Trends Over Time

Figure 4.1 shows that, between the first DHS in 1986 and the most recent round in 2015, the proportion of all women 15-49 years old, who say that their 'ideal family size' is zero, one or two children has grown from around 55% to over 70%, with 45% and 52% expressing a two-child preference in 1986 and 2015, respectively. Although the expected two-child norm has persisted and strengthened, since the 2000 DHS, the proportion of women with a one-child ideal (15-16%) has nearly caught up with three children (17-18%). Additionally, an ideal of more than three children has halved in proportion, from just over one-fifth in 1986 to 10% in 2015. A parallel change has occurred in the lower orders since 1986, when only 10% of women stated an ideal of zero or one child, doubling to 20% by 2015. Finally, an ideal of childlessness (i.e. of zero children) has also increased in the observed period, from 2 to 6%. Although still a low proportion, this is broadly comparable with figures from OECD countries, where even fewer women express an ideal of zero children, according to the OECD Family Database's indicators of 'The structure of families', based on the 2011 Eurobarometer survey.⁴¹

⁴¹ See the PDF and Excel files for SF2.2, available from: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm> (Last accessed 5 Feb. 2019). The Excel file contains the data for Chart 2.2.B, which demonstrates that in the OECD countries included, there is variation among women aged 15-39 (from 0% in Estonia to 4.03% in Germany), but across all countries few women consider zero children the ideal family size.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Changing Ideal Family Size Over Time (All Women, DHS 1986-2015)



Source: Own calculations using women’s DHS microdata from 1986-2015.

In the 2010 DHS, 4% of all Colombian women (15-49) expressed an ideal of no children, compared to 1.65% of women (15-39) in the OECD average (2011) for the ‘Ideal general number of children’, meaning that the Colombian figures are slightly higher, although the comparison should be interpreted with caution.⁴² Regardless of context, very few people consider a childless family to be the ‘ideal’ family. In Colombia, approximately 1 in 20 women, mothers and non-mothers, now feel comfortable declaring an ideal of non-motherhood. While not all of these women will attain that stated ‘ideal’ (and as this proportion includes some mothers, they have already departed from it), this could suggest a broader, albeit modest, shift in attitudes towards the social necessity of motherhood.

⁴² In Colombia, the DHS asks: “If you could choose exactly the number of children you would have in your lifetime, how many would you have?” This is akin to what the OECD calls the ‘mean personal ideal number of children’, for which the Eurobarometer question is: “And for you personally, what would be the ideal number of children you would like to have or would like to have had?” whereas the ‘mean general ideal number of children’ (reported above) tends to elicit slightly lower estimates from women in the OECD countries, and is based on the question: “Generally speaking, what do you think is the ideal number of children for a family?” (OECD Family Database 2016: 1). As noted in the report, the phrasing of the question and variations in sub-samples can have a large effect on the answers elicited.

'Ideally' Childless Women: Trends Over Time

The logical question that follows on from these broader fertility ideals amongst all women is: *what proportion of women are childless and 'ideally' so?*

Figure 4.2: Changes over Time in the Relative Distribution of Motherhood and Ideal or Non-Ideal Childlessness Among All Colombian Women, DHS 1986-2015



Source: Own calculations using women's individual DHS microdata, 1986-2015.

The first graph in Figure 4.2 shows that, as of 2015, only about 3% of all women aged 15-49 were both childless and had an 'ideal' of no children (around half the proportion of women who expressed an 'ideal' of childlessness, regardless of their fertility status). Ideal childlessness has grown modestly over time amongst women of all ages. The

second graph illustrates the trend amongst the youngest women only (aged 15-24), and also displays the same increasing pattern. Whereas around 1-2% of the youngest women surveyed from 1986-1995 were 'ideally' childless, this had more than doubled to 5.5% by 2015. The third graph shows that, amongst 25-34-year-old women, there was also an increase over time, again more than doubling from just 0.8% in 1986 to 2.2% in 2015. In the oldest group of women (35-49-year-olds), however, there is no consistent increase over time, perhaps partly due to the very small proportion of this age group who are childless *overall*. The panel of graphs in Figure 4.2 clearly show that the proportion of all women who are 'ideally' childless is small across all years and age groups. However, it has increased over time, primarily amongst younger women (under age 35). It will be interesting to see whether this increasing trend continues, and whether, as these younger women age, this pattern of modest 'growth' in ideal childlessness expands into the oldest age group.

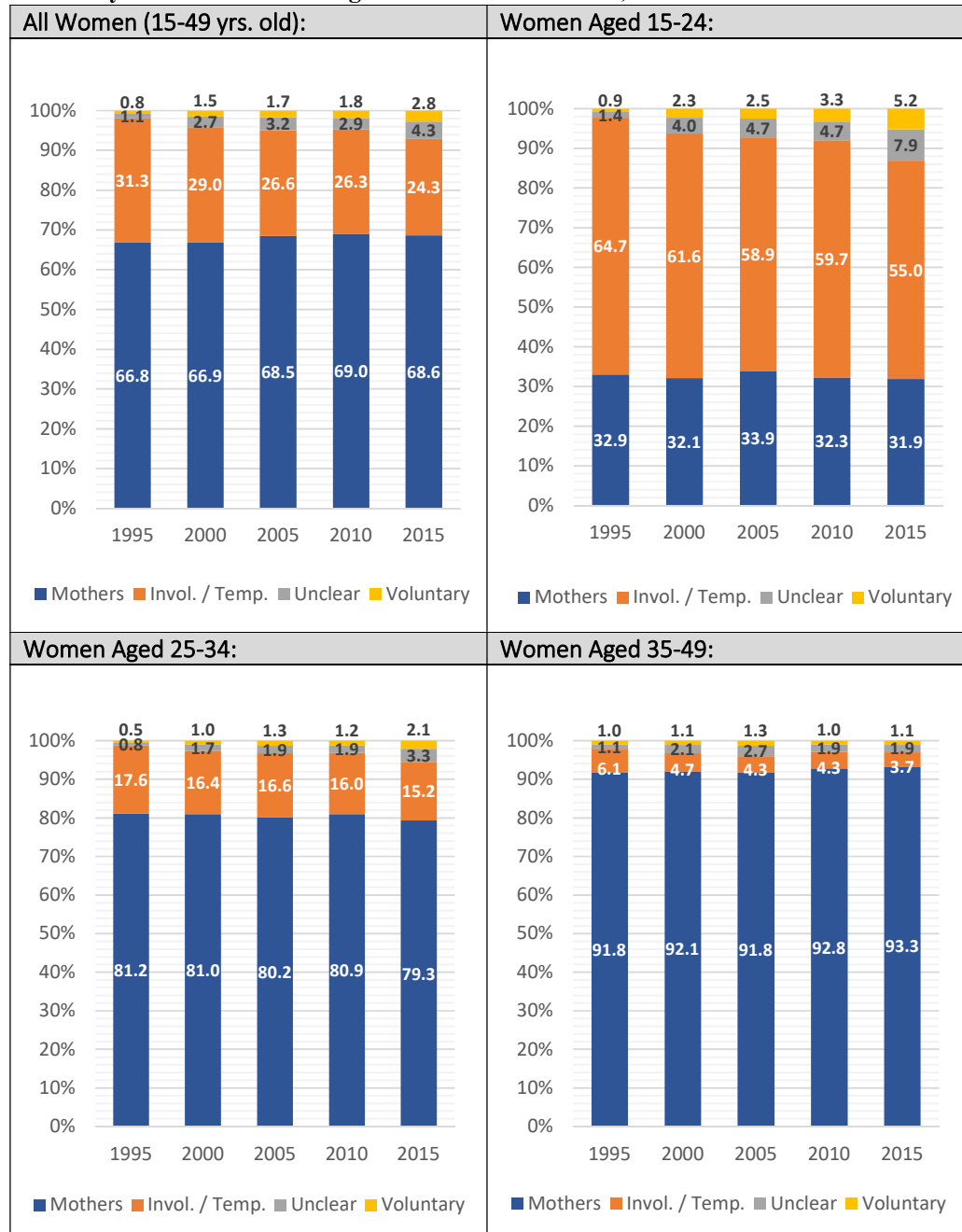
'Strictly' Voluntary Childlessness

It is important to note that, whereas Figure 4.2, above, presents the evolution of 'ideal' childlessness as a proportion of all women, using all DHS from 1986-2015, the graphs in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4, below, only begin in 1995. This is because, although information regarding 'ideal' fertility has always been collected from all women, in the same way, across all DHS rounds, the same cannot be said for information regarding 'desired' fertility. 'Strictly' voluntary childlessness (presented in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4) is a more fine-grained measure than 'ideal' childlessness, and classifications are based on answers to three questions: (1) number of children ever born, (2) each woman's personal 'ideal' number of children, *and* (3) their 'desire' for children in future. This last question is informative, but problematic from a data perspective, as the 1986 and 1990 DHS only asked women who were 'currently' in union when interviewed about their 'desired' future fertility, making these years incomparable with the 1995-2015 DHS.

However, by integrating information regarding both fertility 'ideals' *and* 'desires', Figure 4.3 allows the addition of an 'unclear' category, alongside 'strictly' voluntary and 'involuntary/temporary' childlessness. The 'unclear' group (grey) includes childless women who are undecided about wanting children in future, alongside those who gave contradictory or mismatched answers to questions regarding ideal number

of children and desire for children. Figure 4.3 shows that this ‘unclear’ group has grown over time: in 1995, 1% of all women aged 15-49 were childless and had ‘unclear’ fertility desires, compared to 4% in 2015. This growth could indicate that, alongside increasing ‘voluntary’ childlessness, women’s desires for children were less certain in 2015 than in 1995.

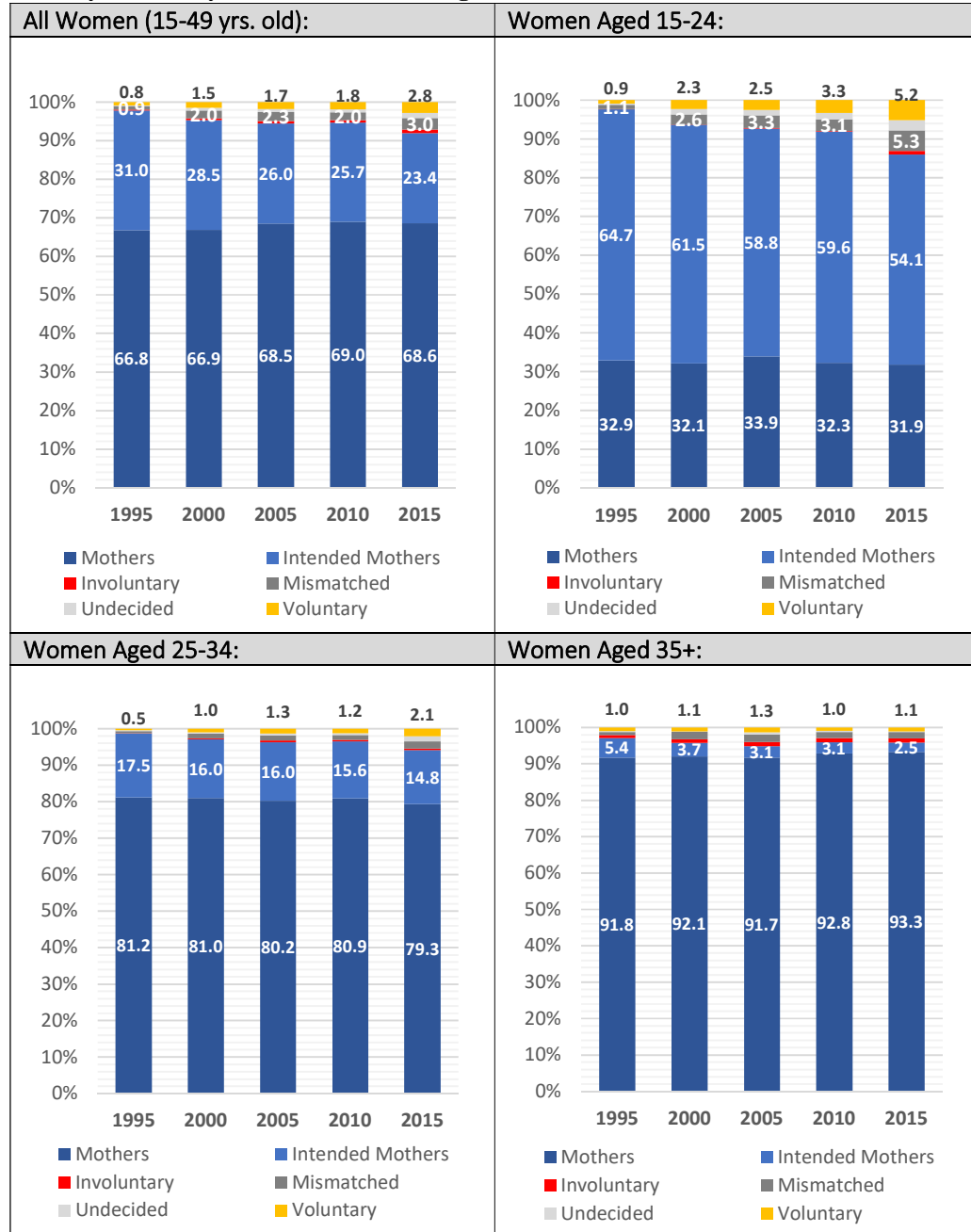
Figure 4.3: Changes over Time in the Relative Distribution of Motherhood and ‘Strictly’ Voluntary Childlessness Among All Colombian Women, DHS 1995-2015



Source: Own calculations using women’s individual DHS microdata, 1995-2015.

Figure 4.4 explores this idea, breaking down the ‘involuntary/temporary’ (orange) and ‘unclear’ (grey) groups from Figure 4.3 into four, more detailed subgroups. ‘Involuntary/temporary’ childlessness is split into ‘involuntary’ childlessness and ‘intended mothers’, while the ‘unclear’ group is divided between ‘mismatched’ desires and ideals and ‘undecided’ regarding having children.

Figure 4.4: Changes over Time in the Relative Distribution of Motherhood and Detailed ‘Strictly Voluntary’ Childlessness Among All Colombian Women, DHS 1995-2015



Source: Own calculations using women’s individual DHS microdata, 1995-2015.

Two groups remain the same across Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4: the proportions of ‘mothers’ (dark blue) and of ‘voluntary’ childlessness (yellow). It is clear in Figure 4.4 that, although the proportion of women who are mothers has been roughly stable over time across all age groups, the proportion of ‘intended mothers’, who are ‘temporarily’ childless⁴³ (shown in lighter blue) decreased between 1995 and 2015. Although modest amongst 25-34-year-old and 35-44-year-old childless women, this decrease is most marked in the youngest group (15-24-years-old), where ‘intended mothers’ declined from 65% to 54% of all women. This coincided with an increasing trend in strictly voluntary childlessness, or the proportion of young (15-24-year-old) childless women whose ‘ideal’ and ‘desired’ number of children were both zero. However, over time, there are also slightly more young women who are either ‘undecided’ (coloured light grey), when asked about their desire to have children in future, or whose fertility ideals and desires are ‘mismatched’ (dark grey). The mismatched category includes childless women from two groups: (1) those who have an ‘ideal’ of zero children but say they want to ‘have a child’ in future, and (2) those who have an ‘ideal’ of 1+ children but say they want ‘no’ children.

Few women who declare an ‘ideal’ of no children then say that they ‘want’ to have a child in future; therefore, most of the women in the ‘mismatched’ category fall into the second group of women whose ideal involves one or more children, but who do not ‘want’ to have a child in future, for whatever reason. Since ideals are less concrete than fertility desires (see Appendix 4A for the original DHS questions), some women may want children in a hypothesised ideal world but, given the constraints they face in their real lives, decide that they do not ‘want’ any children. It would be enlightening to know *why* these women do not want to have a child despite ideally wanting to be mothers. While, unfortunately, there is no DHS information that clarifies this, I use qualitative interview data to explore this idea in Chapter 6.

4.4 ‘Voluntary’ Childlessness as a Proportion of Childless Women Only

Shifting the frame from considering *all* women as the denominator to considering only *childless* women, Table 4.1 explores changes over time in the proportions of childless

⁴³ I.e. currently childless women who have both an ideal of 1+ children and a desire to ‘have a child’ in future. In 1995 this group includes women who have ‘never had sex’ but declare an ideal of 1+ children. This means that the data from 1995 are not exactly comparable with those from subsequent years; however, even without the data from 1995, there is still a decreasing trend over time.

women of all ages (15-49) who are ‘voluntarily’ so, again comparing the two measures (‘ideal’ and ‘strictly voluntary’ childlessness) introduced above. Amongst all childless women, there has been a steadily increasing number who declare that being childless is also their ‘ideal’ fertility: from just 2.6% of all childless women in 1986 to 9.2% in 2015. When considering both fertility ‘ideals’ and ‘desires’, or the ‘strictly’ voluntary childless measure, the increase is very similar from 1995-2015.

Table 4.1: Trend in the Proportion of All Childless Women Ages 15-49 who are 'Ideally' or 'Strictly Voluntarily' Childless

		1986	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
% of all Childless Women (Weighted)	'Ideally' Childless	2.6%	3.3%	2.4%	4.6%	5.8%	6.1%	9.2%
	'Strictly' Voluntarily Childless	--	--	2.4% ¹	4.5%	5.5%	5.9%	8.8%
Total N, Weighted ²	'Ideally' Childless	52	107	89	177	702	947	1,048
	'Strictly' Voluntarily Childless	--	--	89	173	667	908	1,000
	All Childless Women (15-49)	2,025	3,198	3,696	3,840	12,073	15,461	11,390
	All Women (15-49)	5,331	8,489	11,140	11,585	38,355	49,817	36,300

Notes: The proportions of ‘strictly’ voluntary childlessness are only presented from 1995 on, because prior to this, only women *in union* when interviewed were asked whether they would like to have children in future. This excluded large proportions of women who had previously or never been in a union. In contrast, the ‘ideal’ childlessness measure was created using a question that all women in all years were asked regardless of their union status.

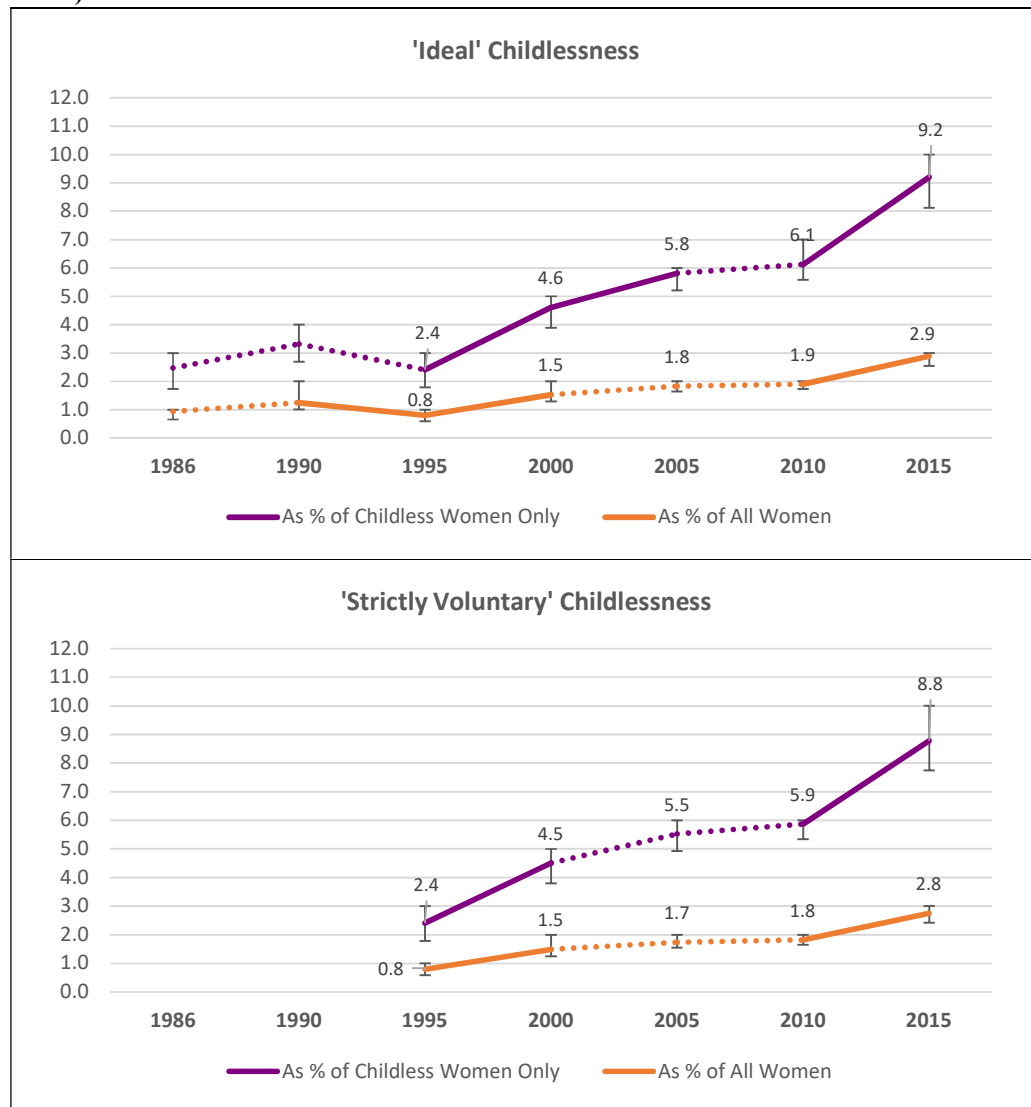
¹ The cell for 1995 is shaded because it is not strictly comparable with the subsequent surveys. This is because in 1995, ‘Never had sex’ was considered a valid response, so it is impossible to say whether the women who had never had sex would have responded to the question declaring a desire either to have children or for ‘no more’ children. In contrast, from 2000-2015, even women who had never had sex were able to declare a future childbearing desire. In 1995, I consider women who had ‘Never had sex’ but had an ideal of ‘zero’ children ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless.

² See Appendix 4C for the unweighted numbers of women in each of these categories.

Source: Own calculations, using women’s individual DHS microdata, 1986-2015.

The small difference in the proportions of women who are ‘ideally’ and ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless in Table 4.1 again illustrates the similarity of these two measures. Figure 4.5 graphically charts this increase in ‘ideal’ and ‘strictly voluntary’ amongst all women aged 15-49, and amongst childless women of the same ages.

Figure 4.5: Trends in ‘Ideal’ and ‘Strictly Voluntary’ Childlessness (All Women, aged 15-49)



Note: Solid lines indicate a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) change between two surveys. Robust confidence intervals calculated using the 'svyciprop' R command, with the 'beta' method, for robust confidence intervals.

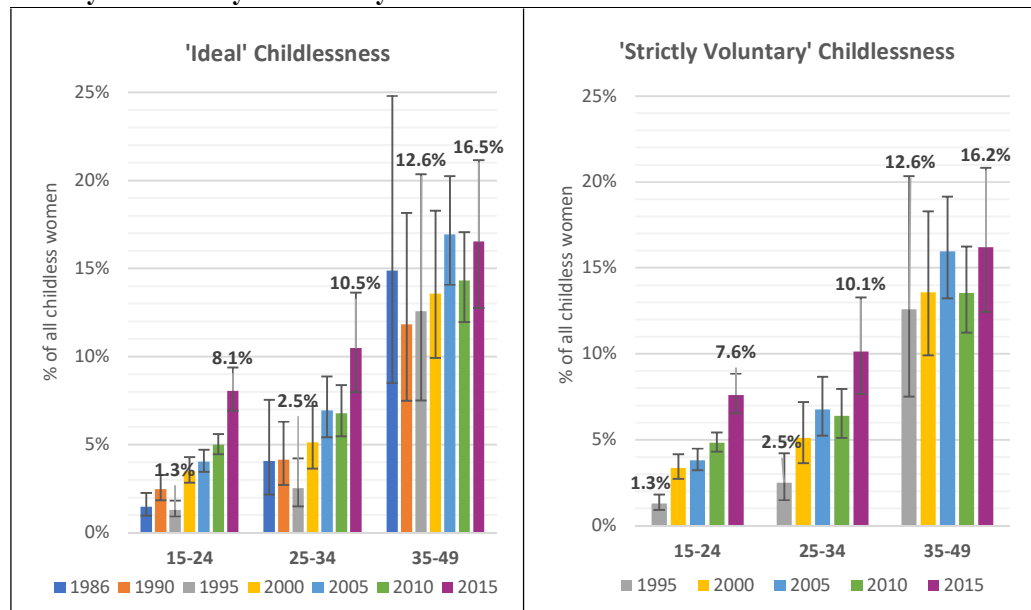
Source: Own calculations, using women's individual DHS microdata, 1986-2015 (ideal) & 1995-2015 (strictly voluntary).

Both as a proportion of all women and of childless women only, a statistically significant increase in female voluntary childlessness has occurred. These women are, however, not only a tiny minority of all women in Colombia (around 3%), they are also a relatively small minority of all childless women, comprising under 10% of this group, even in the 2015 DHS.

Exploring the Observed Increase in ‘Voluntary’ Childlessness

Figure 4.6 charts the age-specific proportions of childless women who are ‘ideally’ or ‘strictly voluntarily’ so (analogous to the purple line in Figure 4.5). Similar to the increasing pattern over time amongst all women (15-49-years-old), it shows that, even when divided according to broad age groups, there is a generally increasing pattern of ‘ideal’ childlessness over time for women *within* age groups. The non-overlapping confidence intervals in the 15-24-year-old and 25-34-year-old groups indicate that this increase is statistically significant from earlier to later DHS rounds. Amongst the oldest women, however, the numbers of childless women are small and resulting confidence intervals wide, making the apparent, but more modest, change over time statistically insignificant.

Figure 4.6: Age-specific Trends in the Proportion of All Childless Women only who are ‘Ideally’ or ‘Strictly Voluntarily’ Childless



Source: Own calculations, using data from the women’s individual DHS from 1986-2015 (‘ideal’) & 1995-2015 (‘strictly voluntary’). Confidence intervals calculated in *R*, using ‘svyprop’ commands with ‘logit’ estimation, to calculate asymmetrical confidence intervals that account for the complex survey design, and provide better estimates for small numbers close to zero.

Finally, the increasing trend in ‘voluntary’ childlessness, as well as the greater number of women of all ages declaring that their ‘ideal family size’ is zero could indicate that, even as childlessness overall is not becoming more common in Colombia, the idea of childless womanhood might be more acceptable than it was 30 years ago. The stigma of childlessness and pro-natalist pressures may slowly be subsiding, particularly

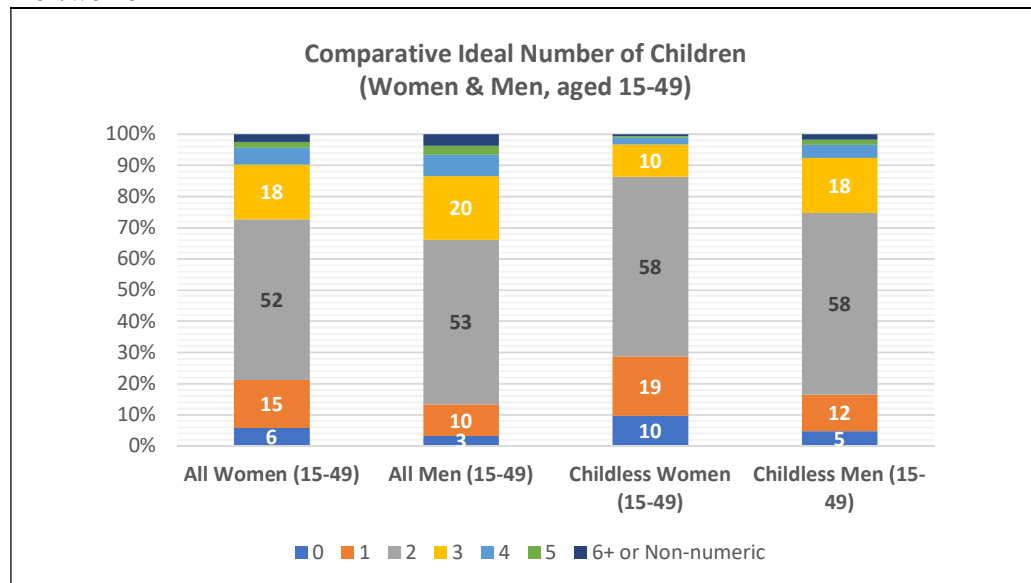
amongst younger women, making it more possible for non-mothers to conceptualise and state an ideal of zero children and no desire for children in future. This trend could represent a true increase in ‘voluntary’ female childlessness over time or, alternatively, there could always have been a slightly larger-than-estimated proportion of women who were ‘voluntarily’ childless, but who historically felt reluctant to declare their true feelings in a survey like the DHS. These two hypothesised explanations could also be acting together. Due to their similarity, and the fact that ‘ideal’ (but not ‘voluntary’) childlessness can be calculated in the same way for women across all years and for men, the rest of this chapter focuses on ‘ideal’ childlessness only.

4.5 Men’s Fertility Ideals and ‘Voluntary’ Childlessness in Comparative Gendered Perspective

Comparative Fertility Ideals

Figure 4.7 shows the comparative ‘ideal’ numbers of children for women and men. In 2015, only 3% of all men⁴⁴ and 6% of all women declared an ideal of no (zero) children.

Figure 4.7: Ideal Number of Children for Women & Men; all men/women & childless men/women



Source: Own construction, using DHS StatCompiler (<https://www.statcompiler.com/en/>). [Accessed: 14/Mar/19].

⁴⁴ Here, the men’s sample is restricted to ages 15-49, for greater gender comparability.

For childless men and women, these figures were 5% and 10%, respectively. Though only a small minority of both sexes had a ‘childless’ ideal in 2015, men were about half as likely as women to idealise non-parenthood. Figure 4.7 also illustrates the powerful two-child norm for all adults, representing the ‘ideal’ fertility for more than 50% of both sexes.

Table 4.2 presents Colombian women’s and men’s mean ideal family size, showing that men have a larger ideal family size than women. With nearly 90% of childless women expressing an ideal of two or fewer children (in Figure 4.7) and a mean ideal number of 1.8 children (regardless of union status), childless women persistently have the lowest fertility ideals. whereas married/cohabiting men have the highest, at 2.7 for men aged 15-49 (or 2.8 for those 15-59). This is the equivalent of a whole extra child, when compared to childless women.

Table 4.2: Mean Ideal Number of Children (DHS 2015)

	Women: ages 15-49		Men: ages 15-49 (ages 15-59)	
	All	Currently in Union Only	All	Currently in Union Only
All (Parents and Childless)	2.2	2.4	2.5 (2.6)	2.7 (2.8)
Only childless	1.8	1.8	2.2 (2.2)	2.1 (2.1)

Source: Own construction using DHS StatCompiler (<https://www.statcompiler.com/en/>). [Accessed: 14/Mar/19].

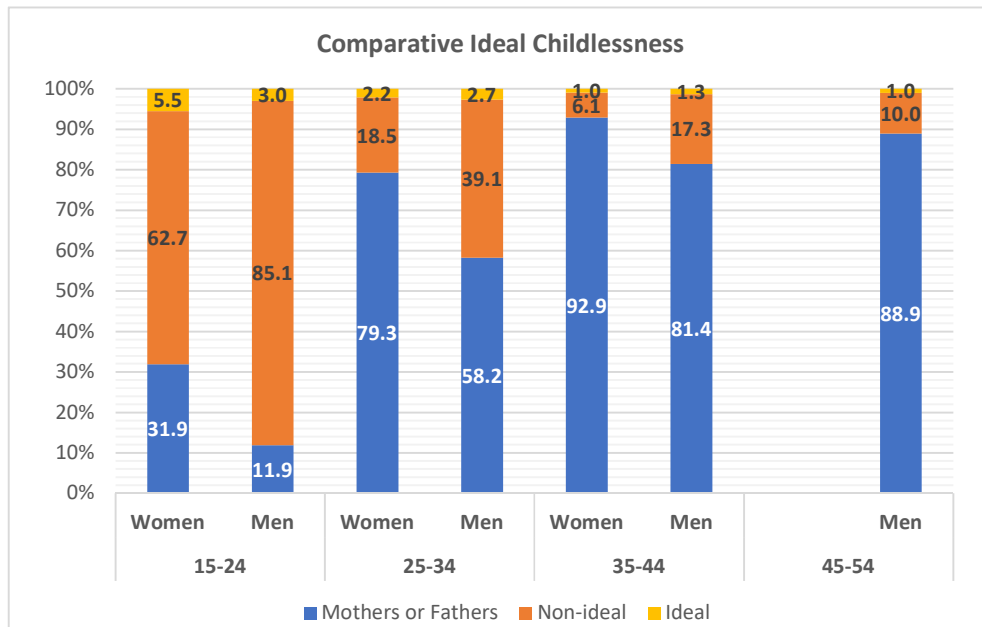
Additionally, though women’s fertility ideals tend to be more modest than men’s, childless adults of both sexes have consistently lower fertility ideals than those who are parents. This is likely due to two factors. First, many parents are reticent to admit to having an ‘ideal’ number of children smaller than their actual family size, although there are limits to this (see Appendix 4D, and also Rodriguez-Wong (2009), as the literature indicates that this is less the case in the Colombian context, where what demographers call ‘wanted’ fertility is often lower than actual fertility). Secondly, it is also likely that at least some childless adults have adjusted their own fertility desires and ideals downward (though not much below the population average).

Comparative Ideal Childlessness

As shown above, around 3% of all women aged 15-49 are ideally childless, with the comparable figure for all men being similar, at 2.3% (aged 15-49, or 2.1% of men aged

15-59).⁴⁵ Figure 4.8 compares the age-specific proportion of women and men who are: ‘ideally’ childless (as well as non-ideally childless and parents), as a proportion of all women and men aged 15-24, 25-34, and 35-44 (as well as 45-54, for men only). This illustrates the modest variation in ideal childlessness by gender and age group. The youngest women (under age 25) have higher levels of ‘ideal’ childlessness than men of the same age group: 5.5% versus 3%. However, comparing women and men over age 25, not only is ‘ideal’ childlessness very low for both sexes, it is very similar, with slightly higher figures for men aged 25-34 (2.7% versus 2.2% of women), and those 35-44 (1.3% versus 1.0% of women).

Figure 4.8: Comparative ‘ideal’ childlessness, ‘non-ideal’ childlessness, and parenthood amongst all Colombian women and men of similar ages



Source: Own calculations, using DHS 2015 women’s and men’s individual microdata.

As for women, I created a ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless measure for men in 2015, but I have not included it here, as there is little difference between ‘ideal’ and ‘strictly’ voluntary childlessness. Differences in the way that the women’s and men’s data regarding ‘desired’ future children were collected⁴⁶ also makes measures that integrate this information less gender-comparable than simply relying on ‘ideal’ childlessness.

⁴⁵ Of the 28,477 men aged 15-49, 615 are ‘ideally’ childless; similarly, of 33,778 men aged 15-59, 718 are ‘ideally’ childless

⁴⁶ For men, but not women, having ‘no current partner’ and ‘never had sex’ were valid answers.

4.6 Characteristics of the ‘Ideally’ Childless: What factors are associated with voluntary childlessness amongst women and men?

In this final section, I compare the profile of ‘ideally’ childless women and men to their non-ideally/temporarily⁴⁷ childless and parental peers. First, I present an overall breakdown according to *individual* (sociodemographic), *contextual*, and *attitudinal* characteristics. Then, I present logistic regression models summarising these profiles. Due to the very small numbers of ‘ideally’ childless women and men, I include all individuals over age 25, rather than restricting the samples to specific age groups around ages 30 and 40, as I did for the analysis of women’s overall childlessness in Chapter 3.

Comparative Profile of ‘Ideally’ Childless Women & Men

Table 4.3 separately summarises the basic characteristics of mothers/fathers, ‘involuntarily’ childless women/men, and ‘ideally’ childless women/men. It is restricted to women and men aged 25+ for two reasons. First, the excluded younger women and men (aged 15-24) are likely to be finishing their studies. Most teens in 2015 would have been in secondary school or some form of post-secondary ‘higher’ education, and this could affect the relationship between childlessness and education, as well as occupational group. Secondly, although ‘ideal’ childlessness is highest amongst younger women and men, it is arguably more meaningful to look at childlessness after age 25, as people are likely to begin thinking about settling down and having children from this age, if they have not already. See Appendix 4E⁴⁸ for the comparative characteristics of all women and men (aged 15-49/59). In the 2015 DHS, ‘ideally’ childless women comprised just 1.6% (N=381) of all women aged 25-49 and ‘ideally’ childless men just 1.8% (N=417) of all men 25-59.

⁴⁷ Below, I refer to these individuals simply as ‘involuntarily’ childless, but some of them are still young enough to be future parents, technically making them ‘temporarily’ childless, with an ideal of parenthood.

⁴⁸ This appendix also contains supplementary tables with the weighted numbers of women/men in each category (rather than just proportions).

Table 4.3: Comparative Characteristics of Parents, Involuntarily Childless and Voluntarily Childless Women and Men (Restricted to Women and Men over Age 25 only)

Independent Variables		All Women, Aged 25-49 (N=24,170)			All Men, Aged 25-59 (N= 23,703)		
		Mothers N=21,046	Invol. Childless N=2,743	Ideally Childless N=381	Fathers N=17,997	Invol. Childless N=5,289	Ideally Childless N=417
		Col. %			Col. %		
INDIVIDUAL							
Age Group	25-34	40.7	72.8	61.3	27.6	63.2	54.8
	35-49 (F) / 35-44 (M)	59.3	27.2	38.7	30.4	21.9	21.0
	45-59 (M)	--	--	--	42.0	14.9	24.2
Partnership Status	Ever in Union	92.4	41.2	37.2	96.8	37.9	38.4
	Never in Union	7.6	58.8	62.8	3.2	62.1	61.6
Education	Primary or Less	25.1	6.4	6.1	32.3	21.1	17.8
	Secondary	43.3	20.9	18.6	42.4	36.1	37.2
	Higher	31.6	72.6	75.3	25.3	42.9	45.0
Currently Working	No	33.5	23.4	23.5	2.0	4.2	13.7
	Yes	66.5	76.6	76.5	98.0	95.8	86.3
Occupat. Group	Agriculture/ Manual	14.5	8.6	6.0	43.0	33.9	32.8
	Services	34.6	22.2	12.0	23.9	22.8	23.4
	Sales	23.9	15.4	15.4	13.5	13.2	10.7
	Clerical	8.0	14.2	15.2	5.4	8.8	5.5
	Prof/Technical /Managerial	13.4	36.5	47.4	14.1	20.8	26.0
	Never worked	5.6	3.1	3.9	0.1	0.5	1.6
Wealth Index	Poorest/ Poorer	37.6	20.1	13.6	39.8	36.6	20.9
	Middle/Richer	42.0	45.7	45.1	40.1	41.6	45.7
	Richest	20.4	34.2	41.3	20.2	21.7	33.4
Ethnicity	Non-minority	85.5	87.3	88.4	--	--	--
	Minority	14.5	12.7	11.6	--	--	--
CONTEXTUAL							
Residence	Urban	79.3	89.8	91.0	76.4	78.6	91.8
	Rural	20.7	10.2	9.0	23.6	21.4	8.2
Region	Bogotá	18.0	20.0	25.1	18.1	16.3	17.6
	Atlantic	20.9	19.4	7.6	21.2	19.6	5.4
	Central	24.2	27.5	39.4	24.1	27.3	37.4
	Eastern, Orinoquia, Amazonia	19.6	17.1	11.7	19.9	19.1	11.4
	Pacific	17.4	15.9	16.2	16.7	17.7	28.1
ATTITUDINAL							
Approves of Gay Rights	Disagrees	37.0	31.7	21.4	47.6	38.9	29.6
	Agrees	63.0	68.3	78.6	52.4	61.1	70.4
Gay Adoption OK?	No	79.3	71.4	50.0	84.0	73.1	55.3
	Yes	20.7	28.6	50.0	16.0	26.9	44.7
Women take care of house	Agrees/ Neither	40.2	24.0	17.7	48.9	42.6	27.2
	Disagrees	59.8	76.0	82.3	51.1	57.4	72.8
Childcare is for women	Agrees/ Neither	28.9	16.8	11.7	24.8	25.9	15.6
	Disagrees	71.1	83.2	88.3	75.2	74.1	84.4

Note: Attitudinal variables are DHS Colombia-specific, and relate to agreement with two statements regarding "Perception of gays": (1) "Approves to grant rights to couples of the same sex" and (2) "Approves that gay couples should adopt children" & agreement with two "Gender relations statements": (1) "Most important role for women [is] tak[ing] care of house" and "Tak[ing] care of children is women[']s responsibility".

Compared to mothers and fathers, Table 4.3 shows that, ‘ideally’ childless women and men are younger and far less likely to have ever been in a union; they are also more educated (though similar to ‘involuntarily’ childless women and men). ‘Ideally’ childless women are slightly more likely to be working, and far more likely to have a professional occupation (47% versus just 13% of mothers). In contrast, ‘ideally’ childless men are less likely to be working than fathers or ‘involuntarily’ childless men. Like women, ‘ideally’ childless men are overrepresented in professional occupations, though to a lesser degree (26% versus 14% of fathers), and slightly underrepresented amongst agricultural/manual workers (33% versus 43% of fathers). ‘Ideally’ childless women are also overrepresented in the ‘richest’ wealth quintile (41% versus 20% of mothers), as are men (33% versus 20% of fathers). With respect to ethnicity, ‘ideally’ childless women are very similar to mothers and the ‘involuntarily’ childless, though slightly more ‘non-minority’ (white/mestizo). Unfortunately, men’s ethnicity information is unavailable.

In terms of the contextual variables in Table 4.3, ‘ideally’ childless women and men are underrepresented in rural areas: less than 10% of such women and men live in non-urban areas, compared to 21% and 24% of mothers and fathers, respectively. Regionally, ‘ideally’ childless women are concentrated in Bogotá and the Central region (home to 64.5% of these women), while such men (65.5%) are concentrated in the Central and Pacific regions, representing a gender difference in their geographical distribution.

Finally, although ‘involuntarily’ and ‘ideally’ childless individuals are socio-demographically similar, ‘involuntarily’ childless women and men are ‘attitudinally’ somewhere between mothers/fathers and the ‘ideally’ childless, as they show weaker support for gay rights and gay adoption, in particular, and slightly stronger support for ‘traditional’ women’s gender roles than ‘ideally’ childless women and men. Though more than half of all women and men across all groups ‘approve’ of granting rights to same-sex couples (with support from 79% and 70% of ‘ideally’ childless women and men, respectively), gay adoption is far less popular. Only 20% of mothers and 16% of fathers support gay adoption, compared to 50% of ‘ideally’ childless women and 45% of such men. Colombian men in all groups are slightly more ‘attitudinally’ conservative variables than women. Interestingly, a larger proportion of men and

women across all groups disagreed with the ‘gender relations’ statement that ‘taking care of children is women’s responsibility’ than with the statement that ‘the most important role for women is taking care of the house’. This could suggest that, while most women and men (parents and non-parents) expect men to be involved in childcare, they have lower expectations regarding men’s role as joint housekeepers.

Multivariate Analysis

Table 4.4 presents odds ratios from logistic regression models assessing the relationship between hypothesised independent variables and the outcome of ‘ideal’ (voluntary) female childlessness, and Table 4.5 presents the same for men’s ‘ideal’ childlessness. Since this analysis seeks to understand the characteristics associated with ideal childlessness, I have grouped mothers/fathers together with ‘involuntarily’/temporarily childless individuals. This contrasts with the basic, descriptive analysis in Table 4.3, where they are separated. Temporarily and involuntarily childless individuals can be considered future parents or as wanting parenthood, in contrast with the ‘ideally’ childless. For each independent variable, the ‘reference’ group (against which other categories are compared) is the first group. For example, for the age group variable, 25-34-year-olds are the reference group against which 35-49-year-old women are compared. ORs greater than 1 indicate increased odds of ideal childlessness (and ORs<1 indicate decreased odds), compared to the reference group. I have regrouped some of the independent variables due to the small numbers of ‘ideally’ childless women and men in certain subgroups. For example, the educational variable is now binary, comparing women/men with a higher education to all those with secondary education or less. Occupational groups have similarly had to be collapsed, with women and men who have ‘never worked’ now grouped with manual/agricultural workers; sales and services grouped; and clerical workers grouped with professional/technical/managerial workers. Importantly, the ‘regional’ variable has been collapsed into two, geographically-contiguous groupings, representing the (north) ‘East’ (comprising the Atlantic Coast, Eastern region, Orinoquia, and Amazonia), and (south) ‘West’ of the country (Bogotá, the Central region, and Pacific Coast). This ‘West’ region includes Colombia’s three largest cities: Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali.

Table 4.4: Logistic Regression Models of Women’s ‘Ideal’ Childlessness (compared to ‘Involuntary’ Childlessness & Motherhood)

Independent Variables	All Women Aged 25-49 (N=24,170)									
	Unadjusted Odds Ratios (ORs)		Model 1: Individual Only		Model 2: Individ. & Contextual		Model 3: Full - All Factors		Model 4: Final Model (Reduced)	
	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR (95% CI)	p
INDIVIDUAL										
Age Group: 25-34	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
35-49	0.50	***	0.87		0.87		0.9			
Partnership Status:									1.0	
Ever in Union	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Never in Union	10.8	***	7.2	***	6.9	***	6.4	***	6.5 (4.0-10.4)	***
Education:									1.0	
Secondary or Less	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Higher	5.4	***	1.8	**	1.9	**	1.8	**	2.0 (1.3-3.2)	**
Currently Working:										
No	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Yes	1.6	*	0.93		0.90		0.93			
Occupat. Group:									1.0	
Agriculture/Manual /Never worked	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Services/Sales	0.9		0.75		0.82		0.82		0.85 (0.5-1.4)	
Clerical/Prof./ Technical/Managerial	4.9	***	1.6	.	1.7	*	1.7	.	1.8 (1.1-3.1)	*
With. Index:										
Poorest/Poorer	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Middle/Richer	2.8	***	1.8	*	1.8	.	1.7	.		
Richest	4.9	***	1.9	*	1.7	.	1.6	.		
Ethnicity: Non-minority	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Minority	0.8		1.1		1.0		1.0			
CONTEXTUAL										
Residence: Urban	1.0				1.0		1.0			
Rural	0.41	*			1.3		1.3			
Region: ‘East’	1.0				1.0		1.0		1.0	
‘West’ (incl. Bogotá)	2.8	***			2.1	**	1.9	*	1.9 (1.1-3.3)	**
ATTITUDINAL										
Approves of Gay Rights: Disagrees	1.0						1.0			
Agrees	2.1	*					0.82			
Gay Adoption OK: No	1.0						1.0		1.0	
Yes	3.6	***					2.8	***	2.6 (1.7-4.1)	***
Women take care of house:							1.0			
Agrees/Neither	1.0									
Disagrees	2.9	***					1.1			
Childcare is for women:							1.0			
Agrees/Neither	1.0									
Disagrees	2.9	***					1.1			
Intercept			0.004	***	0.002	**	0.002	***	0.002 (0.001-0.004)	***
AIC			3251.1		3232.3		3184.8		3139.0	
BIC			3234.4		3238.9		3248.5		3172.4	

Note: Empty cells indicate variables excluded from model.
 Statistical significance (‘p’): ‘***’p≤0.001 / ‘**’p≤0.01 / ‘*’p≤0.05 / ‘.’p≤0.10

The first columns in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 present unadjusted ORs and their statistical significance (p-values). Model 1 in both Table 4.4 (women) and Table 4.5 (men) includes only 'individual' variables (age, partnership status, education, current work/occupational group, and wealth index). Model 2 adds contextual variables (urban/rural residence, and region) to Model 1. Model 3 is the 'full' model, adding attitudinal variables (agreement with gay rights and gender role statements) to Model 2. Finally, Model 4 presents the final model, which is a reduced version of Model 3.

Table 4.4 shows that, at the bivariate (unadjusted) level, most of the hypothesised independent variables are strongly associated with women's ideal childlessness; only ethnic group is not. Given that this is the case, I will only summarise the most important factors here. Having never married/cohabited (partnership status) is strongly, and positively associated with women's ideal childlessness, as are higher education, being richer, being a professional worker, and having more accepting views on gay rights and non-traditional gender role ideas. Ideal female childlessness is also higher in the 'Western' region and lower in rural than urban areas.

For women, Table 4.4 shows that, despite the large number of bivariate associations with ideal childlessness, once each independent variable's relationship to the outcome was adjusted for the potentially confounding effects of other variables (see Models 3 & 4), factors like age group, wealth index, urban/rural residence, and agreement with statements on gay rights (with the exception of gay adoption) and gender relations, no longer appear to be as important. In the women's final model (Model 4), having never cohabited/married (partnership status) is most strongly, and positively (OR=6.5) associated with ideal childlessness, as it was for female childlessness overall. The next most important factor, increasing the odds of ideal childlessness amongst women, is agreement with adoption by same-sex couples (OR=2.6). This is in keeping with my hypothesis, and with the SDT theory that voluntary childlessness should be associated with less traditional, more socially-accepting views. When compared to less educated women, those with a 'higher' education have twice the odds of ideal childlessness. Finally, women in the 'Western' region of the country (including Bogotá), and those in clerical or professional/managerial occupations are also more likely to be ideally childless (though these associations are relatively weak).

Table 4.5: Logistic Regression Models of Men's 'Ideal' Childlessness (compared to 'Involuntary' Childlessness & Fatherhood)

Independent Variables	All Men Aged 25-59 (N=23,703)									
	Unadjusted Odds Ratios (ORs)		Model 1: Individual Only		Model 2: Indiv. & Contextual		Model 3: Full - All Factors		Model 4: Final Model (Reduced)	
	OR	P	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR (95% CI)	p
INDIVIDUAL										
Age Group: 25-34	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
35-44	0.48	**	0.84		0.83		0.88			
45-59	0.44	***	0.92		0.92		1.0			
Partnership Status:									1.0	
Ever in Union	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Never in Union	8.1	***	7.0	***	6.8	***	6.3	***	6.3 (4.3-9.3)	***
Education:										
Secondary or Less	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Higher	2.0	**	1.0		1.1		0.91			
Currently Working:									1.0	
No	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Yes	0.16	**	0.26	**	0.25	**	0.28	**	0.27 (0.10-0.72)	**
Occupat. Group:										
Agriculture/Manual /Never worked	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Services/Sales	1.1		0.86		0.80		0.79			
Clerical/Prof./ Technical/ Managerial	1.7	.	1.0		0.93		0.88			
With. Index:										
Poorest/Poorer	1.0		1.0		1.0		1.0			
Middle/Richer	2.1	***	2.1	**	1.1		1.0			
Richest	3.0	***	2.8	***	1.3		1.2			
CONTEXTUAL										
Residence: Urban	1.0				1.0		1.0		1.0	
Rural	0.30	***			0.37	***	0.37	***	0.36 (0.25-0.63)	***
Region: 'East'	1.0				1.0		1.0		1.0	
'West' (incl. Bogotá)	3.4	***			2.8	***	2.4	***	2.6 (1.7-3.9)	***
ATTITUDINAL										
Approves of Gay Rights: Disagrees	1.0						1.0			
Agrees	2.0	***					1.0			
Gay Adoption OK:									1.0	
No	1.0						1.0			
Yes	3.6	***					2.1	***	2.2 (1.4-3.3)	***
Women take care of house:										
Agrees/Neither	1.0						1.0			
Disagrees	2.3	***					1.4			
Childcare is for women:										
Agrees/Neither	1.0						1.0			
Disagrees	1.9	**					1.1			
Intercept			0.020	***	0.018	***	0.013	***	0.014 (0.006-0.032)	**
AIC			3550.9		3471.6		3429.8		3387.5	
BIC			3470.7		3468.6		3488.4		3403.2	

Note: Empty cells indicate variables excluded from model.
 Statistical significance ('p'): '***'p<0.001 / '**'p<0.01 / '*'p<0.05 / '.'p<0.10

Table 4.5 shows that, amongst men, occupational group exhibits the weakest bivariate association with the ideal childlessness and, as for women, never having married/cohabited the strongest. Partnership status is followed by agreement with gay adoption and residence in the 'Western' region, as well as being richer, and disagreeing with the idea that women's most important role is taking care of the home, all of which are associated with increased (unadjusted) odds of ideal childlessness. In contrast, living in a rural area and currently working both substantially decrease men's (unadjusted) odds of ideal childlessness. Importantly, current work had a different relationship with ideal childlessness according to gender: whereas amongst women it is associated with increased ideal childlessness, amongst men the opposite relationship is clear. For men, as for women, once the effects of each variable were 'adjusted' for the effects of others (as in Model 4), factors like age group, education, occupational group, wealth index, and agreement with statements on gay rights (with the exception of gay adoption), and gender relations no longer appear to be important.

In the final model (4), partnership status is still key, with men who have never married/cohabited much more likely than others (OR=6.3) to be ideally childless. This is followed by the contextual factors of residence in the 'Western' part of Colombia (OR=2.6 compared to 'East') and rural residence, which is associated with lower odds of ideal childlessness (OR=0.36) compared to urban-dwellers. Current work is still significantly associated with reduced ideal childlessness (OR=0.27). Finally, men who agree with gay adoption have twice the odds of ideal childlessness, again confirming the hypothesis that women and men who have chosen childlessness would have non-traditional/more socially-accepting views of minority rights.

Taken together, the results of the final models for women and men in Table 4.4 and Table 4.5, show that ideally childless women and men have certain things in common, such as being more likely to: have never been in a union; accept gay rights, particularly adoption; and live in the 'Western' region. However, there were also differences in the profiles of ideally childless women and men: higher education and professional occupations appear to be important for women, but not men. In contrast, current work status was important for men, but not women. I will return to these factors and gender differences in subsequent chapters, particularly using my qualitative interview data.

4.7 Conclusions

To conclude, in this chapter, I traced the evolution of women's fertility ideals and their voluntary childlessness since from the 1980s-2015, before comparing women and men using 2015 data only. I showed that women's ideal number of children has declined over time, with increasing numbers declaring 'zero' or 'one' child as ideal (around 20% in 2015), and, with respect to gender differences, that men typically have a slightly higher ideal number of children than women. Despite this, there is still a strong two-child preference amongst both sexes. I also showed that, when measuring 'voluntary' childlessness, considering both 'desired' future children and 'ideal' number of children adds little, and that a simpler measure of 'voluntary' childlessness based only on having no children alongside an ideal of 'zero' was sufficient. I subsequently used this 'ideal' childlessness measure to compare women's and men's experiences.

In Chapter 3, I found that female childlessness overall does not display a consistent, substantial increase over time in Colombia; in contrast, although the numbers are still small, women's voluntary childlessness *does* exhibit a modestly increasing trend over time. In 2015, 'ideal' childlessness was similar amongst women and men (characterising around 3% and 2% of all women and men aged 15-49, respectively). In terms of their respective profiles, ideally childless women typically exhibit 'advantaged' characteristics: more likely to have a 'higher' education and work in professional occupations. Ideally childless men's personal profile is less obviously 'advantaged', and for them, education and profession are less important than not currently working. With respect to common features, ideally childless women and men are both more likely to live in the 'Western' region of the country (where major cities Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali are all located), and to hold more supportive views of gay adoption. They also share the most important factor: having never married or cohabited, which displayed the strongest association with women's (adjusted OR=6.5) and men's (adjusted OR=6.3) ideal childlessness (compared to women/men who had ever cohabited/married).

Although it is not possible to explore whether wanting to be childless makes it harder to find a compatible partner, or if not having a partner makes Colombian women and men more likely to decide their 'ideal' is to be childless, longitudinal research from

Australia suggests that the ‘childbearing desires’ of childless adults tend to be adjusted downward with age (and conversely, upward with relationship formation) (Gray et al. 2013). It is possible that, having never entered a union, these women and men have adjusted their fertility ideals down, never to have them raised by a union. Unfortunately, because the DHS is cross-sectional, it does not allow for testing these hypothesised trajectories, though the patterns discussed above raise questions for future research. This is an important limitation, as surveys, like the DHS, are far from an ideal way to get at the complexities of childbearing desires and the measures presented here are simply approximations. However, Chapter 6 provides a qualitative complement to this descriptive statistical analysis. There, I analyse a subset of in-depth interviews I conducted with ‘voluntarily’ childless women and men in Bogotá in 2017. First, though, I focus in on men’s overall childlessness from a mixed quantitative and qualitative perspective, in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Colombian Fatherhood and Non-Fatherhood

5.1 Introduction & Rationale

It is widely recognised that men have historically been ‘left out’ of the extensive body of social science research addressing reproduction and fertility (Greene & Biddlecom 2000; Inhorn et al. 2009a), and that the late-20th and early-21st century anthropological ‘boom’ in research on reproduction was largely skewed towards women’s experiences. While “more than 150 ethnographic volumes” were devoted to women’s reproduction and health from the 1980s to the early 2000s (Inhorn 2006a in Inhorn et al. 2009b: 2), men’s concerns and reproductive roles are still typically ignored. Demographic research has followed a similar tendency, focusing on women for both biological and practical reasons: their more condensed reproductive lives; their gestational role in childbearing and the fact that they are more likely than men to live with their children even after relationship dissolution, which allows them to report the number of (living and deceased) children they have had more accurately; the greater ease of interviewing women for surveys, since they tend to be at home more often;⁴⁹ and the fact that two-sex models of fertility are more mathematically complicated than single-sex models, while adding relatively little to our understanding (Greene & Biddlecom 2000: 85; Zhang 2011: 4–5). However, demographers increasingly acknowledge that men’s and women’s fertility differs in important ways, which should be explored in their own right (Bledsoe et al. 2000) if we seek to improve our understanding of emerging areas of interest, such as childlessness.

Colombia and other Latin American countries tend to have high levels of marital and informal union dissolution, multiple unions/remarriage, and high levels of internal and international migration – all factors which can make female and male fertility rates diverge more greatly than in societies with low levels of geographical mobility and less dynamic marriage markets (Zhang 2011: 7). In such contexts, women’s fertility experiences are unlikely to provide an adequate stand-in for men’s. Using DHS data to calculate male total fertility rates (TFRs), Schoumaker (2017a) found that, at least in ‘developing’ countries, men’s TFRs are higher than women’s, although these

⁴⁹ When approached, women also tend to be more compliant with household surveys than men, as reflected in higher response rates. This is true in the Colombian DHS.

discrepancies are typically greater in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions. Schoumaker (2017b: 4) expanded this analysis to cover most countries globally, finding that in ‘western’ countries, where couples’ age gaps are smaller and “where there are slightly more men of reproductive age than women” men may actually have lower fertility than women. Other research paints a similarly diverse picture. Using data from 43 ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ nations, Zhang (2011: 46–47) corroborated the finding that men typically have slightly higher fertility than women, but emphasised the high correlation between male and female TFRs overall. Zhang (2011: 46–47) also emphasised that men’s and women’s fertility is more similar in low fertility (TFR<2.2) settings; that in low-fertility countries, women tend to have slightly higher fertility than men; and that men’s fertility displays greater ‘variation’. In other words, at the population level, men’s reproductive experiences may be more diverse than women’s.

Non-fatherhood, Fatherhood and Masculinity

Demographic research from European countries has shown that non-fatherhood tends to be more common than non-motherhood (Tanturri et al. 2015), although historically this was not always the case (Coleman 2000). Higher rates of male childlessness owe partly to data issues, since men’s non-gestational reproductive role makes them more likely to have unknown or unacknowledged children (see Rendall et al. 1999). However, it is partly a ‘real’ gap. Different reproductive schedules, with men typically having children later than women, mean that men spend a longer portion of their adult lives childless. The greater variability of male fertility means that, at the population level, even where a higher proportion of men remain childless, they are also more likely to have children with multiple partners than women (Miettinen et al. 2015). As men cannot bear children themselves, and are also far less likely than women to be single parents following union dissolution, heterosexual men’s experiences of parenthood tend to be deeply intertwined with their relationship to current or previous partners. Finally, there is some European evidence that men’s wellbeing, especially later in life, may be more affected by being childless and/or unpartnered than women’s (Dykstra & Hagestad 2007; Keizer & Ivanova 2017). These factors underscore the importance of identifying the similarities and differences between male and female reproductive experiences in specific contexts, in order to fully understand the different pathways to and effects of childlessness on women’s and men’s lives.

Demographic researchers in the Global North have also begun investigating the profile and experiences of men who remain childless in comparison to women (e.g. see Berrington 2004; Fiori et al. 2017; Jensen 2016; Parr 2010; Tocchioni 2018; Waren & Pals 2013). Evidence suggests that childless men and women differ in important ways, e.g. with *less* educated men most likely to be non-fathers and *more* educated women non-mothers (Miettinen et al. 2015). Such research remains less common in other regions, where exceptions tend more towards anthropology or epidemiology, often focusing more on male infertility and its treatment than on other forms of childlessness (e.g. Inhorn 2013; Inhorn & Patrizio 2015; Inhorn & Wentzell 2011). In their review of the literature on childlessness in ‘resource-poor areas’, van Balen & Bos (2010) found only one study that addressed Latin America, with all others focusing on Asia or Africa. Their review concentrated on involuntary childlessness, especially infertility, and on women’s, rather than men’s experiences, illustrating the large gap in the existing research on male childlessness in Latin America.

Anthropological attention to men’s reproduction tends to focus on their experiences of fatherhood, fertility ideals/desires, roles in (or exclusion from) family planning, and their perceptions and self-definitions of masculinity. Matthew Gutmann’s (1996, 2007, 2011) work with Mexican men has been influential for questioning the typical narratives of Latin American ‘hegemonic’ masculinities and for meaningfully exploring men’s roles in biological and social reproduction. Some of his more recent work, also in Mexico, has focused on how men are integrated (or not) into reproductive health care and family planning (Gutmann 2007, 2011). Mara Viveros-Vigoya’s (2001, 2002a) work on Colombia has also questioned typical narratives of masculinity as defined by ‘machismo’, addressed the centrality of fatherhood to male identity, and related masculinities, sexualities, and gender relations to other important regional issues, like racial/ethnic identities (Viveros-Vigoya 2002b) and violence (Viveros-Vigoya 2016).

This chapter is presented in two parts. Part one addresses the quantitative data from the 2015 Colombian Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) regarding men’s fertility, in relation to their personal characteristics. Where possible, I compare these findings to the analysis of women’s overall childlessness in Chapter 3. Part two analyses a sub-

selection of the qualitative interviews I carried out in Bogotá in 2017, primarily drawing on men's perspectives.

5.2 A Quantitative View of Overall Colombian Male Childlessness

In Chapter 3, I presented the trends over time in overall female childlessness. Due to data limitations, such an analysis is not possible for men. Instead, I explore childlessness across the male reproductive life course, from ages 15 to 59, focusing on three, ten-year age groups, centred around ages 30, 40, and 50. Where possible, I interpret men's results in a gender-comparative way.

Quantitative Research Questions

1. What proportion of men in Colombia (aged 15-59) were childless in 2015?
2. What factors are associated with male childlessness, especially around ages 30, 40 and 50?
3. How does the overall level of, and factors associated with, male childlessness compare to female childlessness?

Data & Methods

As previously noted, the 2015 Colombia DHS included an 'individual' survey interview for reproductive-aged men (13-59), for the first time. As for women, I restricted the sample to men aged 15 years and older. This is an internationally-standardised measure of the reproductive lifespan, and I focus primarily on women and men aged 25 and over, as a more meaningful way to approach 'childlessness'. The DHS collects information regarding men's and women's *fertility history* (whether and how many children they had) as well as sociodemographic information. With respect to the primary outcome of 'childlessness', I have described men as *childless* if they have no 'children ever born' (CEB): in other words, if they have never knowingly fathered a biological child (see Appendix 4A, for the phrasing of men's DHS fertility questions).

Using a series of bi- and multivariate logistic regression models, I explored factors associated with childlessness separately for men aged 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54. As for women, this includes each man's: *age*; *partnership status*; *education level*; *wealth index*; *urban/rural residence*; and *region* of residence. These variables were described

in Chapter 3 and are the same for women and men. Using odds ratios (ORs) to compare childless men to fathers (with $OR > 1$ indicating a positive association with childlessness), I first present the unadjusted associations, followed by a ‘full’ model that includes all hypothesised explanatory variables, and then a ‘final’ model, which was selected by iteratively comparing the statistical significance of likelihood ratio tests and AIC/BIC values for different models, favouring lower AIC and BIC values. I carried out all statistical analyses in *R* with *RStudio*, using the *Survey* package (Lumley 2018). Note that all numbers and estimates presented here are survey-weighted.

5.3 Quantitative Analysis: Results

Overall Male Childlessness

Table 5.1: Comparison of women’s and men’s characteristics overall, including sample mean age, and proportion of sample who are parents

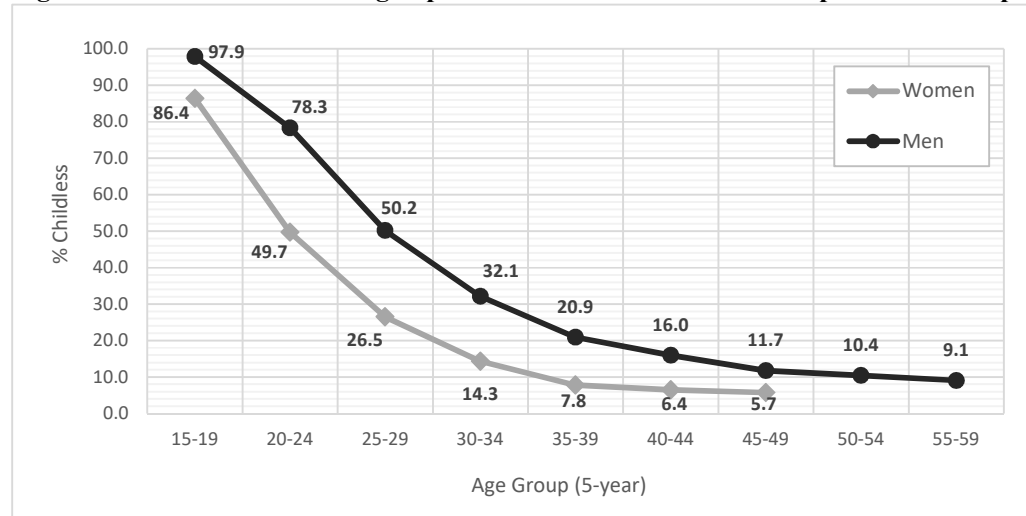
Gender	Women	Men	
Age Groups	15-49	15-49	15-59
Mean Age (SD)	30.6 (0.08)	30.1 (0.11)	33.9 (0.10)
N (Total)	36,300	28,474	33,777
N (Parents only)	24,912	14,411	19,192
% Parents	68.6	50.6	56.8
% First time Mothers at age 35+ / Fathers at age 40+	1.1% (268/24,912)	4.0% (761/19,192)	

Source: Own calculations, using women’s and men’s 2015 DHS individual microdata.

Table 5.1 illustrates the wide gender gap in overall childlessness: while only 31% of Colombian women aged 15-49 were childless in 2015, 49% of Colombian men 15-49 (or 43% of those 15-59) were. When looking at age-specific childlessness, and comparing estimates for men and women in the same five-year age groups, Colombian men consistently exhibit higher levels of childlessness than women (see Figure 5.1), as expected based on research in other contexts. Whereas only 86% of women aged 15-19 are childless, nearly all teenage men are childless. Adolescent motherhood is far more common than adolescent fatherhood, and men typically have children later than women, as is evident from Figure 5.1. Part of this gender gap relates to women dating men their own age or older. In 2015, women’s median age at first birth was in the 20-24-year-old age group, and men’s in the 25-29-year-old age group, as these are the points at which 50% of the (female and male population, respectively) has had a child. By their late 30s, only about 20% of men are still childless, and by their late 40s, the

figure hovers around 10%, barely decreasing over the following decennial age group. Although few Colombians of either sex in the oldest common age group (45-49-year-olds) are childless, it is still twice as common amongst men (12% versus 6% of women).

Figure 5.1: Male and Female Age-Specific Childlessness across the reproductive lifespan



Source: Own calculations, using women’s and men’s 2015 DHS individual microdata.

Some of this gender difference in reported childlessness could also come from the (likely quite small) proportion of men who have impregnated ex-partners, but who are not aware of this fact, meaning that, although they are biologically fathers, they report being childless. Although the DHS allows us to estimate maternal and paternal co-residence with children (as does the census), it is impossible to know what proportion of men fit into this uniquely male category of ‘unaware fatherhood’. Although stillbirths and other types of infant deaths soon after birth may lead some women to under- or over-report the number of live-born children they have, it is nearly impossible for women to not know about a first and only pregnancy *and* birth, leading them to mistakenly report being childless. This simple fact creates a strong distinction between the likely reporting errors for women and men, and the DHS includes a series of cross-checking questions around live births to minimise reporting errors (see Appendix 4A).

Descriptive Analysis: Men’s Basic Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 5.2 summarises the basic characteristics of all the men surveyed in the 2015 DHS, as well as the proportions childless amongst men with specific characteristics.

Comparable figures for all women (aged 15-49) were presented in Chapter 3, Table 3.2. With respect to their overall characteristics, just over one-third of men and women had never been in a union, and about 30% of men and just under one-quarter of women had some level of post-secondary education. A larger gender difference emerged in current occupational status: while over 90% of men were working when interviewed, just over half of women reported the same. The urban and regional breakdown for men and women was very similar.

Table 5.2: Sociodemographic Characteristics of All Men Surveyed by the 2015 Colombian DHS

Participant Characteristics	All Men, 15-59 years old (N=33,778)			
	Total		Numbers & Proportions Childless	
	N	Column %	N	Row % ¹
Age Group: 15-19	5,063	15.0	4,955	97.9
20-24	5,012	14.8	3,924	78.3
25-29	4,577	13.6	2,299	50.2
30-34	3,965	11.7	1,272	32.1
35-39	3,556	10.5	744	20.9
40-44	3,162	9.4	505	16.0
45-49	3,140	9.3	368	11.7
50-54	2,912	8.6	303	10.4
55-59	2,390	7.1	216	9.1
Partnership Status: Ever in union	21,319	63.1	2,905	13.6
Never in union	12,459	36.9	11,681	93.8
Education: Primary or less	7,949	23.5	1,942	24.4
Secondary	16,261	48.1	7,877	48.4
Higher	9,567	28.3	4,766	49.8
Wealth Index: Poorest	6,722	19.9	2,682	39.9
Poorer	6,750	20.0	2,931	43.4
Middle	6,524	19.3	2,774	42.5
Richer	6,993	20.7	3,135	44.8
Richest	6,789	20.1	3,064	45.1
Currently Working: No	3,127	9.3	2,741	87.7
Yes	30,651	90.7	11,845	38.6
Area of Residence: Urban	25,785	76.3	11,258	43.7
Rural	7,993	23.7	3,328	41.6
Region: Bogotá	5,707	16.9	2,301	40.3
Atlantic	7,161	21.2	3,013	42.1
Central	8,416	24.9	3,842	45.6
Eastern	5,870	17.4	2,534	43.2
Orinoquia/Amazonia	822	2.4	348	42.3
Pacific	5,801	17.2	2,548	43.9
Totals	33,778	100.0	14,586	43.2

¹Note: Childless as a proportion of all men in each group.

Table 5.3 also displays men's basic characteristics, divided into three ten-year age groups around 30, 40, and 50, as they are the focus of the multivariate logistic regression models presented in Table 5.4 of the next section. Table 5.3 shows that about 40% of the youngest men (25-34), 20% of the middle group (35-44), and 10% of the oldest group (45-54) are still childless. When looking only at men who had 'ever' been in union, about 20% of those aged 25-34 were childless, compared to just 6% of men 45-54, but regardless of age group, less than 20% of men who have 'never' been in union are fathers. One personal characteristic that has changed substantially between generations is overall level of education: about 38% of the youngest men (25-34) had a 'higher' education, compared to only 22% of the oldest group (45-54), illustrating the expansion of higher education in Colombia over the past two decades. Nearly all men (regardless of age group) were working when interviewed. Interestingly, amongst the youngest men, there is a strong positive gradient to childlessness across socioeconomic groups, as is also the case for women, whereas in the oldest group, the direction of association reverses, with the richest men least likely to be childless and the poorest/poorer/middle groups 2-3 times more likely.

Table 5.3: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Men Surveyed by the 2015 Colombian DHS, by 10-year age group around ages 30, 40 & 50

Participant Charact's.	Men 25-34 only (N=8,542)				Men 35-44 only (N=6,719)				Men 45-54 only (N=6,052)			
	Total		Childless		Total		Childless		Total		Childless	
	N	Col %	N	Row %	N	Col %	N	Row %	N	Col %	N	Row %
Age Group												
25-29	8,542	100	3,571	41.8								
30-34					6,719	100	1,248	18.6				
35-39									6,052	100	670	11.1
40-44												
45-49												
50-54												
Partnership Status												
Ever in union	5,841	68.4	1,167	20.0	5,879	87.5	554	9.4	5,629	93.0	339	6.0
Never in union	2,702	31.6	2,404	89.0	840	12.5	694	82.6	424	7.0	331	78.2
Education												
Primary or less	1,535	18.0	443	28.9	2,035	30.3	331	16.3	2,381	39.3	290	12.2
Secondary	3,781	44.3	1,352	35.8	2,705	40.3	400	14.8	2,360	39.0	241	10.2
Higher	3,226	37.8	1,776	55.0	1,979	29.5	518	26.2	1,311	21.7	140	10.7
Wealth Index												
Poorest	1,624	19.0	490	30.1	1,324	19.7	235	17.7	1,152	19.0	135	11.7
Poorer	1,775	20.8	652	36.7	1,293	19.2	241	18.6	1,116	18.4	164	14.7
Middle	1,808	21.2	680	37.6	1,274	19.0	211	16.6	1,072	17.7	161	15.0
Richer	1,833	21.5	902	49.2	1,373	20.4	223	16.2	1,317	21.8	138	10.5
Richest	1,502	17.6	847	56.4	1,455	21.6	340	23.3	1,397	23.1	74	5.3
Currently Working:												
No	192	2.2	169	88.0	128	1.9	48	37.1	186	3.1	44	23.8
Yes	8,351	97.8	3,402	40.7	6,591	98.1	1,201	18.2	5,867	96.9	626	10.7
Area of Residence												
Urban	6,581	77.0	2,920	44.4	5,203	77.4	972	18.7	4,680	77.3	499	10.7
Rural	1,961	23.0	651	33.2	1,516	22.6	277	18.2	1,372	22.7	172	12.5
Region												
Bogotá	1,445	16.9	636	44.0	1,253	18.7	209	16.7	1,070	17.7	65	6.0
Atlantic	1,820	21.3	664	36.5	1,366	20.3	236	17.3	1,215	20.1	126	10.4
Central	2,104	24.6	971	46.1	1,616	24.0	342	21.2	1,569	25.9	213	13.6
Eastern	1,469	17.2	589	40.1	1,162	17.3	211	18.2	1,066	17.6	127	11.9
Orinoquia/Amazonia	206	2.4	68	33.1	154	2.3	18	11.7	126	2.1	12	9.1
Pacific	1,498	17.5	643	42.9	1,168	17.4	233	19.9	1,005	16.6	128	12.7
Totals	8,542	100	3,571	41.8	6,719	100	1,248	18.6	6,052	100	670	11.1

Multivariate Analysis: Characteristics Associated with Childlessness across the Male Life Course

Table 5.4 presents a series of logistic regression models for the associations between men's childlessness (the outcome) and the personal and contextual characteristics with which I hypothesised it is associated. I analysed the three 10-year age groups separately (with 25-34-year old men representing slight 'postponement' of fatherhood, 35-44-year olds representing more significant 'postponement', and 45-54-year olds representing 'definitive' childlessness). From a life-course perspective (Buhr & Huinink 2014), these age groups could be interpreted as 'early', 'mid-', and 'later' life male childlessness. Regardless of age group, the personal factor that had the strongest association (in both unadjusted/bivariate and adjusted/multivariate models) with male childlessness was *partnership status*. This was also true of overall female childlessness. In the youngest age group, men who had never married or cohabited had odds of childlessness 27 times higher than 'ever' partnered men, rising to 58 in the oldest age group, even when adjusted for the effects of other factors. Overall, in the adjusted models for all age groups, neither place of residence (urban/rural) nor region were associated with childlessness.

'Early life' Childlessness (around age 30): Young Male Postponement

Looking only at the youngest men (25-34) in the 'final' model presented above, age and occupational status are both highly significant factors associated with childlessness. Men who are currently working (compared to men without a current job) also have significantly lower odds of childlessness (decreased by 80%), which suggests that men's jobs are crucial to their reproduction, or conversely, that men with children must work in order to help support not only themselves, but also a partner and child(ren). Education and wealth index quintiles (socioeconomic status) are positively associated with childlessness, although only modestly. When compared to men with primary education or less, those with a higher education have slightly increased odds of non-parenthood (OR=1.5), and when compared to the poorest men, those in the 'poorer' and 'middle' quintiles have slightly increased odds of childlessness (OR=1.4), as do those in the 'richer'/'richest' quintiles (OR=1.7).

Table 5.4: Associations (Unadjusted & Adjusted Odds Ratios) between hypothesized explanatory variables and male childlessness around ages 30, 40, and 50 using 2015 Colombia DHS

Independent Variables	Men Aged 25-34 Only (N=8,542)			Men Aged 35-44 Only (N=6,719)			Men Aged 45-54 Only (N=6,052)		
	Unadjusted OR	Full Model: Adj. OR (AOR)	Final Model: AOR (95% CI)	Unadjusted OR	Full Model: AOR	Final Model: AOR (95% CI)	Unadjusted OR	Full Model: AOR	Final Model: AOR (95% CI)
Age (Contin.)	0.85 ***	0.91 ***	0.91 (0.87-0.94) ***	0.93 **	0.94 *	0.94 (0.89-1.0) *	0.98	0.98	
Partnership status:									
Ever in union	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never in union	32.3 ***	26.5 ***	26.6 (20.7-34.0) ***	45.7 ***	48.5 ***	47.6 (33.6-67.2) ***	55.9 ***	57.0 ***	58.4 (37.9-90.2) ***
Education: Primary or less	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	
Secondary	1.4 **	1.1	1.1 (0.8-1.4)	0.9	0.81	0.83 (0.57-1.2)	0.8	1.1	
Higher	3.0 ***	1.6 **	1.5 (1.1-2.1) **	1.8 ***	1.8 *	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	0.9	1.3	
Wealth index:									
Poorest	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0	1.0
Poorer	1.3 **	1.4 *	1.4 (1.1-1.9) **	1.1	1.0		1.3 .	1.7 *	1.8 (1.3-2.6) **
Middle	1.4 **	1.4 .	1.4 (1.1-1.9) **	0.9	1.0		1.3 .	1.8 .	2.0 (1.4-3.1) ***
Richer	2.2 ***	1.7 **	1.7 (1.3-2.4) ***	0.9	0.93		0.9	0.98	1.1 (0.73-1.7)
Richest	3.0 ***	1.7 *	1.7 (1.2-2.6) **	1.4	1.2		0.4 ***	0.58	0.61 (0.32-1.1)
Currently working:									
No	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0	
Yes	0.09 ***	0.24 ***	0.24 (0.1-0.4) ***	0.38 **	0.69		0.4 ***	0.60	
Area of residence:									
Urban	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0		1.0	1.00	
Rural	0.62 ***	0.95		1.0	0.84		1.2	0.91	
Region: Bogotá	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0	
Atlantic	0.73 .	1.1		1.0	1.3		1.8 *	1.5	
Central	1.1	1.3		1.3	1.7		2.5 **	1.9 .	
Eastern	0.85	1.2		1.1	1.4		2.1 *	1.8	
Amazonia/ Orinoquia ¹	0.63 *	1.2		0.7	1.2		1.6	1.3	
Pacific	1.0	1.3		1.2	1.7		2.3 **	1.7	
Model Intercept	--	9.3 ***	11.0 (3.2-37.9) ***		0.96	0.82 (0.09-7.3)		0.12	0.05 (0.04-0.07) ***
AIC	--	6608.3	6592.0		4115.1	4077.6		3072.0	3056.3
BIC	--	6680.2	6633.6		4163.5	4085.6		3148.8	3074.9

¹Note: Orinoquia/Amazonia here is geographically equivalent to the 'National Territories' in the 2010 DHS. Level of statistical significance: p<0.001 '****' p<0.01 '***' p<0.05 '**' p<0.10 '.'

Comparing men's results to women's (see Chapter 3, Table 3.3), current work is important for both male and female postponement, but the direction of its association with childlessness is different. Whereas working women are *more* likely to be childless than non-working women, working men are *less* likely. Although higher education and socioeconomic status are both positively associated with childlessness amongst men, this effect is less pronounced than in comparable women of the same age. Women with higher education have odds of childlessness four times those of women with primary education or less, while the richest women have more than double the odds of the poorest women. Higher education and work are much more likely to conflict with women's childbearing ideals than they are with men's, since men have traditionally been children's secondary caregivers and so have more time to pursue other interests.

'Midlife' Childlessness (around age 40): Older Male Postponement

Turning to the 'middle'-aged group of men (35-44), Table 5.4 shows that far fewer of the hypothesised explanatory variables have any significant relationship to childlessness in the final model. Apart from its important relationship to partnership status, only age and education were significantly associated with childlessness. Increasing age is weakly associated with decreasing childlessness, and when compared to men with primary or no education, those with 'higher' education have twice the odds of childlessness. Men with higher education are likely to postpone their partnership formation and/or childbearing longer than those with less education.

There are similarities and important differences with female childlessness in the same age group. Partnership status was important for both sexes. Age was not important for female childlessness amongst women 35+ years old, whereas it was still weakly important for men (who have children later). Additionally, whereas wealth *and* education were important for women, among men in this age group, only 'higher' education was important.

'Definitive' Male Childlessness (around age 50)

Finally, in the oldest group of men (aged 45-54), as in the oldest group of women (35-44), *age* was no longer significantly associated with decreased childlessness, reflecting the negligible effect of first births fathered by men over age 45. Unlike in the two younger age groups, education also appears to have little relationship to

childlessness, perhaps because fewer men in this group were highly educated, and it is higher education, rather than secondary, which typically displays the strongest (though still modest) relationship with childlessness.

Apart from the very strong relationship between childlessness and never having been in a cohabiting or married union (OR=58 compared to 'ever' in union), only *socioeconomic status* appears to have any relationship to definitive male childlessness. Men in the 'poorer' and 'middle' wealth quintiles are most likely to be childless, while the 'richest' men are least likely. This is consonant with the evidence from other countries, primarily Euro-American ones, where working class/poorer men tend to have higher levels of childlessness than richer men (Fieder et al. 2011; Parr 2010), and is likely to be at least partly a 'union' effect, whereby poorer men may have more difficulty finding and keeping a partner than the richest men.

Taken together, the results of the logistic regression modelling across the three male age groups indicate that: (1) partnership status (never marrying/cohabiting) is the overwhelming determinant of both early and late postponement of fatherhood, but especially of definitive childlessness; (2) a higher level of education is associated with early and late postponement, but is not an important factor for definitive childlessness, though this may change in future, as more highly educated cohorts of Colombian men age; and (3) socioeconomic status has a complex relationship with male childbearing. While richer men are more likely to postpone childbearing in the youngest age group, amongst the oldest, it is men who are in the poorer or middle economic groups who are most likely to be 'definitively' childless. This relationship to socioeconomic status appears to be a uniquely male effect; in contrast, amongst women, those in the richest wealth quintile are significantly more likely than their poorer peers to be childless, regardless of age group.

In Chapter 4, I showed that men's and women's 'ideal' childlessness was very similar. Given men's higher levels of overall childlessness, however, this means that more men are involuntarily/non-ideally childless than women at all ages. While some of men's 'non-ideal' childlessness may be involuntary (e.g. lack of a partner, as suggested by the multivariate results), other men might be 'non-ideally' childless because they are still hoping to have children in future, and so would more accurately be considered

‘temporarily’ childless, even if they are over 35. This was the general tendency expressed in the qualitative interviews I address next.

5.4 A Qualitative View of Men’s Childlessness

Characterising the interviewed (non-)fathers

This section focuses on a subset of the interviews I carried out in Bogotá. Largely owing to recruitment difficulties, only seven of my interviewees were men (out of 35 audio-recorded interviews). The men I interviewed were nonetheless open and candid about their life histories and their experiences of childlessness or fatherhood. As Table 5.5 shows, of these seven men, only one (Francisco) was a father when I interviewed him. None of the non-fathers had female partners who were currently pregnant. Recruitment was based on a semi-purposive, snowball sampling strategy. Instead of focusing on generalisability, as in the first part of this chapter, I focus on individual experiences and the personal meanings that men attribute to their experiences. I sought to answer the following questions:

1. How have childless men and fathers arrived at their respective positions (what are the ‘pathways’ to non-fatherhood)?
2. What has influenced men’s decisions (or not) to remain childless and how does this compare to their female peers?
3. How do these men envision fatherhood?

These data do not represent the experience of all childless men/fathers, or even all similar men, in Bogotá or Colombia. Aside from the sampling strategy itself, the small number of men interviewed further limits what I can conclusively say regarding Colombian fatherhood and non-fatherhood. However, these men’s perspectives provide valuable insights into the thought processes, aspirations, and social pressures that men and women without children face in an urban, middle-to-upper-middle-class Colombian setting.

In order to contextualise my analysis and interpretation of these men’s narratives, Table 5.5 presents some basic, socio-demographic characteristics that are important to their experiences and descriptions of parenthood or non-parenthood.

Table 5.5: Male Interviewees' Basic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age group	Any Children ?	'Ideal' & 'Desired' # of Children?	Marital Status	Partner Interviewed?	Stratum	Highest Level of Education
David	30s	No	2 / Undecided	Married	No	3-4	Undergrad
Sebastián	40s	No	2 / 1	Single	No	5-6	Postgrad
Nicolás	30s	No	2 / 2	Cohabiting	No	3-4	Postgrad
José	40s	No	0 / 0	Married [†]	Yes	5-6	Postgrad
Camilo	40s	No	2 / 1	Single	No	3-4	Postgrad
Daniel	40s	No	2+ / 0	Married [†]	Yes	3-4	Undergrad
Francisco	40s	2	5 / No more (has 2)	Married	No	3-4	Postgrad
Mean:	41.7 yrs		2.1 / 1				

[†] These two men were married to other interviewees: José to Gabriela and Daniel to Susana.

The men I interviewed were more homogeneous than their female counterparts: all were in their 30s and 40s and were middle class or above. All lived in middle- (Stratum 3-4) or upper-class (Stratum 5-6) areas of the city when we spoke, and had at least an undergraduate degree, while five of them had a postgraduate degree. This made them highly unusual for Colombian society as a whole, though slightly less exceptional amongst Bogotá's middle-class professionals. All these men were academically and professionally high-achieving but, unlike the women that I interviewed, did not typically describe a drive for personal autonomy as central to their non-parenthood.

The quantitative DHS analysis showed that 'never' having been in a cohabiting or married union is the personal characteristic most strongly associated with non-parenthood for women and men alike. Most interviewed men (all but two) were either cohabiting or married when we spoke, and one of the two 'single' men had a non-cohabiting partner. The other, Sebastián, had never cohabited with or married his previous partners, and in the DHS, would be classed as 'never in union'. Though he was not in a relationship when we spoke, he had had a succession of years-long relationships with women in the past. He (together with his ex-partners) had simply chosen not to cohabit. It is therefore important to remember that, in the DHS, 'never in union' refers to women or men who have never lived with a romantic partner, even though they may have had a succession of different, potentially very long-term non-cohabiting partners. None of the men self-identified as either bisexual or gay in the interview, and all described serious prior relationships with women.

I was only able to interview one father, an obvious limitation, although he provided a useful counterpoint to the narratives of men without children, when combined with the

considerable and growing literature addressing fatherhood in Latin America (for Mexico, see Gutmann 1996; for Colombia, see Henao 1997; Viveros-Vigoya 2002a). Unlike some female interviewees, none of the men openly described experiences of infertility, wherein they had previously wanted to have children, but could not have them for a biological reason. However, when it came to fertility ideals and desires, only one man (José), declared both an ‘ideal’ and ‘desired’ number of zero children, fulfilling the most stringent demographic definition of ‘voluntary childlessness’. Daniel had an ‘ideal’ of two or more children but told me that he did not want to have any children himself, and David said that his ‘ideal’ was two children, but he and his wife were ‘undecided’ about whether they themselves wanted children in future. Most of the men were instead ‘involuntarily’ or, as I argue, ‘temporarily’ or ‘ambivalently’ childless. All but one of the six childless men had an ideal of two or more children, and four said that they ‘would like to’ have children in future, despite being in their mid-30s or older. However, based on their self-descriptions, these men’s narratives problematise the idea that all forms of ‘involuntary’ childlessness are negative states that cause suffering. Because none of them were knowingly infertile and had not reached a point at which they felt fatherhood was completely unattainable, all those who wanted children in future still felt that this desire was achievable.

Gendered Pathways to Childlessness?

This section focuses on two of the three different ‘pathways’ to male childlessness that emerged from my interviews. The first pathway, most common amongst men who were not in long-term cohabiting/married relationships, represents what I have termed ‘ambivalent’ non-fatherhood, characterised by a diffuse desire for children, combined with the prioritisation of other life goals and personal preferences over the immediate achievement of fatherhood. The second pathway represents men who expressed a more concrete desire for children in future, and who were in committed relationships with women, meaning that they could potentially achieve that goal, but whose preferred version of hands-on fatherhood clashed with their circumstances, making them ‘temporarily’ childless. The third pathway represents a committed ‘childfree’ perspective. Only one man, José, fit this pathway. Given that there were few gendered differences between men’s and women’s so-called ‘child-freedom’, I will leave José’s story to the in-depth, qualitative discussion of voluntary childlessness in Chapter 6.

Sebastián and **Camilo** were both in their 40s, had postgraduate degrees, and technically ‘single’ (i.e. not married or living with someone) when interviewed. They had built their present lives partially around a desire for independence, as had many non-mothers, and yet neither of them was strictly ‘voluntarily’ childless. In the questionnaire portion of our interviews, both said their ‘ideal’ was two children, but that they wanted one child in future, adjusting their ideals downward slightly, due to their age and current circumstances. Given that childlessness was neither their ‘ideal’ nor their ‘desired’ fertility outcome, in the DHS analysis above, they would both be classed as ‘involuntarily’ childless. However, their stories nuance this description and draw attention to the limitations of relying solely on numerical data. Based on their narratives, I would not describe either one as ‘involuntarily’ childless. I will instead argue that their indefinite postponement of fatherhood, combined with positive feelings towards the idea of being a father in the abstract represent a more ambivalent, or ambiguous, attitude to fatherhood and non-fatherhood alike. Here, I focus on this ambivalence and the journey towards ‘wanting’ children that both Camilo and Sebastian described. In Chapter 7, I revisit their stories to contrast their definitions of ‘independence’ with those of non-mothers.

Both men expressed a diffuse desire for children, sometime in the future. When I asked specifically whether he wanted children, Sebastián described his situation in the following way:

I never thought about it until recently. [...] You know, I never specifically asked myself, ‘Do I want to have kids? Do I want to be a dad?’ I never thought about it so explicitly, let’s say. But I also never ruled it out. Not like my sister, who clearly says ‘I do not want children.’ It was always something that was there, though, as time passed. That’s why I responded ‘yes’ to your first question about wanting children. Today, yes, I would like to have one. But, it’s also not something that I’m frantically searching for, you know?

While Sebastián liked children and the idea of fatherhood, he had no concrete plans to have them – not yet, as he was going through a professionally-demanding stage when we spoke. The idea that he was not “frantically” searching for a partner and a baby was contrasted with his experiences of dating women in their 30s who, as he put it, “were not joking around” when it came to having children. While Sebastián spoke positively, and extendedly, about fatherhood, he framed it as an abstract possibility rather than a concrete life goal:

After this? Yeah, it could be *amazing* [*fascinante*] – it wouldn't bother me at all [*no me molesta en lo absoluto*]. [...] But, the idea of not having children doesn't upset me either, you know? Thinking about it right now, I don't think I would feel disappointed if I don't have children. Now, I don't know how I'll feel in 5 or 10 years, but today, no.

The juxtaposition of the two ideas at the start of this quote express Sebastián's ambivalence perfectly: on the one hand, he describes the idea of having children as potentially "amazing", and on the other, he finishes his thought with a far less positive "it wouldn't bother me at all", emphasising the fact that, while exciting as a potential future, fatherhood is not a priority right now and will perhaps never become one. While Sebastián's relaxed approach to fatherhood seems removed from immediate time-based pressures (e.g. of advancing age), by admitting that he does not know how he might feel in "5 or 10 years", he acknowledges the potential changeability not only of plans for fatherhood, but also how changes to those plans over time might affect him emotionally, in an as-yet unknowable way.

Camilo similarly liked the idea of fatherhood, partly because he felt it would provide him with a lasting human connection – and with someone who might accompany him in old age – his answers to my questions about fatherhood reflected uncertainty, and he described moving between different states of mind over time. When he was younger, he said he felt "scared" by girlfriends' suggestions that they might have children together, but as he got older and dated women more seriously, including one woman he considered having children with, his opinions changed. This gradual transformation alongside a highly contextualised desire for children was a common pattern. Most of the men I interviewed, and others I engaged with less formally during fieldwork, viewed having children as part of a package that would tie them to another person – not just to their hypothetical child, but also to the child's mother, forever. Camilo had changed his thinking about children while dating his most recent ex-girlfriend, Johana, who was also the only partner with whom Camilo had ever cohabited. Unfortunately, they were not on the same page, as he told me: "she didn't want kids" because "she felt too young, even though she was 37". Ironically, although Camilo draws attention to the contrast between Johana's actual age and her feeling "too young", he spent a lot of time talking about how, despite having had "a lot of girlfriends" in the past, he himself had never felt ready for fatherhood until dating Johana.

Reflecting on the interplay between these interviews and the preceding analysis of quantitative DHS data, for example, Sebastián’s perspective highlights the fact that, as cross-sectional data, the DHS – and these interviews – can only provide a snapshot at one time point, whereas a longer-term view of fertility desires and their influence on achieved fertility is more informative (for examples using longitudinal European data, see: Berrington 2015; Toulemon & Testa 2005). A long-term qualitative view would be particularly informative for individuals with less fixed, less imminent desires for parenthood, like Sebastián and Camilo, to explore how their feelings regarding fatherhood might change over time, as they pass through new life stages and experiences.

It is striking that neither of these 40-something men had seriously considered the question of having children until relatively recently. This provides a strong contrast with women’s experiences. Women are constantly confronted by the issue of motherhood – in casual conversation, in popular culture, in romantic relationships. While even the youngest women I interviewed (in their mid-20s) had been explicitly asked about their desire for children by friends and family, most men had no similar experience until they were in their 30s, if at all. Despite being married, David, for example, felt that Colombian society was “indifferent to the theme of childlessness”. While some women felt similarly to David,⁵⁰ most non-mothers strongly disagreed with this idea, citing personal examples of interest in their fertility or stigma associated with not having children. In contrast, none of the men I interviewed, apart from Daniel and Nicolás felt that they had been pressured about their fertility. For Daniel, all the pressure came via his wife’s family, which suggests that the preoccupation with women’s childbearing plans is occasionally transferred onto their male partners. Similarly, Nicolás primarily felt interrogated when at weddings and other family events with his girlfriend, where people would ask “So, are you next? What about a baby?” and similar questions, reflecting the largely situational nature of reproductive questioning for men, again attached to their association with a female partner. Their longer reproductive lifespan⁵¹ gave most men them the freedom to move through life

⁵⁰ For example, Isabel, a married, childfree woman in her late-30s felt that, if anything, Colombian society treated women and men without children better than parents, such as by providing greater workplace flexibility.

⁵¹ Though understudied, there is some evidence of age-related fertility decline amongst men, albeit less dramatic than for women (Harris et al. 2011). There are also social ‘upper age limits’ on when most

without as much general interest in their fertility, and without feeling pressured to decide definitively one way or the other. Unlike childless women in their 30s and 40s who still ‘want’ to be mothers, these men are able to indefinitely delay finding a partner, ‘settling down’, and thinking about foregoing other goals that might conflict with parenthood, without worrying that they might leave it ‘too late’ to ever have children. This luxury of time to delay fatherhood has made these men into what British demographer Ann Berrington (2004) has termed “perpetual postponers” well into their 40s. Most men – fathers and non-fathers – described feeling like they were just getting things together in their 30s, around the same time that women start to feel their childbearing ‘window’ starting to close, exemplifying a completely different fertility schedule. This is partly cultural – late first motherhood is still rare in Colombia, and as fertility has declined, late motherhood at any parity has become relatively uncommon.

This situation exemplifies several biosocial tendencies. First, it reflects the differential pressures of traditional gender roles, which position motherhood as central to feminine identity while fatherhood’s relationship to masculinity is more tangential.⁵² Men are simply not expected to reflect on having, or not having, children. Secondly, the finite nature of female fertility (a stronger so-called ‘biological clock’) contrasts with the perception that men are indefinitely fertile, and relieves most men of the time pressure felt by their female peers. It is not until they reach the *social* ‘upper age limit’ on fatherhood that it becomes less feasible to indefinitely postpone becoming a father themselves. Liefbroer & Billari (2010: 294) argue for the importance of ‘norms’ within demography, and identify three that are relevant to family-formation: “age, quantum, and sequencing norms”. While Colombian men and women are subject to all of these norms, I will focus here on what these authors refer to as ‘gender-specific age norms’, highlighting the fact that, in subsequent research, Billari et al. (2011: 618) found that, across 25 European countries, 96.4% of respondents perceived a “social age deadline” for women’s childbearing, compared to 90.2% for men’s, with mean age deadlines for women and men of 41.7 and 47.3 years, respectively. Since Colombians tend to have

people view it is acceptable to have children, though these tend to be higher for men than for women (see Billari et al. 2011).

⁵² For example, Viveros-Vigoya (2001: 246) notes how Mexican men tended to prioritise “qualities such as being a boss, a worker, or provider” over fatherhood in their conceptions of masculinity.

children younger than Europeans,⁵³ it is likely that social age norms around older motherhood in Colombia would be even stricter, and would set an upper limit lower than 42 years.⁵⁴ My interviews suggest that this upper limit exists in Colombia, too – e.g. **Sebastián** set age 50 as his personal upper limit for fatherhood – men appear to benefit from more flexible biological and social deadlines. Finally, but importantly, in order to become fathers, most men must either engage in an extended relationship with a woman or go through the long process of adoption (where adoption by single fathers is legal). Unfortunately for those men who desire fatherhood, but for whom finding a suitable partner is difficult, single fatherhood is simply not as achievable as single motherhood, making men’s parental dreams even more dependent on their romantic relationships than women’s are.

‘Temporary’ Non-fatherhood and the Tension between Ideals and Realities: “I would like to be a mother, too”

Most of the men I interviewed idealised parenthood. For example, when I asked Nicolás (late 30s, ‘temporarily’ childless, cohabiting) about not having children yet, and whether he might have them in future, he started by reflecting on the love he felt for his mother, particularly, before saying “When your parents go [die], you need to transfer that love over, you know? You need to feel like it’s necessary to keep living, that you have to keep fighting for someone else.” He went on to describe his desire to be actively involved in his (future) child’s daily life and their most basic care – a part of life that he thought not many fathers had the opportunity to be involved in, and that others opted out of – what he described as a process whereby “taking care of the child’s wellbeing grows into love [*‘se transforma en amor’*] – you know, for the one who burps you, who wipes your bum, who wipes the boogers off your face?” Here, he means the love of the child for his parents, contrasting these intimate, caring activities traditionally carried out by mothers, with a different kind of love that was historically

⁵³ The median age of Colombian women’s first birth is just 21.7 years versus a mean of 28.9 years for women in EU-28 countries. Colombian data refer to women aged 25-49, in the 2015 DHS (ICF 2012). EU data from 2015, EuroStat’s “mean age of women at birth of first child.” Source: EuroStat Fertility Indicators (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/data/database>). [Accessed: 23/Jun/19].

⁵⁴ There is some evidence that only about 2% of Colombians consider first motherhood after age 30 to be the ‘ideal’, though this should be interpreted cautiously, as it comes from a newspaper report on a survey by the Clínica Eugén (a fertility clinic), whose original data/survey report is not available online. (See *El Espectador*, 19/Nov/2016, “Seis de cada 10 colombianas apoyan congelar óvulos para retrasar maternidad”; <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/salud/seis-de-cada-10-colombianas-apoyan-congelar-ovulos-retr-articulo-666385> [Accessed: 23/Jun/19]).

associated with fathers – a more hierarchical, distant, imposing love, as a form of respect or deference “for the one who arrives home and punishes you.” Nicolás was very clear that he was opposed to reproducing the latter form of fatherhood in his own home, instead telling me “I would like to be a mother, too [*Yo quisiera ser mamá, también*].” While this may be an unusual way for Nicolás to express his desire for active fatherhood, it was echoed in another interview.

Luisa (late 40s, mother of two) described her own (male) partner’s approach to fatherhood in the same way: “He was a mother, the ‘motherhood’ ideal. [...] He took care of them, cooked, changed diapers, ... he even said things like ‘If only I could breastfeed’. He wished he could nurse them!”⁵⁵ Here, ‘motherhood’ is standing in for new approach to parenting: one that is gender-neutral, egalitarian, shared, and which takes an active role in day-to-day caregiving. However, in Nicolás’s case, he was uncertain exactly how he and his girlfriend could achieve this type of shared ‘maternity’, saying “I don’t see how, in the city, with my work and so many things to do, one can do it, how I could raise my kids myself. I want it to be ‘equal’ [*igualitario*] between her and me, you know? [...] So, what I would really love would be a year for both of us [to jointly raise our children].”⁵⁶ While Nicolás dreams of a year of joint parental leave, to allow him and his partner to live out this dreams of shared, traditional ‘motherhood’, as he put it, under current Colombian law, he would be entitled to just 8 days of paternity leave. Nicolás’s ideas of active fatherhood bring some of the tensions between ideals and realities into sharp relief. Today, as Crespi & Ruspini (2015: 355) have argued, it is not only women who have to learn “[h]ow to balance paid work, other interests and relationships with responsibilities and pleasures of childrearing”, but many men, too.

My interviews suggested that many middle-class Colombian men have internalised an involved, active, and resource-intensive ideal of fatherhood. Most men felt that it was important to have the time and money to actively parent, rather than leaving this to grandparents (who firstly might ‘spoil’ the child, and secondly, have already raised

⁵⁵ Luisa drew attention to the fact that, unlike in English, linguistically, in Spanish, there are only words for ‘fatherhood’ [*paternidad*] and ‘motherhood’ [*maternidad*], but no commonly-used, separate word for ‘parenthood’, since *paternidad* is used for both ‘fatherhood’ and ‘parenthood’.

⁵⁶ In Colombia, men are currently entitled to 8 days of paternity leave, while maternity leave is now 18 weeks long. Both are paid through the social security system, administered by ‘*Entidades Promotoras de Salud (EPS)*’, or ‘Health Promoting Entities’, which are essentially health insurance companies.

their own children and therefore deserve a rest) or to non-family members, who might mistreat the child or not provide appropriate socialisation (see MacDonald (2010) for a discussion of the issues American women viewed as important when choosing nannies and other forms of childcare). When I asked why he had not yet had children, **David** (late 30s, ‘temporary’ non-father, married), for example, told me:

So the first thing that seems really important to me is that in order to be a dad you have to share a lot of time. These days, fatherhood tends more towards the economic side of things, and I don’t want to do that. Like, [...] I have a child, but then I also have a nanny to raise it. [...] People have children who they never see. I don’t want that.

Like Nicolás, David also has an ideal of hands-on fatherhood, which is usually interpreted as a non-traditional role in the Colombian context (Henaó 1997; Villanueva Tabares 2015). However, the combination of those ideals with a 50-hour-a-week job, and a wife who also works full-time, has placed his hands-on, child-centric parenting ideals out of practical reach for the moment. In these men’s narratives, the conflicts between work and domestic life frame the decisions of a ‘new’ generation of men as they aim for active fatherhood, just as they have affected previous generations of working mothers. While both of these men could afford to hire a nanny to take care of their children, or ask for help from their own parents, like many childless women, they actively rejected the idea, questioning why anyone would have children if they could not actually invest their own time in raising them.

It should be clear that many men in contemporary Colombia, as elsewhere, value actively participating in their children’s upbringing and, at least ideally, aspire to a relatively equal/equitable division of domestic labour. Recent work from Spain, assessing men’s take-up of paternity leave and their fertility desires has shown that those men who took paternity leave (and who are therefore assumed to undertake a more active fathering role), adjusted their fertility desires downward, and that those couples had longer birth intervals and fewer children overall (Farré & González 2019). Many of the non-fathers I spoke to had very ‘intensive’ fatherhood ideals, but these ideals were coupled with the lowest possible fertility: no children (yet). This suggests that there is potentially a relationship between intensive, time-consuming, and emotionally-demanding views of parenthood and its avoidance or delay in the Colombian context, for both women and men (I will return to discuss this in Chapter 8, in relation to women’s ideals).

Finally, men typically described arriving at the decision to have a baby as a deliberate process and a joint decision. Though Nicolás and his girlfriend are slowly moving in the direction of parenthood, they have not yet explicitly decided one way or another:

We haven't had a chat where we plan out, 'When we've accomplished X, we'll have a baby', no. Right now, we're trying to buy a place together, and maybe that's a step towards that future. We've already said, we've had that conversation, saying 'We need another bedroom', you know? Like, for your mother to stay in, or maybe for a child? Or to store things? But, yeah, the idea becomes more normal for us every day, so I think that the time will come where it's a decision we have to make.

He further articulated how having a baby by accident is uncommon now that contraception is very reliable. This means that the decision must be taken actively, engaging with your partner in that discussion, rather than just letting nature take its course. This is a classic example of the reversal of the direction of decision-making within the different ideas of 'demographic transitions': whereas during the 'first demographic transition', the decision that needed to be made was when to *stop* having children and start contracepting; now, the key decision is when to stop contraception, in order to have children. However, this decision arguably looms larger the longer first-time parenthood is delayed. This also reflects a socioeconomic-/education-based gradient, since young parenthood is particularly concentrated in less well-off sectors of Colombian society. In addition to differential selection into postponement, based on other characteristics, such as education or wealth, there is also an element of luck involved in not having impregnated someone (or been impregnated) by accident earlier in life, which most interviewees, including other men, had acknowledged made them fortunate.⁵⁷

Living out the 'New' Fatherhood: Personal and Social Transformations

As the only father I interviewed, Francisco was unique. When I asked what being a father meant to him, he started, after searching for words, by telling me how it was, simply, "a unique/one-of-a-kind experience [*una experiencia única*]". He was also frank about his wife's first pregnancy having been a surprise. Like the ambivalent non-fathers above, he said that, when she became pregnant, he was in his early 30s and had not even considered fatherhood yet. When his (now) wife became pregnant, he had

⁵⁷ Though I did not specifically ask about abortion or contraception, several interviewees, male and female, did refer to their own – or family members' – experiences of unplanned pregnancy followed by abortion. Unplanned pregnancies more often led to unplanned parenthood, which underlines the element of luck or 'chance' involved in avoiding young parenthood.

imminent plans to leave Colombia and study abroad. She was hesitant to move while pregnant, and so Francisco put those dreams aside and stayed in Colombia. He said:

then, my daughter was born, and ... I think [it was] the most marvellous, spectacular thing I've ever felt, ... it's the most incredible experience. I don't know exactly how to describe it, but you feel it in your mind, in your body, even now, at their ages – they're 10 and 7 years old.

Here, even though birth and motherhood are more closely associated with female bodily and emotional transformation, Francisco actively mirrors this discourse when describing fatherhood. I could see tears welling in his eyes as he continued to tell me about fatherhood, emphasising that he did not want this stage of the experience (with two children under 10) to end, but recognising that one day, his children will “leave the nest [*van a volar*]”. At this point he explained how his previous mindset from more than a decade before, of not even contemplating children, had, over time, become an ‘ideal’ of five children (in a world with no other constraints on his fertility): “It’s so marvellous that I would love to repeat it again, and it’s because of that that I told you ‘five’ kids [in the questionnaire].” This is a good example of how interviewees ‘storified’ their lives over the course of life history interviews, in a process that Lloyd-Sherlock (2008: 784) explains, can “to varying degrees exhibit self-justification or self-blame, as well as a tendency to order random events.” Here, Francisco rectifies the contradiction between having originally not wanted any children, having two children (which is the ‘ideal’ number for most Colombian women and men), and his own personal ‘ideal’ of five or more children.

One of my questions for parents related to whether they felt that they had missed out on anything or had to sacrifice things for their children. While many mothers turned this question around to describe all the things their children had brought to their lives, Francisco simply said “Yes, yes, but a normal sacrifice,” before telling me about hobbies that he no longer engaged in, and friendships for which he no longer had as much time. More interestingly, he framed his own personal goals (studying), which he had put on the back burner following the unplanned birth of his first child, as having shifted since becoming a father, due to a different kind of opportunity cost:

The other thing was having to delay my studies indefinitely, because there’s a decision that has to be made – studying now means that I lose valuable time with my children. In economic terms, too, I need to give them everything that I can to have a good life.

He described work in a similar way, framing it in terms of wanting to spend more time with his family: “I run home because, as they say, home awaits [*mi casa me espera*].” Francisco described how, every morning, he woke his children up and got them ready for school, as well as helping them with their homework in the evenings and reading to them before bed. On the weekends, he said they spent time together doing sports, like swimming and cycling. Although Francisco placed a lot of emphasis on activities that he did with his children – sports and helping them academically – he also described doing at least some of the quotidian activities of childcare, like getting his kids ready for school and taking them to the dentist or doctor.

Whether this is an idealised version of his weekly schedule matters less than the fact that today’s urban middle-class professionals highly value this type of active fatherhood. He also described how his current approach to fatherhood and his own ideas around gender differed from his parents’:

My dad never let me wash the dishes, make the bed, wash the clothes – he would shout ‘What are you doing? There are a million women around here to do those jobs!’ [...] But I think we’ve changed a lot. Being a dad today is a huge commitment. I think it was much easier to be a father in my dad’s day, because, of course, his role was to be a provider. So, the worries around ‘How are the kids doing, academically? How are they feeling? Who are their friends?’ [...] All that fell to my mum.

Here, Francisco describes the heavier ‘emotional labour’ (Wharton 2009: 154–55) of modern fatherhood, and reflects on what Crespi & Ruspini (2015: 354) describe as “contemporary societies’ [...] contradictory discourses for fathers and fathers-to-be”, which simultaneously emphasise “that fathers are to take care of financial providing (as breadwinners)” as well as recently-transformed discourses “that describe highly involved and caring fathers.” This transformation means that men and women’s roles are changing in unison, though arguably at different paces. While women’s transition out of the home and into ‘breadwinner’ roles is advanced in Colombia, as elsewhere, the global transformation of men’s domestic roles not only started later, but is taking longer: what England (2010: 149) has termed an ‘uneven and stalled’ gender revolution (see also the literature on women’s ‘second shift’, such as Hochschild & Machung (1990), and on gender revolutions, Goldscheider et al. (2015)).

Because Francisco and his wife both worked, he described, in detail, the ways in which they shared the childcare and housework. However, their status as a middle-class professional, double-income household allowed them to buy in extra help. A

maid/nanny [*‘una persona que nos acompaña/colabora’*] helped them with childcare and household tasks three days a week, splitting the burden three ways. While Francisco portrayed himself as a ‘new’ man, and the way he spoke about fatherhood largely supported this, it would have been interesting to also interview his wife regarding the same issues. Even in the absence of a corroborating narrative, I would argue that Francisco’s use of discourse portrays a fundamental shift in what aspects of fatherhood are valued by many modern Colombian men, away from authoritarian provider roles, and towards the provision of hands-on, ‘mothering’ care by fathers, as well. While ‘uneven’, the second half of the so-called ‘gender revolution’ is underway, and is changing how men see themselves, their partners, and their actual or imagined future children.

5.5 Discussion & Conclusions

As expected, based on the literature from other contexts, Colombian men’s and women’s childlessness differs in important ways. Men have their children later, remaining childless for longer, and more men end their reproductive years without children (i.e. 7% of women over 35 are childless, compared to 12% of men of men over 40). Relationship status has the strongest and most consistent association with non-fatherhood, as men who have never married or cohabited are significantly less likely to be fathers than their partnered peers (as was also the case for women). Socioeconomic status also displays an interesting and complex relationship to male childlessness over the life course, wherein poorer men are less likely to be childless at younger ages (to postpone fatherhood), but more likely to end their reproductive lives childless than richer men (to experience ‘definitive’ childlessness). The oldest Colombian non-fathers (aged 45-54) tend to be socioeconomically in the bottom half or so of all men. This is the opposite of the relationship between childlessness and wealth observed in women, and may have important implications for these childless, relatively poorer men’s social networks and, consequently, for their health and wellbeing in older age.

The direction of causation is unclear. It could flow from poverty to childlessness, wherein poorer men (with less stable economic prospects) have a difficult time finding a partner because of the (heterosexual) gendered expectation that men will provide for their families, while their female partners dedicate their time to childcare. Conversely,

there is some evidence that fathers are richer by virtue of fatherhood. Literature from Europe/North America suggests that men receive a fatherhood ‘bonus’ in the job market, working more hours and earning more than non-fathers (see Gibb et al. 2014; Glauber 2008; Hodges & Budig 2010). Here, not becoming a father has a negative impact men’s earning potential. Regardless of whether being poor leads to childlessness or being childless plays a role in later-life poverty, the association indicates that special attention may need to be paid to these men to prevent social isolation. Childless men tend to have poorer wellbeing and shallower social networks than childless women (Dykstra & Keizer 2009; Kohli & Albertini 2009), though studies have also found that much of the negative effect of childlessness amongst unpartnered men was actually attributable to their partnership status (i.e. lacking a stable partner), rather than to not having children (Keizer et al. 2010).

Reflecting on my quantitative and qualitative analysis together, while the men I interviewed were significantly better off than the older generation of men who are childless in the DHS, they were more similar to the men in the ‘middle’ childless group from the DHS, where higher education was the second-best predictor of not having children from ages 35-44, after ‘never’ having been in union. In this sense, Sebastián again fits the demographic profile of a childless man very well, as do the others, to a lesser degree. What is unfortunately missing from this study is the perspective of the slightly older men (aged 45-54), who, in the DHS tended to be less well-off and, again, whose childlessness was most strongly associated with their union status. While José was in this age group, he was upper-middle class, married to a female partner, and he was committed to voluntary childlessness (see Chapter 6).

Research addressing elderly childless women’s living arrangements, specifically in Latin America (De Vos 2012, 2014a), found that these women tended to live with extended family (i.e. nieces/nephews or siblings). I am not aware of any research specifically addressing older, childless Latin American men’s living arrangements, although there is research addressing older men and women’s relationships to their children and grandchildren in later life (e.g. Lloyd-Sherlock & Locke 2008). The relationship between men’s family networks (or lack thereof) and their social and financial wellbeing is also poorly understood in the Colombian context and is an important avenue for future research.

Whether biologically or socially, ‘fatherhood’ is rarely framed as equally significant to ‘motherhood’ – for either parents or their offspring. This has led other scholars to reframe men as the true ‘second sex’, with respect to reproduction (Inhorn et al. 2009b). Biologically, men are (as yet) unable to bear children, and their ‘physical separation’ from pregnancy (Dudgeon & Inhorn 2009) means that they play a secondary role in their children’s gestation and birth. Additionally, at the population level, mothers around the world continue to invest more time in parenting than fathers, though the extent to which this is true varies cross-culturally (Barker 2006: 44); similarly, where one parent is primarily or wholly responsible for their children, single fatherhood continues to be far rarer than single motherhood, meaning that those fathers who are sole caregivers have fewer role models and a smaller potential support network of other fathers going through similar experiences.

Despite their secondary role, research has shown that many men do frame fatherhood as a personally-desired identity. Blackstone & Stewart (2016) note that, although men face external pressure to become parents, this tends to be exerted on them less intensely than on women – a finding echoed here. Existing research on men’s decisions to parent indicates that their internal drives are more important. For example, Gerson’s 1993 study showed that socioeconomically successful men in the US chose parenthood after “becoming disillusioned with their fast-track careers” which were externally rewarding but did not provide the “intrinsic rewards” they felt fatherhood would (Blackstone & Stewart 2016: 297). Even in the absence of ‘fast-track’ careers, fatherhood offers men a route to prove themselves and accrue social respectability (Augustine et al. 2009, in Blackstone & Stewart 2016). These results are echoed in the Latin American literature, with Viveros-Vigoya (2001: 245) arguing that, across multiple studies, fatherhood “has emerged as the highest form of male responsibility,” representing adulthood and constituting one of the most important (potential) experiences in men’s lives.

Not only is fatherhood viewed as an enriching role, with fewer of the potential ‘costs’ traditionally attached to motherhood, it is also beneficial for men’s wellbeing, especially as they get older (Dykstra & Keizer 2009; Kohli & Albertini 2009). Though obvious, it is important to remember that men who are *involuntarily* childless, whether because of infertility (Hanna & Gough 2015; Pujari & Unisa 2014) or circumstances (Hadley 2018; Hadley & Hanley 2011), are deeply emotionally affected by this.

Dudgeon & Inhorn (2009) draw attention to how masculine norms around ‘strength’, along with the expectation that they will experience and/or show less emotion can be harmful, when combined with their ‘secondary’, or less active, role in reproduction. For example, following infertility or pregnancy loss, men are usually expected to be ‘strong’ in order to support their wives through a difficult period, which may cause men to mask or minimise their own personal suffering/sadness.

This highlights the historically- and contextually-situated nature of ‘fatherhood’ (and non-fatherhood) as one of many masculine roles. As I have attempted to show in my characterisation of different forms of non-fatherhood, the meanings of these masculine roles are subject to substantial change over time and according to social context, as well as interacting with individual personalities and circumstances. Drawing on Hernán Henao’s (1997) work in Colombia, Viveros-Vigoya (2001: 246) highlights the historical transformation of fatherhood in Colombia, from a ‘traditional’ image of the father as ‘unreachable’ and authoritarian, who played almost no role in everyday caring activities (promoted by the Church and mothers as much as by fathers themselves), to a more contemporary ‘fatherhood’ marked by men’s active engagements with their partner and children. Writing nearly twenty years ago, Viveros-Vigoya argued that Colombian fathers were already “expected to interact more with family members and to enjoy their home environments, very different from the fathers of bygone times, when male roles and values were determined by men’s lives outside the domestic sphere” (2001: 246). This transformation is ongoing and was clearly communicated by all the men I interviewed – whether as part of the narrativised practices of actual fatherhood, as in Francisco’s case, or in the type of fatherhood to which non-fathers aspire.

Chapter 6: Choosing ‘Childfreedom’? Exploring the Narratives and Experiences of ‘Voluntarily’ Childless Colombian Women and Men

I want to travel the world, I want to get to know things, I want to do other things, I have a partner to accompany me in those adventures, and I don't need to have kids. So, I think that that's changed over time – the idea of needing to have children. (Daniel, early 40s, married, ‘broadly’ or semi-voluntarily childless)

6.1 Introduction

In late May 2017, while living in Bogotá, I received several excited WhatsApp messages from friends familiar with my thesis topic. They sent me links to newspaper articles publicising the findings of a study carried out by the Colombian University of the Savannah [*Universidad de la Sabana*]. Most of the headlines stated something along the lines of: “Six in 10 Colombians do not want to have children” while others walked their readers through “The reasons why Colombians do not want to have children” (see Figure 6.1). The *Family Thermometer* [*Termómetro de la Familia*] study that these headlines were publicising was reported as though 6 in 10 Colombians had declared themselves to be voluntarily childless, or perhaps that was how my friends and I had wishfully read the headlines, given my thesis topic. In reality, parents and non-parents alike were asked: “Would you like to have more children than you already have, or if you do not have children, would you like to?” (Instituto de la Familia 2017). Nearly 60% of respondents answered ‘No’, generating the headline coverage; however, almost 80% of that sample consisted of adults who were already parents. The survey population itself was also heavily skewed, as it relied on a self-selected convenience sample of about 1,500 Colombian women and men with internet access. Only 7.5% of the Family Thermometer study respondents self-identified as stratum 1 or 2 (out of 6), which are the poorest strata, whereas in Bogotá, for example, the actual proportion of the population living in a Stratum 1 or 2 area is closer to 50% of the population (Secretaría Distrital de Planeación 2014). Childlessness and smaller ‘ideal’ numbers of children tend to be clustered in with higher socioeconomic status and levels of education, though there is a strong two-child family size preference in Colombia across all groups, as shown in Chapter 4.

Figure 6.1: Internet clippings from major Colombian news organisations, reporting on the ‘Family Thermometer’ Study’s Findings

The figure displays four screenshots of news articles from Colombian media outlets, all reporting on the findings of the 'Family Thermometer' study. The articles are arranged in a 2x2 grid:

- Top Left (El Espectador):** Headline: "Seis de cada 10 colombianos no quieren tener hijos: Universidad de La Sabana". Sub-headline: "El 'termómetro de la familia' fue una encuesta en la que participaron 1.527 personas mayores de edad de diferentes regiones del país, que respondieron sobre la opción de tener más hijos, las condiciones socioeconómicas para ser padre en Colombia, el reconocimiento jurídico de la familia, accesos a los servicios públicos, entre otras." Includes a photo of a family.
- Top Right (El Colombiano):** Headline: "Seis de cada diez colombianos no quiere tener hijos: estudio". Includes a photo of a man holding a child.
- Bottom Left (Noticias Caracol):** Headline: "Seis de cada diez colombianos no piensan en tener hijos, ¿por qué?". Includes a photo of a family sitting at a table.
- Bottom Right (El Tiempo):** Headline: "Las razones por las cuales los colombianos no quieren tener hijos". Sub-headline: "Más de la mitad de personas se abstiene de tomar esta decisión. Vea la encuesta de UniSabana." Includes a photo of children running in a park.

Sources (Top left to bottom right): *El Espectador* (2017); *El Colombiano* (2017); *Noticias Caracol* (2017); *El Tiempo* (2017).

Nonetheless, these headlines arguably illustrate a changing perspective on parenthood in Colombian society. First, they demonstrate that having children, as well as deciding how many children to have, are now framed as conscious choices, rather than accepted eventualities. Secondly, although the *Family Thermometer* study included parents and non-parents alike, even some of the surveyed women and men without children felt able to say that they do not want to have children in future, which itself reflects important social changes that have occurred over the past 30 or so years. Thirdly, with respect to the reasons expressed for not wanting to have any (more) children, the newspapers reported that Colombia’s socioeconomic conditions were paramount, as

60% of respondents gave the country a 1 or 2 (economically deficient) on a scale going up to 5. Most people also felt that government support for parents (e.g. through access to paid leave, etc.) was poor. This reflects a widely-held pessimism and scepticism about the government that I often encountered during fieldwork, and my interviews also highlighted the perceived expense and low level of support for parents.

Beyond the headlines, then, media coverage of the *Family Thermometer* study focused attention on important social issues, namely how ‘family-friendly’ or ‘unfriendly’ society is. Colombia is a relatively socio-culturally friendly place for children, and families are encouraged.⁵⁸ However, the material and political conditions that contextualise both having children and raising them in a safe and healthy environment are more problematic: the State is widely viewed as ‘weak’ and deficient (Palacios 2006: xiii), with infrastructural issues manifested in complaints about gridlocked traffic and ailing public transportation in Bogotá, alongside widespread fear of petty crimes like muggings and other forms of theft or victimisation (Ardanaz et al. 2014). While safety has improved over time, Colombia continues to have relatively high rates of crime like interpersonal violence and murder, in both public and domestic settings (Friedemann-Sanchez & Lovaton 2012; Vallejo et al. 2018). All of these contextual issues may affect men’s and women’s desire to have children and their ‘ideal family size’.

The research question I seek to answer in this chapter is:

1. What are the self-identified key factors in the process that leads urban, middle-class Colombians to ‘choose’ childlessness and how does this affect and interact with other aspects of their lives?

This qualitative chapter complements Chapter 4, which quantitatively explored ‘voluntary’ childlessness using DHS data. Here, I present important themes that emerged primarily from data collected during my fieldwork, particularly from in-depth interviews with 16 women and men who can be considered ‘voluntarily’ childless.

⁵⁸ This was broadly expressed across my interviews, and even the *Lonely Planet* guide to ‘Life in Colombia’ saw fit to warn readers, sweepingly: “All Colombians [...] are bound by strong family ties, not just to immediate blood relatives but also to their extended family, and childless visitors over 21 years of age will be quizzed endlessly on their plans to start a family” (Lonely Planet 2017).

6.2 Who are the ‘voluntarily’ childless?

While some researchers focus exclusively on the ‘childfree’ (i.e. ‘voluntarily childless’), I instead sought to capture a wide range of experiences, interviewing anyone without biological children, across the “continuum of childlessness” (Berrington 2015: 2; Letherby 2002; McAllister & Clarke 1998). This covers the spectrum of intentionality from completely voluntary to completely involuntary childlessness, encompassing all forms in between. The 27 childless people I interviewed had no biological children, nor did they identify as parents socially (e.g. through adoption or emotionally/practically involved step-parenthood). Sixteen of the 35 respondents could be considered ‘voluntarily’ childless in some form, based on their answers to the DHS questions regarding their desired and ideal number of children, and on their self-description. I have distinguished between those who are ‘strictly’ and ‘broadly’ voluntarily childless based on their ideal and desired number of children, with ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless women/men here referring to those who have both an ideal and desired number of zero children. ‘Broadly’ voluntarily childless individuals are those who do not desire children in future, but whose ‘ideal’ family size includes 1+ children.

As I will explain, not all are confirmed and reconfirmed ‘childfree’ (though some were), and many were previously amenable to a life with children (or, for younger women, are open to the idea that their thoughts might change in future, but when interviewed, self-identified as childless *by choice* and did not want children in future). Some prioritised other aspects of their lives and/or the circumstances never aligned in the right way for them to have children – yet, in order to be included here, they typically did not express strong regrets about this or describe times in the past where they desperately wanted children they could not (and still do not) have. In short, the boundaries between circumstantial and voluntary childlessness are complicated and blurry, and the 16 people profiled here (see Table 6.1) might not all be considered ‘voluntarily’ childless by other researchers with stricter criteria. Indeed, given the incomparability of the results of question regarding ‘desired’ children in future across different DHS rounds, in the quantitative analysis in Chapter 4, I relied on a definition of voluntary childlessness that focused only on ‘ideal’ number of children. In the DHS it was very rare for women to express an ideal of ‘zero’ children, alongside a desire to

have one or more children in future. Similarly, here, none of the 12 interviewees who had an ‘ideal’ of zero children ‘desired’ a child in future.

In contrast, and again in keeping with the DHS data, the opposite relationship between these two questions was more common: many women with an ‘ideal’ of 1+ children expressed *no desire* to have them in future. This reflects a partly age-related pattern, whereby older women with no children adjust their fertility desires downwards (sometimes to ‘zero’, as below). I also hypothesise that, since ‘ideal’ fertility is a less concrete idea, which is not as bound by other limitations, it is more open to counterfactual personal imagining or to construing the question as a generally ‘ideal’ family size (for others). This figure therefore remains relatively higher. Finally, I have excluded one interviewee who expressed a ‘desired’ number of zero children: Luz María, a married, 50-something non-mother with an ‘ideal’ of six children (she herself was from a large family), who had previously tried, unsuccessfully, to have children. Luz María was a very highly-educated, upper-class, professional woman, who had a strong desire for children that unfortunately never came to fruition, so I consider her ‘involuntarily’ childless and exclude her here. I have also excluded the ‘ambivalently’ childless men whom I considered in the previous chapter, as they all expressed a ‘desire’ to have one or more children in future, as did some childless women, who were either ‘unsure’ or ‘open’ to motherhood or concretely wanted to have 1+ children, despite being relatively ‘voluntarily’ childless in their current perspectives on life.

Since personal characteristics and background influence people’s experiences and narratives, we must first consider who these ‘voluntarily childless’ women and men I interviewed in Bogotá in 2017 are, and how they fit into the broader Colombian population (see Table 6.1 for some of their basic characteristics). They form a relatively homogeneous group: all had at least an undergraduate university degree and were middle-class or above. Some of the women I interviewed had stepchildren but did not self-identify as mothers. For example, Elisa (‘broadly’ voluntarily childless) did not view herself as a stepmother to her husband’s children from a previous marriage, since they were already adults when she married their father, and they had never cohabited in a parent-child relationship. The rest had neither biological nor stepchildren, although Virginia was dating a man with young children when we met and expressed some reservations about becoming more involved in their lives, given that she adamantly did not want children and had surrounded herself with likeminded

(also ‘childfree’⁵⁹) friends. Despite this, she (and other women) had also dated men with children in the past or still were when I interviewed them. As with my interviewees overall, most of this ‘voluntary’ subgroup were born and raised in Bogotá, though often to parents from other regions (typically Antioquia or Boyacá).

Table 6.1: Basic Characteristics of ‘Voluntarily’ Childless Women & Men

Name	Sex	Age	In Union?	Strat-um	Education	Ideal # of kids?	Desired # of kids?	Type of ‘Vol’ Childless ?	Orig. from	# of Sibs ²
Isabel	F	35-39	Married	3-4	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	0
Diana	F	35-39	Single	3-4	Undergrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	1
Teresa	F	65-69	Single	3-4	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	2
Mariana	F	25-29	Married	3-4	Undergrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	1
Andrea	F	25-29	Single	3-4	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	1
Camila	F	30-34	Prev. cohab.	3-4	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	2
Natalia	F	40-44	Single	5-6	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Central Region	1
Virginia	F	40-44	Prev. Marr.	3-4	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	1
Maritza	F	45-49	Married	3-4	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	3
Adriana	F	40-44	Cohab.	5-6	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	2
Gabriela ¹	F	35-39	Married	5-6	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Eastern Region	4
José ¹	M	45-49	Married	5-6	Postgrad	0	0	Strictly	Bogotá	4
Eva	F	40-44	Prev. cohab.	3-4	Postgrad	2	0	Broadly	Bogotá	1
Elisa	F	50-54	Married	3-4	Postgrad	2-3	0	Broadly	Central Region	3
Susana ¹	F	35-39	Married	3-4	Postgrad	3	0	Broadly	Bogotá	1
Daniel ¹	M	40-44	Married	3-4	Undergrad	2+	0	Broadly	Bogotá	4

¹Gabriela & José and Susana & Daniel were the two married couples I interviewed.

²Number of siblings

Twelve of the 16 were currently or had previously been in a cohabiting union. This includes the two couples I interviewed: Gabriela & José and Susana & Daniel.⁶⁰ While the first couple is ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless (expressing both an ideal of zero children and no intention to have children in future), the second is ‘broadly’ voluntarily childless (with no intention to have children in future, but ideals of two/three children each). I will address what this means for each of the couples, and how my imposed

⁵⁹ ‘Childfree’ is the English term often used to describe ‘voluntarily childless’ people, but it was not used by any of my interviewees. While some people use the term ‘childfree’ in Spanish, the literal translation, which is sometimes used, is ‘libre de hijos’, and the equivalent of ‘voluntarily childless’ or ‘childless by choice’ is ‘sin hijos por elección’, neither of which were commonly used by my Colombian interviewees, though increasingly popular online.

⁶⁰ Both couples had the choice to be interviewed together or separately. While I interviewed Gabriela & José together, Susana and Daniel chose separate interviews, on different days.

demographic definitions of different forms of ‘voluntary’ childlessness, drawing from the DHS questions relates to the couples’ own self-definition below.

Of the twelve women and men who were ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless, about two-thirds lived in stratum 3-4 and one-third in stratum 5-6 neighbourhoods;⁶¹ all four of the ‘broadly’ voluntarily childless individuals lived in stratum 3-4 areas. This meant that this group contained neither the socioeconomically best- nor worst-off individuals that I interviewed, although it does place most of them roughly in the wealthiest 10-15% of the population of Bogotá. While they were not socio-economically or educationally ‘average’ Colombians – being both better-off and very highly educated, even for Bogotá – this group could be expected to be the ‘forerunners’ of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), since “income growth and educational expansion jointly lead to the articulation of more existential and expressive needs” on which the SDT theory is premised (Lesthaeghe 2014: 18114). However, that is not to say that childless women and men who are less well-off and have had fewer educational opportunities would not express similar ideas and inclinations – I simply do not have those data. This is an important avenue for future research.

6.3 Why ‘choose’ childlessness? Pathways to Chosen Childlessness and Relational Considerations

First and foremost, ‘voluntarily’ childless interviewees identified a lack of innate maternal or paternal drive or desire for children. This was typically the first thing people mentioned or the factor they highlighted as paramount. In some cases, there was a strong sense of continuity to this: some women and men had known since very early in their lives that, regardless of their personal circumstances or romantic relationships, they would never want children – what Callan (1984) labelled ‘early articulators’. Others felt no desire for children, but had revisited the question often, thereby enacting a process of continual self-interrogation and re-affirmation. For yet other people, voluntary non-parenthood reflected a transformation: a gradual realisation that, while they had previously imagined having children, the course of their lives had led them away from this path, and towards a non-parental space they

⁶¹ Colombia is divided into socioeconomic strata, originally designed as a way to subsidise the utility payments of the poorest Colombians. I introduced this system in Chapter 2, but briefly: it classifies small geographical areas of towns/cities into different strata based on a complex classification of the physical environment. In Bogotá, there are six strata, with one being the lowest (i.e. the poorest individuals) and six being the highest (i.e. the richest).

were comfortable inhabiting.⁶² All of these paths had bearings on people's romantic relationships. In the first two groups, whom I view as 'committed' to voluntary childlessness, disagreements regarding desires for children had contributed to the end of relationships. However, in the third group, which is more 'flexibly' childless, this flexibility was often influenced by partners who felt more strongly about choosing childlessness.

'Strictly' Voluntarily Childless: Different Paths to a Similar Place

The group of people who are 'strictly' voluntarily childless had no desire to have children in the future. Most (though not all) expressed a strong sense of continuity – insisting that they had always felt this way, when considering the question of having children, that they had made the decision when they were relatively young, or that they had wavered in the past, but only momentarily, and had never felt any strong emotional 'pull' towards mother- or fatherhood. **José** (40s, married) provides the most radical example of this continuity. I interviewed José and his wife, Gabriela, together one Saturday afternoon, in their apartment in a peaceful, upper-middle class area of Bogotá. Early in the interview, José had expressed a relatively negative view of children, and was describing how his friends who are schoolteachers talk about their pupils as unruly, spoiled nightmares. When I asked whether this had influenced his thinking on having his own children, he replied: "No, no. For me, it's almost genetic. I mean, it's something deep inside me, in my blood, because no, from childhood I think I took that decision. From the time I was very young, I've known." In effect, José presents his childlessness as natural and completely innate, and as something other than a choice. He is, and thinks he always was, committed to childlessness. Although he still frames this as a decision, it is almost as if childlessness chose him, rather than the other way around. When I ask if he had ever considered having children, he responds in no uncertain terms: "No. Never. No-o!" Though he did not use the term himself, José is truly 'childfree' in the sense that he has no children, has never wanted them, and relishes his life without them.

⁶² This relative flexibility over time also travelled in the other direction for some women (not included in this chapter, as they are no longer 'voluntarily' childless when I spoke to them), who, after spending most of their lives not prioritising motherhood, had come to desire children, after entering into new relationships. Several of the younger women I interviewed, who were very adamant that they did not want children (Andrea, Camila, and Mariana) also acknowledged that the possibility that their views could change in future but did not view this as a likely outcome.

In contrast, **Gabriela** (30s, married) highlighted the role of early-life experiences that had influenced her decision, saying:

In my case, my older sister's pregnancy really affected me. She got pregnant young, and I was still in school when it happened. And her first child had – has – a disability, and then her marriage fell apart, and well [...] That made me question [motherhood] from a young age... I thought *I just couldn't* deal with all that, because it's really difficult to raise a child with special needs on your own.

Through her older sister's experiences of motherhood, Gabriela witnessed both the unpredictability of having children and the potential necessity of parenting alone. She went on to say that that she simply could not imagine herself in that role, as she did not "have the patience", so she had decided against motherhood. Though she described close relationships to her siblings' children, she was happy to be an aunt only. Other women also described the importance of formative experiences, and both Teresa's and Adriana's decisions against motherhood were partially influenced by early-life events (both of theirs related to health issues), whereas other women, like Isabel, were influenced by observing their mothers' experiences of marriage and motherhood.⁶³

Virginia (early 40s, divorced) similarly expressed no desire to have children. However, for her, it was a process that was reaffirmed multiple times over the course of her life, and a maternal yearning that she had always expected, but never arrived. Her narrative is representative of what many women told me:

The years passed, and I have some friends who have this intense desire to be mums regardless – however, with whomever, it doesn't matter. And I, I told them, 'I just don't feel that'. Never. I never imagined having a pregnant belly, never imagined having a baby in my arms. I mean, people pass me babies, and I say 'Cute [*lindo*], really nice.' But you pass me the dog and I won't give it back!

Although José and Virginia both frame their voluntary childlessness as innate, José never countenanced the idea that this would change, whereas Virginia had thought that perhaps she would eventually want a child (she specified later that she thought it would happen around age 40). Her expected transformational moment never came. This arguably represents a gendered difference, where women feel that, even if they do not have any innate desire for motherhood, they *should* want to have children, since motherhood was traditionally constructed as intrinsic to womanhood (Pachón 2007:

⁶³ She elaborated that despite her parents' difficult marriage, she thought her mother had stayed with her father for her sake, which Isabel regretted. Whereas a child ties you to another person forever (to the child and the other parent), marriage was potentially a more finite commitment; therefore, the prospect of an easier separation/divorce in a childless marriage was one aspect of Isabel's decision.

148). In contrast, given the historical emphasis on men's public, rather than private sphere roles, their non-interest in fatherhood is more naturalised and less interrogated – by both themselves and those around them.

Despite their slightly different orientations, José, Gabriela and Virginia's narratives all indicate that they were 'early articulators', never feeling a strong urge to have children, and questioning parenthood from an early age. This contrasts with **Diana** (30s, single), who transitioned from imagining herself as a mother to being clearly committed to non-motherhood:

In school, I always thought I would get married young, and that I would have a husband, a young family, that I would be young mother, because that's what they 'sold' us in school and at home, but that's changed. [...] When I was around 30, I thought about it and I decided, no, I don't want to be a mother.

Diana had attended a Catholic all-girls' school, which had influenced the way she imagined her future when she was an adolescent girl. Although she was still religious, her feelings about motherhood had changed over time. This was partly due to difficulty maintaining long-term romantic relationships, but she also expressed a deep appreciation for her life as an unattached woman with a successful career, alongside fewer responsibilities and more freedoms than she would have had as a married mother. This transformation is interesting as it suggests that there is some fluidity and flexibility even amongst the 'strictly' voluntarily childless. Based on her answers to the DHS questions regarding 'ideal' family size and 'desired' future children, and on her own self-description, Diana is 'strictly' voluntarily childless, yet her case shows how circumstances around relationships have influenced her thinking on motherhood and helped her transition towards voluntary non-motherhood. In other cases, women who described themselves as completely committed to childlessness (to the extent that they or their partner had been sterilised) told me how they had become pregnant in the past, or had considered or tried to become pregnant for the sake of previous or current romantic partners. All expressed relief that this had not come to pass and re-emphasised their commitment to non-motherhood. These narratives highlight two important ideas. First, that there are multiple pathways to 'strictly' or committed voluntary childlessness. Secondly, even for many people who self-identified as being committed to childlessness, there is often at least temporary flexibility or re-assessment, for the sake of romantic partners who may not feel the same commitment.

In some cases, however, disagreements about parenthood can lead to relationship breakdown.

‘Strictly’ Voluntarily Childless: Reflecting on Relationships and Partners

Partnership history is unsurprisingly the most statistically important factor associated with childlessness, for both women and men, whether chosen or not, as shown in Chapters 3 & 5. Some demographers exclude single people altogether, approximating ‘voluntary childlessness’ as a measure of the proportion of heterosexual couples who are neither parents nor biologically infertile (Toulemon 1996b). However, while natural to assume that someone who has never cohabited might never have had the opportunity to have children – in which case singlehood leads *to* involuntary childlessness – being committed to remaining childless, which is a minority position, might also make finding a similarly-minded partner more difficult, and/or precipitate a break-up when a couple realises their ideas about family do not align – in which case singlehood results *from* voluntary childlessness.⁶⁴ For example, though they had been married for several years, Gabriela and José emphasised that they had discussed the prospect of children prior to marriage and had agreed on pursuing a childfree life together. Both viewed agreement on this issue as essential to the success of any relationship, as did many other interviewees who felt strongly about choosing non-parenthood, such as Mariana. While **Mariana** (20s, married) and her husband had also agreed to be childfree (and he had been sterilised), she expressed a common sentiment that disagreement on such a key issue was fatal:

If in a relationship, one person wants children and the other doesn’t, well, there’s nothing you can do – and the relationship ends. And it should end, because the person who wants children can’t live the rest of their life frustrated by not having had kids just because their partner didn’t want them. And the one who doesn’t want children shouldn’t have them just because their partner wants them. You know? It’s a very serious issue, because parenthood is a key life decision.

This view that resentment would inevitably grow in any relationship where one partner wanted children and the other did not was commonly held, as strong feelings about

⁶⁴ It is also true that being ‘single’ in the sense of non-married/non-cohabiting does not exclude women/men who may be dating or engaging in other forms of sexually-active partnership that could lead to parenthood, and therefore they will be contemplating the possibility of parenthood inasmuch as they might take steps to avoid it through contraception.

parenthood (or the ability to opt out of it) were framed as a key determinant of self-fulfilment and happiness in life.

Interviewees also portrayed a sense that that wanting (or not wanting) to have children could reflect different life priorities and outlooks (with wanting children framed as the ‘traditional’ path in life). For example, before José, **Gabriela** had dated a man for several years, whose

priority was to get married, have children, all that stuff. And I said, to myself and to him, ‘But I don’t want that’. In other words, I don’t want to be a housewife and a mother. I just don’t like that prospect, and I feel like I don’t have that... Oh, what’s it called...? [C: Maternal instinct?] Right, I don’t have it, even though I like kids.

In some cases, mismatched ideals and expectations regarding having and raising children had contributed to break-ups – for Gabriela, but also for Camila, Virginia, Natalia, and Teresa. **Teresa** (60s, single), for example, had never wanted children, but had been in non-cohabiting relationships throughout her life (some lasting more than 10 years). She framed her reluctance to cohabit as a choice and a lifestyle preference, but one which had both precluded the possibility of having children with those exes and contributed to the end of at least one relationship. When I asked **Andrea** (20s, single) if she thought her feelings towards children might change in future, she replied in the following way:

I’ve considered it a lot recently. What would I do if I meet the person I want to be with, and he wants children? And I don’t. I mean, I’m genuinely not interested in them. [...] How does one face that? How do you tell someone else ‘no’? Either I leave him, or ... what? What do you do then? I’ve thought about the issue for that reason, and it seems really difficult.

Now that parenthood has become, as Mariana said, “a key life decision”, rather than an accepted eventuality, it can cause potentially relationship-ending rifts between partners.

‘Broadly’ Voluntarily Childless: Partners, Past Relationships, Timing and Reflections on Single Motherhood

Some couples nonetheless found ways to stay together despite different ideas about parenthood. In this section, the boundary between circumstantial and chosen childlessness blurs and becomes less clearly discernible. Married couple, **Daniel** (40s) and **Susana** (30s) described a process of adjustment over time, with compromises on both sides. When asked about whether he had ever wanted children in the past, Daniel

said that he and Susana had discussed it, and, when his wife had told him that she did not want to have children, he had told her that he, in fact, did:

So, then, at that point, do we compromise? Like, either you [Susana] have them or I come to a point where I say 'I don't want them.' [...] But, yes, during my upbringing, my family environment, it was always clear that I wanted a family. One or two kids.

When asked to elaborate on what had changed between previously wanting children and now wanting none, Daniel described how, over time, he and Susana both expressed a willingness to see each other's perspectives. He started to see the benefits of childfree coupledness, while

Susana at one point said, 'Let's see what happens in the future. I don't want you to abandon the idea that maybe we could have kids.' So, then, we came to this consensus that we would just see what happens. And, living together, I don't know [...] I started to question whether I really wanted that responsibility in my life. [...] I think it was a decision that we're really good as we are, we have a great time together, and now I don't know if I want to put myself in that situation, where I'm responsible for a child, and all that comes with it.

In the end, Daniel had changed his thinking more than Susana. This compromise in the female partner's direction reflected a sense expressed across almost all interviews that, within a heterosexual relationship, the ultimate decision to have or not have children should be the woman's. It was relatively unusual for people to explicitly self-identify as 'feminists' (many disavowed this label), but this accords with feminist thinking – and international population policy – that it is a woman's right to choose when, how, and with whom she will have children. Men, when considered, typically come second. This further acknowledges men's non-gestational role, and the fact that the caring acts constitutive of parenthood have historically been coded as 'women's work'. Despite efforts to equalise women's and men's caring activities, parenting continues to affect women's lives more than men's, e.g. professionally, socially, and even in terms of physical or mental health. Some recent (US-based) research indicates that mothers who feel 'disproportionately responsible' for children's adjustment (i.e. their emotional development) had significantly worse life satisfaction and greater feelings of 'emptiness' (Ciciolla & Luthar 2019). Based on a small sample of partnered upper-middle class mothers, the study argued that, even where men have a more equitable and active role in day-to-day household and parenting tasks, many women continue to be the overall 'household manager', and that the invisibility of this labour contributes to poorer mental health (Ciciolla & Luthar 2019).

Daniel was not alone in his change of heart towards his wife's position. Although **Maritza** (40s, married) was a 'strictly' voluntary non-mother, who married in her late 30s, her now-husband had originally wanted children. When he expressed this desire to her, it provoked a mini-crisis in Maritza's life: "There was a moment where he said, 'Since we are so in love with each other, maybe we could share this with a child?' ... And so, I started panicking." Eventually, Maritza's husband deferred to her desire not to have children,⁶⁵ but only after she had started to doubt herself and discussed the issue with others. Eventually, it was a gynaecologist who played a crucial role in reassuring her, as Maritza recounted a critical moment in her crisis:

I told her [the gynaecologist], 'Look, I'm exhausted, and everyone is telling me that if I don't have children, I won't be able to live with myself.' And so, I told her, 'Then I'm also thinking about him [my husband], like, does he want to have them? Because he likes kids...' So, this woman told me, 'Look, if there's one thing that's clear in life, it's that children are the mother's, and they are a lifetime commitment. If you have them because he wants them, that's great if you can raise them together. But, for you, there's no guarantee that he'll be there for the rest of your lives, and you will have to keep taking care of those kids regardless.'

This quote reflects two important ideas. First, while partners/spouses may come and go, children are forever; and, secondly, that, while men continue to benefit from the fact that active fatherhood is primarily an opt-in role, active motherhood is more opt-out in nature. The difficulty of opting-out once children are born and the high level of expectations associated with middle-class parenting raises the 'costs' of motherhood, and contributes to some women's reluctance to take on the role at all (discussed further in Chapter 8). In interviews, many Colombian women *and* men gave concrete examples contrasting the changes in their female friends' lives, post-motherhood, with those of their male friends, post-fatherhood. For example, while Daniel's best friends from university were both fathers, they continued to be "party animals [*parranderos*]" who Daniel deemed far from stable or hands-on, describing one as "totally irresponsible and always has been [...] he's a disaster as a dad..." In contrast, he spoke more reverentially of friends who are mothers, including a colleague who used to stay for drinks after work, but who now leaves exactly "at 5pm" to pick-up and care for her child, and others who are "with their kids almost all the time. And of course, they prefer quality time with their kids to doing other things." This contrast between men's

⁶⁵ Like Daniel, he actively adopted a positive take on his not-completely-chosen childlessness, at least in Maritza's telling (I did not interview him). She told me that, when they occasionally babysat a friend's child, he would often end the night by saying: "Ahh no, this kid's a real handful, I don't think we're cut out for this."

and women's approaches to parenthood was repeated over and over. While hands-on, all-absorbing parenthood is not exclusively female – remember that Francisco described his own approach to fatherhood in similar terms in Chapter 5 – it is still *expected* that women will devote themselves to their children, whereas devoted, hands-on fathering represents a veritable paradigm shift in what fatherhood means, and completely absent fatherhood is not uncommon.

Another transformational issue regarding partially-chosen childlessness lay not in a partner's differential desire for parenthood, but in the timing of partnerships. **Eva** (40s, previously cohabited) had a two-child ideal, but no desire to have children in future, partially because she felt she was already 'too old'.⁶⁶ Reflecting back, Eva described previously wanting to have children, and had considered herself 'ready' in her early 30s. Until that point, she had always put her professional life first, and her affective life 'in second place'. However, this timing coincided with an extended period of singlehood, and Eva was strongly against becoming a single parent herself. She told me:

I think that the conditions in Colombia, well, even with a partner, [...] it would be difficult. But as a single mother? No! I really respect and value single mothers, but I think the ideal for children is that they have a mother and a father – or two mums/dads.

For her, not only did children require the support of more than just one parent, but mothers themselves also needed support, from a partner or broader network, "for the logistics, to relieve you when you're tired, for different perspectives, for economic reasons, for everything...", which Eva felt she did not have. In those circumstances, the only alternative to non-motherhood would be single motherhood by choice, which most women consistently ruled out as being undesirable or too 'difficult' in the Colombian context, for similar reasons to Eva. For a contrasting perspective, see Graham's (2017: 13) study of middle-class, British women contemplating single motherhood by choice, who "felt largely comfortable" with their decision, which resulted from the same constraints faced by Eva. Unlike her, they were confident of being 'good parents' even without a partner.

⁶⁶ Here, she worried specifically about the increased (biological) risk of complications, the large generational gap between her and any offspring, and the fact that her children would lose their parent(s) earlier in life than the children of younger parents.

The general acceptability of single motherhood in Colombia nonetheless meant that several single women, including Andrea and Diana (both ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless), recounted experiences where others (sometimes their own parents) had asked them if they might consider have a baby without a partner, so that they would not ‘end up alone’, and so that the child could provide for them in old age, which, like Eva, both women rejected. In this telling, being a single mother is preferable to being a non-mother. This perspective reflects a view of children as having a high economic and emotional use value, which is at odds with voluntarily childless individuals’ own views of children as expensive, time-consuming, and an unreliable source of old-age care. It also reflects the high value placed on motherhood as a role and identity. Although single motherhood, particularly amongst Colombian adolescents, has attracted academic attention (see Rico de Alonso 1986; Toro-Campo 2015), I have not encountered any research into single motherhood *by choice* in Colombia. Despite this, the topic has received media attention since at least the mid-1980s: e.g. from a *Semana* magazine article addressing ‘Single Motherhood’ (Semana 1986), which profiles women who took the decision to have a baby while single to a more recent *Vanguardia* newspaper article entitled ‘Child, yes! Husband, no, thanks!’ (Bernal-Leon 2009). There is also a market for artificial insemination and IVF, which caters to single women wanting to have children on their own.⁶⁷ Although none of the women I interviewed were interested in single motherhood by choice, several of the single women, including Eva and Natalia, amongst others, prioritised finding/having a supportive life partner, and felt that being single and/or perceived as ‘solitary’ was even more stigmatised than either childlessness or single motherhood, as traditional notions of the ‘*solterona*’ (‘spinster’) attracted pity.

6.4 Questioning or Appropriating the Narrative that “[n]ot to have children is a selfish choice”

Negative judgements of women (and men) who choose childlessness have been researched extensively in Euro-American contexts (e.g. see Ashburn-Nardo 2017; Bays 2017; Rijken & Merz 2014). There is also some research (Quintal 2002), and plenty of anecdotal evidence, that indicates it is similarly poorly viewed in Latin

⁶⁷ See the *Grupo inSer (Instituto de Fertilidad Humana)* testimonial page entitled ‘Madre soltera por elección’, which is the story of a medical tourist from the US who travelled to the *InSer* clinic in Medellín for fertility treatments to become a single mother by choice (Arlette 2017).

America. The Catholic Church, still a dominant cultural force in Colombia, judges elective childlessness negatively. In a 2015 catechesis, Pope Francis lamented low fertility in Europe, and proclaimed that having many children should not be viewed as an inherently “irresponsible choice”, whereas not having any is the *truly* “selfish choice.”⁶⁸ (This may seem ironic, given the Church’s insistence on the celibacy and thus childlessness of its own clergy.)

Most women and men who had chosen non-parenthood rejected this idea and other negative ascriptions, e.g. that choosing childlessness reflected immaturity or a dislike of children. They typically emphasised their deep relationships with their friends’ and family members’ children, pushing back against the idea that their life choices sprang from a deep dislike of children. Unlike José, his wife, Gabriela repeatedly talked about spending time with nieces/nephews, and how she enjoyed participating in activities and events involving (other people’s) children. Daniel, Diana, Teresa, Elisa and others similarly spoke warmly about their relationships to siblings’ and/or friends’ children, as did the ‘ambivalently’ childless men (discussed in Chapter 5), who typically considered themselves ‘good’ with children. For Daniel, whose friends and siblings mostly had children, not having them meant he could pay more attention to each of his nieces and nephews than he could if he were a father:

I also have lots of nieces and nephews, and I mean, not having kids myself means that I can spoil them all, so they are all really close to me. And then I said, well, I’m already surrounded by these kids who I love and who love me, and that was part of my decision [against having children].

Although he had originally wanted his own children, Daniel’s devotion to other people’s children fed back into his decision not to parent. Partly influenced by his wife’s views, over time, Daniel began to view parenthood as a huge responsibility and potentially all-consuming work, leading him to view his own childfree life more positively, and to cultivate stronger relationships with other children in his life, rather than fixate on having his own biological offspring.

⁶⁸ Catechesis delivered on 11 February 2015: “a society [...] which does not love being surrounded by children, which considers them above all a worry, a weight, a risk, is a depressed society. Let us consider the many societies we know here in Europe: they are depressed societies, because they do not want children, they are not having children, the birth rate does not reach one percent. Why? Let each of us consider and respond. If a family with many children is looked upon as a weight, something is wrong! The child’s generation must be responsible ... but having many children cannot automatically be an irresponsible choice. *Not to have children is a selfish choice*” (Pope Francis 2015).

A related perspective reflected the ‘parenting’ work that many women/men undertook despite not having children, for example, Eva, who taught, said that she was able to “develop a form of maternity/motherhood” by ‘mentoring’ her students academically and taking an interest in them as people, showing them how much she cared about their futures. By being a good teacher, who devoted herself to her work, she did not need to have children to nurture a younger generation. Isabel, Maritza, Daniel, and many others, expressed a similarly outward-facing orientation and a desire to contribute to society more generally. For example, Isabel told me that she thought she could “contribute much more through [her] work” than by having children, and Maritza expressed this in religious terms: “I said to God, like, if I have children, my life will just revolve around them. But, if I don’t have them, there’s a greater possibility that I’ll be able to serve more people.” Since raising children requires substantial emotional energy and resources (as parents themselves freely admit), for voluntary non-parents who do not feel innately pulled towards mother- or fatherhood, that energy can be invested in other paths towards living a ‘good’, outward-facing life. Voluntary non-parents felt they could shape a more positive future without leaving any biological descendants. In this reading, far from being the selfish reflection of a pathological inward-orientation, not reproducing can lead to a *more* altruistic life.

However, others, like José, Isabel, Andrea, and Camila, who were the most ‘strictly’ voluntarily childless, openly expressed their antipathy for children and had little desire to interact with them. This re-appropriation of the ‘selfish’ label and other negative judgements served to question why disliking children is still viewed as taboo (especially for women), if everyone is entitled to make their own choices. For example, when I asked her to talk me through her motivations, **Isabel** (30s, married) told me frankly: “Well, look, I’ve never liked kids [both laugh]. I see them and think: ‘Cute [*lindo*], but... Maybe go away... Far away.’ When I got married, I considered the idea. [...] But, really, it’s never appealed to me. Never.” Isabel’s feelings were so strong that she had sought voluntary sterilisation a few years before. **Andrea** also adamantly expressed no desire for children and told me: “I think it’s great when people want kids, and they’re cute [*lindo*] and everything, but I don’t want them in my own life. I don’t want to have one myself, but I don’t hate them.” This last part is important, as it demonstrated how her feelings had relaxed over time, Andrea described in detail how, in her early 20s, she had, in fact, “hated” being around children, whom she viewed as

“annoying”, “always screaming or crying”, and as “an unnecessary economic burden.” **Camila** (early 30s, previously cohabited) similarly knew she did not want children, and while she could see why other people wanted them (to love/nurture), reflecting on friends’ sacrifices, post-motherhood, said:

I feel like there are certain things I don’t want to experience [related to having a child], and that I don’t want to change my life for, so, obviously that might sound a bit selfish, but it doesn’t really bother me if I’m selfish! [laughs] [...] I just don’t have the mental bandwidth for it [parenthood] [*no tengo cabeza para eso*].

She partly organised her life to avoid being around children, even spending less time with a friend who had recently had a baby, since the baby meant her friend could no longer engage in the same activities that they used to enjoy sharing, like going out for meals/drinks. She characterised this distancing as the result of both of their decisions: her friend had decided to have a baby, and Camila had decided to spend less time with her to avoid the baby. Although an open expression of apathy/antipathy towards children was, unsurprisingly, unique to ‘voluntary’ non-mothers (and even here, only to a minority), the sense of distancing between mothers and non-mothers was more generalised and became a re-emergent theme across interviews.

Subverting the Narrative: Non-parenthood as Altruistic Act

A common strategy for voluntarily childless women and men was to reverse the direction of judgement, framing *parenthood* as a potentially selfish decision, as a role that too many parents undertake by accident, or as the result of a whim, rather than giving it the consideration they thought it deserved. In contrast, they described their own careful reproductive thought-processes. Building on the previous section, I will present a slightly different strategy that emerged from voluntary non-parents’ narratives. This contains two, related strands which I argue represent a subversion of the negative judgements and repeated interrogations many non-parents encounter. The first strand concerns the mobilisation of environmental issues when addressing why people have chosen to forego parenthood. The second strand, though often related to the first, addresses more specifically Colombian contextual factors – such as the perception that young Colombians are under a great deal of pressure, and are exposed to unpleasant aspects of life (violence, crime, pollution, cruelty) from an earlier age than those in other countries. While both reflect broader global movements, many interviewees expressed them in terms that were particularly rooted in the Colombian

context. This is most exemplified by Mariana, speaking for herself and her husband, when she said:

From the beginning we've both been very inclined to see human reproduction as a big risk, most of all because of the society that we live in. Not only because of the economic pressure, [...] but you know it's also a kind of environmental belief. We see the planet being overpopulated, resources are scarce, and a solution to that scarcity is not going to be found soon. That resource scarcity will probably grow, and it will grow in certain places more than others. We're not citizens of the first world. If we had a child, it would probably be affected more acutely by that type of thing than if we lived over there [in a "first world" country]. But maybe not even then, because even being from the first world, you have to be relatively privileged to have some sort of security. The environmental side, for us, is really decisive. Decisive. Number one."

Although, unusually, Mariana identified 'environmental' issues as her number one motivator, she then placed never having 'dreamed' of having children or felt 'predisposed to motherhood' second. This is important, as there was no evidence from my interviews that people who strongly want to have children are choosing not to only, or usually even primarily, because of their concerns over environmental issues. Typically, this is one strand of a larger complex of factors that I will enumerate below. Additionally, Mariana roots her environmental concerns specifically in being Colombian. In the following two sections, I address these environmental motivations and then the more context-specific (Colombian) motivations people mobilised as reasons to forego parenthood, which are grounded in a sense that non-parenthood is the right decision, for themselves, for the good of the planet, and morally (for the unborn child).

Environmental Concerns: Negative 'Anticipatory' Regimes

On 29th January 2019, a Colombian couple from Medellín, Andrés Molina (aged 39) and Nathalie Gómez (aged 30), posted a photo and accompanying message to friends and family on *Facebook*. In the style of a birth announcement, they proclaimed:

We want to share our great happiness with you. WE WILL NEVER BE PARENTS – we accept a life in which we will always buy toys for ourselves, travel without restrictions, walk around the house naked, and more. However, that's not our most important reason [for doing this], the most important reason is contributing to the conservation of the planet, which is overpopulated and damaged. We aren't going to bring one more human into the world to pollute it. Woohoo! [Party popper emojis]"

The accompanying photo was a selfie of the couple with a *Profamilia* waiting slip for a vasectomy. Their message went 'viral', attracting domestic attention and international coverage in Latin America and Europe (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Examples of the coverage received by a ‘childfree’ Colombian couple in the Colombian and international media (including the UK’s Daily Mail)



Source: ‘Why don’t the latest generations want to have children?’, *Semana* (2019).

Source: *Daily Mail*, Torres (2019).

The couple (he is a tattoo artist and she a Spanish teacher) were greeted by both condemnation and support for their post, and subsequently interviewed by multiple media outlets in Colombia.⁶⁹ They elaborated that they: first, had no desire to have their own biological children; secondly, worried about what having children meant for the planet; and thirdly, worried about exposing children to the ‘cruelty’ that they themselves had witnessed growing up. Finally, they said, they wanted to prioritise other life goals. Though the couple is from Medellín, this complex of factors is also broadly representative of the varying motivations for voluntary non-parenthood I repeatedly heard in Bogotá.

It may be tempting to question the sincerity of people’s expressed motivations for non-parenthood, as well as the consistency of their arguments when, in one breath, they detail the ways in which they will continue to engage in a consumption-oriented economy (travelling widely and ‘buy[ing] toys for [themselves]’), and in the next worry about the environment. However, expressing an environmental motivation for childlessness is part of a broader movement, which is gaining traction in the English-language press,⁷⁰ but was also commonly mobilised by Colombians I met. This

⁶⁹ For example, see the 26-minute long ‘*Mejor Hablemos*’ (Spanish-language) interview with Claudia Palacios on Citytv (13/Feb/2019): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnPSRdMC-E> [Accessed: 22/Aug/19].

⁷⁰ For example, see: ‘Would you give up having children to save the planet? Meet the couples who have’ (Fleming 2018) and ‘Why don’t you want kids? Because Apocalypse!’ (Ellis 2019).

strategy allows childfree adults to try to reclaim and valorise a decision that is often regarded negatively.

In my research, this perspective was unique to *voluntarily* childless individuals, and is exemplified by José's pessimistic take on environmental change:

This world is overpopulated, and that's creating a whole host of environmental and economic problems around the world, which are causing, or maybe, in the near future, will create lots of wars... [...] We are going to see some difficult issues emerging in the world, a very serious transformation, and I wouldn't want my child to see that. Wars over water, over oil, everything... In the next 30, maybe 50, years.

Like Mariana and Andrés/Nathalie, José employs perennial ideas about 'overpopulation' and environmental destruction to reframe his decision in terms of a child's best interest. In other words, he is childless partially because he would not want to inflict the suffering and conflict that he sees in the world today (and expects to escalate in future) upon his hypothetical children. In such a world, it is better not to have children at all. This contrasts with Andrés and Nathalie's framing (above), as they prioritise the contribution that their decision not to have children will make to help preserving the environment for future generations of children that *others* will have. Many non-parents employ both arguments together.

This nexus of the natural environment and fertility has also gained prominence in the anthropology of reproduction and in cognate fields, like feminist STS and sociology (see Clarke & Haraway 2018). Michelle Murphy (2018: 101), for example, argues that "[w]ith intensifying climate change, mass extinctions, and extraction regimes poisoning lands, airs and waters, the problem of overpopulation has been recharged for left and liberal politics as a way to think through environmental crisis." As I have shown, this is precisely the framework adopted by many progressively-minded Colombians, like the people discussed in this chapter, and which frames their decisions not to parent. While Murphy (2018: 102) does not believe in reinvigorating the (historically tarnished) population cause, and while not having children may be a crude way to disentangle oneself from what she terms "the mesh of responsibilities and entanglements reproduction has with environmental violence", it is nonetheless an increasingly popular way to think through parenthood and non-parenthood, and to present the decision not to parent. It takes on a slightly different tone in the Colombian context, a country in the Global South, where poor women were historically targeted by early 'population control' programmes, and where the poorest citizens will bear the

brunt of the environmental impacts of climate change, if no effective solutions are enacted.

Additionally, I view this newly-validated position – helping save the world by *not* having children – as reflecting a particular form of identity reclamation through the mobilisation of a what Adams et al. (2009) call ‘anticipatory regimes’. As these authors argue:

[a]nticipation is not only an epistemic orientation toward the future, it is also a moral imperative, a will to anticipate. From climate change, to emergent disease to biosafety, there is a moral injunction to anticipate as an act in which life, death, identity and prosperity are at stake personally and collectively (Adams et al. 2009: 254).

Anticipating the possible end of humanity (through catastrophic climate change), Mariana, José, Nathalie, Andrés, and others, are taking a ‘moral’ action now, by not having children. This is a personalised extension the anticipatory “logic of population control since the 1960s”, which manages “reproduction now to ‘avert’ future births” in hopes of bringing about a better future (Adams et al. 2009: 253). Instead of solving the problem of “overpopulation” by curtailing the reproduction of undesirable ‘Others’, as in many of the coercive, 20th-century population control programmes that Murphy (2018) rightly condemns, these non-parents adopt a modernised, 21st-century solution to their identified ‘problem’, using a personally-responsible action: self-sterilisation. Through this lens, non-parenthood is repositioned as an ultimately selfless act, and, when necessary, negative judgement can be deflected back onto parents: why *have* children in such an environment, and is that not just a bit selfish, too?

Non-parenthood as an act of resistance: Local solutions to local problems

The second form of what I have termed ‘altruistic’ motivations for non-parenthood has a more ‘local’ character. Whereas José, like others, was more concerned with what he termed a ‘global’ perspective, his wife, Gabriela, rooted her motivations for non-parenthood specifically in Colombia: “For me, the situation of the country is very important. [...] When I think about raising a child here? No. In this environment, it’s more difficult for me to imagine.” By “this environment”, she specifically named the violence and insecurity experienced by many Colombians, alongside the easy availability of drugs, and the sparse social safety net, before arguing:

In other countries, you see more policies to support people with problems, to protect people, whereas here, my impression is that the regulations aren't so strict. [...] Of course, that's not my only reason, but it does affect me. You ask yourself, 'What would you like your child to experience?' And, I know I can't change the environment here.

While acknowledging that nowhere is perfect, Gabriela considers the Colombian situation to be worse than other countries because of the lack of State support. Isabel echoed Gabriela's worries about Colombia, in a more extreme form that essentially identified non-parenthood as a small act of resistance against the State. Isabel's work is public service-oriented, and involves travelling around Colombia, where she told me she had seen "18-year-old girls with 3 kids" and that the poverty and destitution faced by many of her fellow Colombians had convinced her that "this country doesn't give you anything":

Look, this is my personal opinion, but I think that Colombia doesn't deserve children. You know, it's a country that's really... Socially, it's getting worse. [...] I mean, it seems like it would be a case of having a child who would have to constantly fight against lots of things. [...] Maybe if I lived in another country, in a 'developed' country, I might think about it, but here, I don't even contemplate the possibility.

Her words reflect an attitude of anger, opposition, and resistance to a state apparatus she views as unworthy, but whose people she herself is committed to helping, through her work. By staying childless, Isabel withholds what she frames as productive future citizens from a Colombia that has proven it does not 'deserve' them, while simultaneously working to improve to society herself. These context-specific perspectives were more common than expected, and many other voluntary (and semi-voluntary) non-parents, like Adriana, Daniel, and David, also took this position, worrying concretely about the Colombian context and its potential effects on children. While some conceded that they would consider having children in other contexts (usually what they referred to as 'developed' countries), this position can be contrasted with José and Mariana's perspectives, who did not countenance parenthood in any context because of their concerns about "overpopulation" and environmental degradation.

6.5 Conclusions

From these accounts, it is clear that economic concerns did not tend to emerge strongly in childfree women's and men's narratives around not having children. First and foremost, no innate desire to have children was viewed as a key factor which should (and did) keep them from having children. In some cases, this was tempered by loving

interactions with other people's children, while a minority expressed strong feelings of apathy or antipathy towards children (a view unique to 'childfree' interviewees). Although many mentioned the difficult political/economic situation in Colombia, this was typically coupled with other concerns regarding partnerships, gender roles, and/or local and global concerns about the natural environment. These concerns were typically framed in altruistic terms. In other words, not having children was not only a personal preference and choice for the non-parent themselves but served to protect (non-existent) children from witnessing cruelty, and aided in the fight against environmental degradation, by contributing to lower population growth. No one I interviewed, however, claimed to have not had children for exclusively environmental or altruistic reasons. Instead, these were typically presented as factors which undergirded a pre-existing resolve not to procreate. This type of reversal of the typical narrative around childlessness as a selfish choice is also significant, when many non-parents globally continue to feel judged and/or stigmatised for not having children. As a defence mechanism when confronted with personal questions around plans to have children, altruistic narratives help childless people to re-focus attention on the specific choice to have children, and on its consequences, rather than presenting this as a natural state of affairs. Instead of asking why anyone would choose *not* to have children, these adults ask, why *do* people have children? Should everyone have children? Is it an essentially altruistic choice, or is it just another way to pursue self-fulfilment?

Contrary to the headline coverage of the *Family Thermometer* study introduced at the beginning of this chapter, which implied that most Colombians had lost interest in becoming parents, being *voluntarily* childless is still a relatively uncommon position in Colombia, as elsewhere (Debest et al. 2014; McAllister & Clarke 2000; Toulemon 1996b). Despite occupying a niche space at one edge of the fertility spectrum, however, voluntary childlessness is a growing phenomenon, as shown quantitatively in Chapter 4. My focus in this chapter on a relatively homogeneous group of highly educated, middle-to-upper class Bogotá residents provides a limited picture, but one which I hope contributes to a better understanding of people who still do not feel their choices are generally accepted, despite the other privileges they enjoy. Any Colombian will nonetheless tell you that such a group could never begin to represent all that is happening across this environmentally-, economically- and culturally-diverse country

as a whole, making it impossible to generalise. In future, it would therefore be especially important to investigate this phenomenon outside of Bogotá and amongst less privileged women and men.

Chapter 7: Historical Reflections – Personal and National Narratives

Across the lines that divide them (lines of class, rural vs. urban experience, or whether or not recent violence has resulted in family tragedy), Colombians cherish whatever opportunities they have to enjoy the country's beauty and their own capacity for wholesome fun – both unequivocally components of 'the good.' Thus Colombians recognize themselves in images of violence and narratives of victimization, but they also recognize themselves in the modern, consumer-oriented world of the nation's cities – a world of art galleries, entertainment events, and well-stocked department stores (Farnsworth-Alvear 2017: 9).

7.1 Introduction

When I began this research, I was determined to focus on what historian Ann Farnsworth-Alvear calls 'the good' in Colombia, since so much of what non-Colombians know relates to negative features of the country's recent history: violent conflict, insecurity, and illicit drug production. I hoped to focus on the less exotic elements of life in Colombia, framing it instead within a global picture of demographic change, highlighting commonalities with other contexts, and emphasising the more quotidian parts of everyday life, like family and parenthood or non-parenthood. In other words, what I viewed as the 'normal' side of life in modern Colombia. However, these quotidian experiences are deeply shaped by the unique, Colombian context. In the previous chapter, I showed how voluntary non-parents often related their choices not to have children directly to the Colombian context, highlighting some of the specific difficulties of modern life in Colombia, and how that affected children from an early age. It was impossible to avoid both the good and the bad, as well as how they are interrelated. The large-scale disruption of the Colombian civil conflict pushed an entire generation towards the city, which profoundly affected the next generations after them, and shapes the context in which many women and men today decide to have, or not have, children.

This chapter seeks to build on the primarily socio-political background presented in the Introduction, alongside Chapter 3, which quantitatively explored the evolution of (women's) childlessness over time since the 1980s. There, I showed that childlessness overall has remained relatively stable and low, including just 5-10% of women in their forties. However, in this chapter, I will focus intergenerational changes, starting with a brief summary of the socio-demographic landscape from the mid-20th to early 21st centuries, before moving on to a longer second section, based on my interviews and

ethnographic fieldwork. This second section will address several themes from personal histories as they intersect with (and in some cases, depart from) the Colombian national history highlighted in the first section. These themes focus on intergenerational changes and continuities brought about by the rapid urbanisation, increasing educational attainment, and decreasing fertility of the Colombian population as a whole over the late 20th century, which particularly expanded women's roles. This will highlight two major cross-cutting issues in this thesis: social class and gendered roles and expectations. I will argue that it is important to understand both the macro-historical events and trends that contextualise people's lives, as well as engaging with the micro-realities of their personal narratives (whether of their life and family histories or their contemporary experiences of childlessness or parenthood). I thereby seek to show how seemingly sudden, national, political events, as well as more gradual socio-demographic change, not only punctuate individual life histories, but also how these events are then integrated into these personal histories as key moments of transformation, serving a narrative function. This emphasises how, despite cross-national similarities, the specific forms of parenthood/non-parenthood are shaped, both materially and interpretatively, by the Colombian environment.

7.2 Fertility, Mortality and Unequal Demographic 'Transitions' in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries

As discussed in the Introduction, violence and conflict are perceived as a depressingly enduring problem for Colombian society, and they have generated deep distrust between citizens and their governmental and other representatives, who are widely viewed as corrupt. However, other changes over time, such as declining levels of mortality and fertility, increasing levels of education and gender equality, and decreasing poverty rates can, and have been, considered 'successes' by both the State and its citizens. While most people would not dispute the presumed benefits of lower mortality and poverty levels, declining fertility and other social changes are more controversial, both in Colombia and elsewhere. In Chapter 8, I will address some of the 'backlash' against changing gender roles (including lower fertility through contraceptive use), and more socially progressive ideas towards sexual minority rights (framed as 'gender ideology' by opponents).

Within demography and economics, many of the sociodemographic changes that took place in Colombia over the course of the 20th century are interpreted through the model of the demographic transition theories introduced in Chapter 1. The simplest form of the ‘first demographic transition’ (FDT) is, broadly, that, at a population level, we can expect that mortality will decline, and as people live longer (due to better nutrition, technological/medical advances, etc.) but fertility is still high, the population of a country (or the planet) will grow rapidly. Eventually, and usually through some form of socioeconomic development/industrialisation/increasing education, fertility will also tend downward, toward what demographers call the ‘replacement’ level of 2.1 children per couple. These theories have been critiqued for many reasons, including the use of a potentially problematic ‘modernisation’ paradigm, which assumes that, for example, low fertility is a positive goal regardless of the sociocultural context, as it represents progress towards an endpoint in keeping with a (highly privileged and promoted) ‘Euro-American’ model. In the Colombian case, this type of narrative is both widely accepted and promoted by forces within and outside the country itself. Although the assignation of value judgements and policy goal-setting based on this theory is potentially very problematic, it is relatively accurate as a purely descriptive model. Colombian mortality and fertility rates did decline substantially during the 20th century, and the population grew very rapidly, from just 4m. people in 1900 to over 40m. by 2000 (Bushnell & Hudson 2010: 90).

Colombia’s ‘first’ demographic transition can be traced back to the late 1930s, when mortality first began to decline (Flórez & Bonilla 1991). It would take another 30 or so years before the fertility rate started to drop; however, as previously noted, starting in the mid-1960s, Colombia’s ‘average’ fertility (TFR) declined from seven children per woman in 1965 to just 2.0 by 2015. The initial pace of the Colombian fertility decline, particularly in the 1960s and ‘70s, was much faster than that observed in many other Latin American countries, and more comparable to East Asian experiences (Miller 2009; Ojeda et al. 2011: 16), but the current TFR is comparable with other countries in the region, including Mexico.

Poverty has also declined substantially: whereas 70% of Colombians lived in poverty in 1973 (measured using an ‘unsatisfied basic needs’ indicator), this had fallen to 20% by 2005 (Ojeda et al. 2011). Some authors also point to a ‘middle-class’ (defined in

absolute terms as individual daily earnings of between US\$10-50 (PPP)⁷¹), which grew from 16% of the population in 2002 to 27% by 2011 (Angulo et al. 2014: 174). Other estimates put the size of the middle class at 30.5% of the population by 2005 – larger than the proportion of Colombians living in poverty – prompting former President Juan Manuel Santos to declare that this was “one of the country’s greatest social achievements” (Uribe-Mallarino et al. 2017: 2). However, Colombia’s middle class is still small compared to other Latin American countries, the labour market is plagued by high levels of informality (Angulo et al. 2014), and it remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. Colombia’s poorest citizens are still nowhere near accessing the same level of opportunities and benefits as its richest. These inequalities are expressed along multiple lines. Some important axes of Colombian inequalities are racial/ethnic and regional (which are themselves interrelated, as the ethnic diversity of the country as a whole is unevenly distributed across its departments and cities); there are also substantial socioeconomic differences between urban and rural areas, with rural residents being poorer on average.

Similarly, the mortality and fertility decline that characterise the FDT are unfortunately still unevenly distributed across Colombian society, according to pre-existing social divisions. Wealth/social class, education, geographical region, and urban or rural residence still have a large influence over both births and deaths, with moderate-to-large differentials apparent, for example, in the child mortality rate, which varied from 18 per thousand among women with higher education to 53 for those with no education in 2010 (Ojeda et al. 2011). Deeply-ingrained socioeconomic and regional inequalities continue to stratify access to essential services and produce starkly different outcomes. Whereas a richer, highly-educated and/or well-connected, pregnant woman in Bogotá might expect to give birth in a relatively well-equipped, modern hospital, with antenatal and post-natal care of a similar quality to that experienced in higher-income countries, her poorer, less well-educated Afro-Colombian or indigenous compatriots living in rural parts of the border regions of Chocó or Guainía, respectively, could expect to have quite a different birth experience, with significant barriers to accessing modern healthcare for themselves and their babies, and potentially deadly consequences. For example, Bogotá has two paediatric intensive care units, whereas the entire regions of Chocó and Guainía have none (Lamprea & García 2016), and

⁷¹ PPP: “purchasing power parity”

while Bogotá's infant mortality rate (IMR) in 2009 was 12.1 per 1,000 births, this compared to 37.5 in Chocó and 47.2 in Guainía (Jaramillo-Mejía et al. 2013). These IMRs pool all women together, rich and poor, therefore given the strong socioeconomic gradient to IMRs, it is likely that the differences between rich women in Bogotá and others would be even starker.

The inequalities again underscore the importance of an intersectional approach to gender (introduced in Chapter 2), which emphasises the fact that individual and collective experiences of 'womanhood' or 'manhood' are not unitary, but are affected by other power structures that stratify societies, such as race/ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic circumstances, sexual orientation, and/or disabilities, amongst many others. These features 'intersect' with gender to produce vastly different outcomes amongst women, complicating sex- or gender-based categorisation. A recent ODI report, focusing on the progress towards 'women's empowerment' in Colombia highlights the unsurprising fact that, it is primarily "well-educated and urban women who have been able to benefit the most from the gains made" towards 'empowerment', whereas rural women, who are much more likely to be "poor and illiterate", or at least have a lower level of education than their urban counterparts, "continue to lag behind – and are also much more exposed to the risks of gender-based violence, discrimination, displacement, etc" (Domingo et al. 2015: 40).

Today, nearly eight in ten Colombians live in cities, and Bogotá is home to approximately seven million. The 20th century was the peak of the country's urban transformation, as both the capital and smaller, regional centres grew substantially. By the mid-1960s, the country was already majority (over 50%) urban, as rural inhabitants were drawn to cities looking for job and educational opportunities (Bushnell 2010a). Many also fled the violence that engulfed the country at multiple points. Today, over a third of all Colombians live in the country's four biggest cities of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla, alone. Bogotá, especially, attracts both highly-skilled internal migrants at the highest end of the income scale, alongside impoverished victims of the conflict at the opposite end.

Most (though not all) of the personal histories that I present below are atypical, being from highly-educated urbanites. It is important to keep in mind that this is the group who benefitted most from the social and demographic changes of the 20th century.

7.3 Personal Narratives

Most of the analysis below is based on semi-structured, life history-style interviews. In this section, I first focus on intergenerational changes within families. Then, I move on to intergenerational perspectives on non-parenthood, which address both ‘social mobility’ and the place of non-parenthood in strategies for social mobility or social class maintenance, as well as a comparative gendered perspective. Finally, I discuss the social sanctions many non-mothers felt they had encountered due to being childless.

Urbanisation, Population Growth and Displacement: Fleeing Violence and Seeking Opportunities

I met with **Maritza** (40s, married, voluntary non-mother) in an enormous, busy, and modern shopping centre in the south of Bogotá, close to where she lived. It was a broadly middle-class area of the city that I had never visited before, and due to my own poor transport choice (I took a small city bus, instead of facing the *TransMilenio* Bus Rapid Transit system at rush hour), my trip there took nearly two hours, as we were repeatedly caught in queues of slow-moving, single-lane traffic on dusty side-streets, before finally emerging onto the highway and then arriving at the shopping centre. As I waited in front of our designated meeting point, scanning the crowds for someone who was also looking for a person whom they had never met, a woman walked towards me, smiling, and said ‘Cristina?’ then ‘Hola!’ before giving me a hug. Maritza was open and friendly from the start, and we eventually sat down in the seating area of a small *Oma* (a local coffee shop), perched at the edge of one of the mall’s mezzanine-style upper levels. Although in a relatively private position, away from the café’s other customers, we sat overlooking children playing and parents shopping or resting in the public spaces of the mall’s lower level, below. Our recorded interview lasted more than two hours (not including long, unrecorded chats before and after). Maritza spoke eloquently of her experiences, at multiple points reflecting on how her own life and her family’s history reflected the history of the country itself.

When I asked her my usual opening question – to please tell me about herself, starting with anything she wanted – Maritza began with her parents’ rural origins, and how her mother’s father had been killed in the violence that swept through the country in 1948,

as part of the *Violencia*.⁷² Her maternal grandmother had been left a widowed mother of four children by the time she was in her early 20s, and had ended up in Bogotá, fleeing violence and seeking work. When her husband was killed, rather than sending her small children to live with other family members, to effectively grow up as domestic servants in relatives' homes (though this was a common practice in the family histories I collected), she brought them with her to the city. Maritza was born and raised in Bogotá, and grew up around her grandmother, hearing about her '*campesina*' origins. This, again, was a recurrent theme. With a few exceptions, most of the people I interviewed described their family background as '*campesino/a*', either in their parents' or grandparents' generation.⁷³ Maritza, however, explicitly connected this to the events of 1948, saying:

Today, we talk about the conflict in Colombia, about widowhood, but sometimes we forget that we are the product of that conflict. I mean, I was born in this city *because of that*... If things hadn't happened that way, well, who knows?

Maritza sees how the tragic events in Colombian history pushed people out of the countryside and into the cities, and in her case, she has benefitted from life in the capital – she went to university, got a Master's degree, and has a highly-skilled, professional job, all of which would have been less likely if she had been born, raised, and stayed in the countryside. However, in her telling, her entire personal history could have been different without the instability of an unpredictable event during a key period in Colombian history. In this intersection between personal and political, a tragedy grew into suffering and hardship for her widowed grandmother, but over the course of the next two generations, it transformed into what Maritza deemed was a better life, and one that she valued highly.

In addition to this process of urbanisation, Maritza's family is a lived example of the process of fertility change over time, and shrinking family size, described above. For example, Maritza's parents were both born in the 1940s. Her mother was one of four children (born before her grandmother was 23 years old, when her reproductive career

⁷² On the 9th April 1948, violence broke out in Bogotá (what is known as the 'Bogotazo'), following the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a populist, Liberal politician, before spreading to the countryside, and becoming an "overwhelmingly rural" conflict (Bushnell 2010a: 44). This is often identified as a key event in '*La Violencia*'.

⁷³ Often literally translated as 'peasant', but it is used to refer to people from rural areas, and more specifically, to farmers, though it can encompass anyone from landless, tenant farmers to small- or medium-size farm owners, amongst others.

was truncated by the death of her husband), and Maritza's father was one of seven children, which would have been an 'average' family for the period.⁷⁴ Maritza herself was born in the 1970s and, as one of four children, her family would also have been considered quite average; however, she has decided not to have any children. This type of consistently decreasing family size was also a common feature of the life/family histories I collected and are a micro-level illustration of the macro-level changes that were occurring in Colombia's demographic history over the late 20th century.

Teresa (60s, single, voluntary non-mother) was approximately 20 years older than Maritza, and her personal narrative and family history illustrate another type of rural-urban migration: namely, the economic migration which was a major driver of mid-20th century urbanisation in Colombia. She explained that, though she was born and raised in the city, her parents were originally from the countryside near Bogotá, and that they had migrated to the city for work, starting off as employees in catering businesses, before saving up enough to start their own. Her generation (born in the 1950s) was educated prior to the expansion of university access in Colombia, meaning that, as a middle-class woman in the 1980s, it likely opened many doors to her. In the '80s, just over a quarter of all women 35-44 worked outside the home (compared to more than two-thirds today). When I asked her to briefly describe herself, she began by saying that she was from Bogotá, and had always lived in the city, before explaining:

I thank God, first, because my parents could provide us, three sisters, with an education. The three of us are all professionals, and it was a completely different time back then. We weren't from an elite background.

I interviewed Teresa at home, in a tidy apartment in a middle-class part of the city, which she shared with her parents (both in their nineties). Teresa was very firm in her decision not to mother and considered herself lucky to have been a highly-educated, middle-class woman who could seek fulfilling roles outside the home, which she did, running the family business. These opportunities, which, at the time had been a relatively new pathway opening up to more Colombian women, gave her options

⁷⁴ Similarly, Natalia (early 40s, single, voluntary non-mother) whose maternal grandmother, had lived in the countryside and raised 14 children there remarked, incredulously, that she had "spent her *entire* life pregnant."

outside of the confines of more ‘traditional’, maternal roles that defined the experiences of most women of her own and previous generations.

In contrast, **Mercedes** (70s, previously married, mother of five) was herself a rural-to-urban migrant, and though they were broadly the same age, she had benefitted from far fewer educational and professional opportunities and remained working-class. Mercedes had lived in the same (originally informal) neighbourhood for nearly her entire life in Bogotá, struggling to buy a little plot and then building her own house on it, after spending years living in what she described as an ‘encampment’ [*campamento*]. I interviewed her at home, where we sat side-by-side on a small sofa, as she told me how she had left school without completing her primary education, and her parents had sent her, first, to work for another relative in the countryside, and a few years later, at the age of 14, to work in Bogotá as an ‘*internada*’, or live-in maid. After the family she worked for mistreated her, she ran away and ended up living with her older sister, who had migrated to Bogotá separately, with her husband and a growing family.

At 19, Mercedes herself married, and she and her husband had five children together. However, she described him as irresponsible, economically unreliable, and prone to extramarital affairs. Although he eventually left her (and he later died), even while they were together, his problems keeping jobs meant that Mercedes effectively served as both the primary breadwinner and the primary caregiver for their children. With a limited education, she had worked in physically demanding but low-paid sectors, as a cook or a cleaner in schools and private homes for most of her life. Mercedes’s life history (being a rural-urban migrant; having five children; taking on a dual role of mother and provider through low-paid work) more closely reflected the stories that other women told me about their grandmothers or mothers. This illustrates important class and generational distinctions, which meant that Mercedes’s experiences of adolescence in the 1950s and motherhood in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s were very different to those of the other, generally younger and more affluent mothers I interviewed. They were also a world apart from the experiences of the younger non-mothers I knew. Sadly, only three of her five children were still living when we spoke, as one child had died in infancy in the 1960s, and another had developed terminal cancer in adulthood. This made Mercedes the only mother I interviewed who had experienced the death of any of her children.

Although she was married, Mercedes's home life reflected a heavy burden not portrayed by other mothers, whose partners, even where described as deficient in some way, could generally be relied upon to help with childcare or around the house, when necessary. Her experience of marital breakdown, involuntary single motherhood, and having to work all her life, motivated by economic necessity rather than for professional fulfilment, are still reflected in many Colombian women's experiences today. Mercedes's daughter Lorena (whom I did not interview) illustrates this well. Like her mother, Lorena left school early, married young, and had five children. Unlike Mercedes, she *chose* to leave school – ending her studies after just four years of lower-secondary schooling, instead of staying on for another two years to complete her 'baccalaureate certificate' [*'bachillerato'*].⁷⁵ Lorena also married in the Church while still in her teens (at age 17). This traditional, conservative start soon unravelled, and whereas her mother had tried to save her marriage to an unreliable husband for many years, when Lorena judged that her own husband was drinking too much, she threw him out, shortly after the birth of their first child. The two separated permanently, and eventually Lorena went back to school. To Mercedes's dismay, this was where she met her second partner:

After that, Lorena said she would go back to study [at night school], and so I took care of her son at night, and that's where she was won over [*'conquistó'*] by her daughter's father. She became pregnant with her daughter by this guy, and well, my God, it was a such a headache for me at the time because, imagine, I had to provide for the older boy, I was the one who was raising him, really, he was like another one of my children. [...] So, well, she had her second child, a girl, and I was raising her daughter, too, when she got back with that same boy and let herself get pregnant *again*. When she was 3 months pregnant with his second baby, this boy [*'muchacho'*] got married to another girl and left Lorena! Oh, God, so, then I told her, 'No more!' She had to start using family planning. No more! Three children already, two out of wedlock: 'What are you doing with your life?!'

As a conservative, Catholic woman, Mercedes was clearly dismayed by her daughter's life choices, yet Lorena was lucky to be able to count on her mother's support, as not all young, single mothers have family who can provide for them (Esteve, García-Román, et al. 2012). Like her mother, Lorena also worked as a cleaner, which Mercedes explained directly as a result of her leaving school without a diploma: "since she didn't want to keep studying, she had to work in family homes, doing housework

⁷⁵ The Colombian school career is divided into three stages, comprising: five years of primary school, plus four years of lower secondary school [*'Secundaria Básica'*], and two years of upper secondary [*'Educación Media'*]. At the end of upper secondary, students receive their baccalaureate [*'Título de bachiller'*, or *'Bachillerato'*].

[*‘oficios domésticos’*], but all of her kids have their high school diploma (baccalaureate), except the oldest one.” Whereas four of Mercedes’s five children had left school without their baccalaureate certificate, only one of Lorena’s five had. Although Mercedes achieved some stability for her family, she herself had not been a beneficiary of much, if any, intra-generational social mobility. Her children and grandchildren also still lived in the same neighbourhood that she had helped build, though they had achieved a higher level of education. Therefore, by that standard, there was some upward intergenerational social mobility, even if this meant a minimal change to their material living conditions.

Urban Worlds and Trade-offs: New Opportunities for Education, Female Autonomy, and Social Mobility

As shown above, the transition from rural to urban had profound implications for the lives of the women and men who migrated, as well as for their children and grandchildren, yet this does not imply that urbanisation resulted in equally-distributed benefits or easy access to social mobility. In Colombia, education is viewed as one of the most important routes to upward social mobility, and higher levels of education are a key marker of the middle class and up (Uribe-Mallarino et al. 2017). In the past thirty years, post-secondary education has expanded rapidly: in 1990, only 9% of women aged 15-49 had a ‘higher’ education, compared to 36% in 2015. There is regional variation here, too, as amongst women in Bogotá the figures for 1990 and 2015 were higher than the national average: 18% and 47%, respectively (ICF 2012). Younger generations of women are also more educated than men, with a median of 10.4 completed years of education versus 10.2 (2015 Colombia DHS, in ICF 2012).

Although, unlike Mercedes, most of my interviewees were from the top three social strata out of six, making them primarily middle-to-upper class, the majority came from families who had migrated from rural to urban areas in search of opportunities, or fleeing violence and insecurity in the countryside, like Maritza’s. Urban Colombians are generally more educated than their rural counterparts, given their greater access to educational opportunities (including a network of universities in cities across the country), as well as the perceived need for higher education in the urban job market, without which the primary options tend to be low-paying and may result in a lifetime of economic precarity (Uribe-Mallarino et al. 2017). The interconnections between

fertility, education, and economic status are well-established, as I showed in Chapter 3, and as the extensive research addressing adolescent pregnancy in Colombia has highlighted (Núñez & Cuesta 2006). Teenage motherhood, as illustrated by Lorena's story, above, is strongly associated with economic disadvantage and lower levels of education (Flórez & Soto 2006: 56). Interestingly, Flórez et al. (2004: 115) used a mixed-method life history approach, and suggested that early motherhood also relates to the centrality (or not) of motherhood in a young woman's life plan ("*proyecto de vida*"), as well as whether she views other paths to self-fulfilment (e.g. through professional achievements) as achievable options. This research highlights the bidirectional relationship between early school-leaving and teenage pregnancy: while some girls may leave school as a result of their pregnancies, in other cases, dropping out *precedes* pregnancy, suggesting that these girls may not have seen secondary or higher education as a realistic goal, regardless (Flórez et al. 2004).

Though poverty and educational disadvantages contribute to teenage pregnancy, there is also evidence that achieving self-fulfilment through early motherhood subsequently decreases women's chances of attaining alternative forms of success and stability. Urdinola & Ospino (2015: 1509) used retrospective DHS data to compare women who gave birth as teens to those who gave birth aged 20-21 (i.e. other early, but not adolescent mothers), and found that teen mothers had lower-quality jobs, their partnership histories were less stable, and they were more likely to have experienced serious domestic violence and the death of a child. Research by Gomez-Cañón (2016) built on this, focusing specifically on the question of whether women and men who became parents before age 21 faced any income penalties. This author found that younger (not just teenage) parents face a significant wage penalty: compared to mothers and fathers who postponed their first births, younger mothers earned 13% less and fathers 5% less per hour, providing evidence not only of an early-parenthood wage penalty, but of a substantial gender difference that disadvantages young mothers more than fathers. Furthermore, when comparing mothers to non-mothers, an additional wage gap appears: a 'motherhood penalty'. Olarte & Peña (2010) analysed the relationship between children and Colombian women's income, finding that mothers earn 18% less than non-mothers. Even after controlling for other factors, a 10% maternal wage gap persisted. They hypothesise that this gap relates not only to mothers' additional caring responsibilities, but also to the lower average quality of

their jobs. Taken together, these findings suggest that, as elsewhere, not only is motherhood penalised in work full-stop, but that women who have their children at a younger age are potentially *more* disadvantaged than postponers.

Additionally, Zuluaga-Diaz (2010) found that the positive relationship between income and each additional year of education was greater for Colombians from poorer backgrounds than their richer peers, hypothesising that this is because richer individuals' social networks give them greater access to better (and better-paid) jobs regardless of their education, whereas this cannot be said for poorer people. She therefore suggests that poorer individuals derive a greater "marginal benefit" from higher levels of education, where they are able to achieve it (Zuluaga-Diaz 2010: 31). It is unfortunate, then, that adolescent mothers are usually from socioeconomically-disadvantaged backgrounds and also tend to have lower levels of education, since these findings suggest that such women might be amongst those who would benefit most from additional years of schooling, in terms of returns to their future earnings. It is also important to note that Colombia is considered a low social mobility country, based on the high correlation between parents' and children's educational level (e.g. 77% of children whose parents have "at least some higher education" are likely to achieve the same, compared to just 11% of children whose parents who have a primary education or less); yet, mobility is higher in urban than rural areas, and Colombian women are more socially/educationally-mobile than men (Behrmann et al. 2001, in Azevedo & Bouillon 2010: 31). This latter fact is important in the context of this chapter. Finally, the value placed on education as a route to social mobility, and the pressure to do well academically (especially for children and adolescents who show academic promise and can 'envision' a future involving professional avenues to self-fulfilment) comes from both individuals' own personal motivations, as well as parental expectations for their children to do better than they did. I expand on both of these factors below, in relation to specific women's life histories.

Non-motherhood as side effect of female education and 'autonomy'?

Elisa and Rocío's stories illustrate the cultural emphasis on education and familial incentives to do well in school, in order to get ahead in life. **Elisa** (50s, married, semi-voluntary non-mother) and I met at an outdoor café near her workplace, in the centre of Bogotá. Elisa lived in a largely middle/upper-class village outside of town and drove

into work every day. We were due to meet early in the morning, but roadworks and traffic meant that she arrived about a half-hour late, and incredibly apologetic. Elisa had a Master's degree and a professional job, but described how, growing up, she had felt there was little option with respect to studying. She told me:

My grandparents came from the countryside, from a really difficult economic background – lots of hardship. [...] So, my generation had to study. My mother and father both knew that you had to get a qualification. They were very clear that social mobility came from education and their aspirations were for their children to study.

This portrays the pervasive sense – described by other interviewees, such as Elisa's age-mate **Luisa** (40s, formerly cohabiting, mother of two), as well as in other studies (see Uribe-Mallarino et al. 2017) – that a professional or other university qualification that will allow you to obtain a well-paid job that is key to either attaining or maintaining middle-class status. Although more technical occupations, such as plumbers, electricians, car mechanics, and others can earn a good living in North America or the UK, in Colombia, such jobs typically pay poorly, are not particularly well respected (at least amongst the aspirational middle class), and therefore are seen as limiting one's opportunities for social advancement. Like Elisa, **Rocío** (40s, cohabiting, 'temporarily' childless) identified education as key to her life success, and tied this into Colombian ideas of 'progress', which her parents had instilled in her and her siblings:

My dad, when he died, had always said that the only thing he could leave his children was an education. It was the only inheritance he could give us. And that was very generalised, in the country, like, it's a very Colombian saying that 'The only thing I can give you is an education'.

However, achieving an education in Colombia is not always easy. The high cost of university education makes it harder for people from working- or lower-middle-class backgrounds, like Rocío, whose parents ran a small shop and had no more than a primary education themselves. Despite that, and like Elisa, Rocío and her three siblings had all graduated from high school and university, and all had professional jobs. Rocío, like many women I knew, had also worked from a young age, helping to fund her own education.

While education is an important driver of social mobility, both generally and in women's own life stories, personal autonomy was another key factor. This was related to education, inasmuch as higher education is correlated with better professional

prospects and the ability to support oneself, without needing the help of a (usually male) life partner. For example, **Eva** (40s, previously cohabited, semi-voluntary non-mother), whom I interviewed the course of an entire afternoon and evening at her home, had, from an early age helped take care of her younger brother and provide for her family, emotionally and financially, because her father frequently lost his job and experienced other troubles.⁷⁶ Although her parents were both lower-middle class, Eva had attended a prestigious private school (on a full scholarship) and, as expected, had gone on to a good university. Neither of her parents had a higher education, so she was the first person in her nuclear family to attend university. Eva had made decisions earlier in life that she felt prioritised work and study (which she ‘loved’) over having children, and which had contributed to her non-motherhood. Though she came across as very comfortable with her childlessness, she also repeatedly reflected on what might have happened in different circumstances; namely, if she had been less focused working and studying constantly throughout her 20s, just to make ends meet, perhaps she would have had more time to contemplate motherhood.

However, Eva’s prioritisation of education and work was influenced by her own mother’s experiences in an unhappy marriage, which was framed in explicitly gendered terms. First, Eva said she wanted “to have the tools *as a woman* not to have to depend on anyone” and, secondly, “not to allow anyone to treat me the way I saw my father treat my mother”. Financial and emotional independence were, in her words, ‘incredibly valuable’, but this independence came at the cost of de-prioritising romantic relationships and possible children (this was also the case for Rocío and other women). This balancing of education, work, and family life appears to be especially problematic for women who are precariously middle-class in early adulthood, when family assistance might make balancing working, studying, and childbearing more feasible for women who are better-off.

⁷⁶ Like Maritza in the previous section, Eva explicitly related this to his personal history and to the history of Colombia. Her father had been a young boy when the *Bogotazo* broke out, destroying the family’s business in the centre of Bogotá, and leading to family ruin. As one of the oldest boys in the family, he had had to leave school and start working very young, to help provide for the family, and to allow his own younger siblings to stay in school. This led to a range of social class statuses within her father’s generation, with his being one of the most precarious, as he had less formal schooling than his younger siblings. This pattern wherein the older children in a family start working at a precocious age partly so that younger children can stay in school was not uncommon in the 20th century sociodemographic history of many countries (see Caldwell 2005).

This drive for personal independence, rather than a joint romantic project, emerged in many other non-mothers' narratives. **Amalia** (40s, previously cohabited, involuntary non-mother), like Eva, had studied and then worked her whole life. She explicitly described the pursuit of independence as the motivation behind these decisions:

My family is middle class, but I think I've always had a desire to be *economically independent*... and because of that, I studied hard, then worked hard, and a lot of that was to be able to have [...] my own space and autonomy. I think a lot of women from the same class, or in this country, might think about a romantic relationship as part of gaining that personal stability or social mobility, but I haven't. For me, it was always an individual goal.

Amalia articulates that studying and working were a route to achieving a comfortable life, and one that she could secure for herself, rather than relying on a joint endeavour with another person. However, romantic partnerships are commonly seen to offer many women a normative route towards securing personal independence and stability, from one's family of origin, at least.⁷⁷ For Amalia, neither romantic partnerships nor childbearing were originally part of her '*proyecto de vida*' (literally, 'life project' or goals), though her thoughts on this had recently shifted, as she had recently entered a relationship with a man with whom she wanted to have children, emphasising the relational nature of reproductive decision-making.

One narrative which presented partnerships as a route to social mobility or greater independence and stability was Andrea's mother's. **Andrea** (20s, voluntary non-mother, never cohabited) and I met at a café near her workplace and chatted for over two hours. She was still young and single, and lived with her mother, despite having a professional job and earning well. This living arrangement is neither unusual nor socially unacceptable in Colombia, where working adult children commonly live with their parents, especially while still unmarried. Andrea's parents' marriage was socioeconomically 'mixed'. Her father's parents were well-off, and he attended a good school, then university, before joining the family business. In contrast, Andrea's

⁷⁷ Here, Amalia excludes herself from this idea that partnerships can provide personal stability or social mobility. It is also important to note that a fairly large proportion of all women are single mothers: about 1 in 5 Colombian women aged 25-29 in 2005 (Esteve, García-Román, et al. 2012: 719). They are more likely to live in poverty, and often live in extended family households (e.g. 72.7% of single mothers aged 25-29 live with extended family (Esteve, García-Román, et al. 2012: 716)). At least some of these women would have originally had children within a romantic relationship, which later broke down, rather than being 'single mothers by choice'. Together, these figures suggest that, for many women, romantic partnerships might not be a lasting way to either gain either stability or independence from one's family of origin.

mother's parents had migrated from the countryside to the city and built their own house, little by little (Andrea described this as '*auto-construcción*', often associated with informal settlements). Her mother's schooling ended with a technical qualification, and she was only able to go to university after she had married Andrea's father, and had a child. By age 21, Andrea's mother was married, and by the time she was 23, she had given birth to Andrea. In contrast, at that age, Andrea was still in university and, in her late twenties, she was enjoying the benefits of being both highly-educated and professionally-employed, as well as the relative freedom afforded by not having children. Andrea expressed doubts about whether her mother would have had children at all, had she not gotten married and pregnant relatively young. While Andrea presented her mother's marriage as a route to upward social mobility, she felt strongly that her mother had wanted to:

Enjoy married life a bit more, because I think, in part, it was really common back then to get married as a way to leave your parents' house. You got married to leave that family behind and gain some independence. So, of course, she wanted to have this life that she couldn't have when she was young [because she didn't have money], just to enjoy her freedom. They were both working, my father earned a good salary, they could travel, they could do lots of things, but then she got pregnant. So, I think that was hard for her.

In Andrea's telling, her mother's marriage afforded her certain opportunities and comforts that she might not otherwise have had (going to university, travelling). However, this route towards one form of independence (from her family of origin) came at the cost of a new dependence on a romantic partner who was ten years her senior and had his own goals, which included having children sooner rather than later. Whereas Amalia's pursuit of financial independence *on her own* might mean she missed her opportunity to have children, Andrea thought her mother would have preferred to have children later, if at all. Social mobility through marriage, as part of a joint project, comes at its own price. In the end, Andrea's parents divorced, and her mother ended up on her own, raising a daughter in trying financial circumstances.

These narratives illustrate the difficult decisions and disparate pathways many Colombian women have to take in their pursuit of independence and social mobility. In their study of social mobility and the Colombian middle-class, Uribe-Maillarino et al. (2017: 5) identify gaining, or increasing, control over one's body and life outcomes as key aspects of middle class narratives and of those who strive for upward social mobility, noting that, for women, being able to "decide when and how many children

to have” is especially important. In a relatively uncertain environment, like Colombia, being middle- or upper-class allows people to gain a greater sense of control over their life outcomes, and, for many women, gaining an education was a key pathway towards self-determination and greater life control, as poorer/less educated women are seen to have less control over their lives, including their reproductive lives, than their richer/more educated peers. There is some truth to this, in the sense that richer urban women have greater access to legal abortion for example, and may expect to enter more gender egalitarian romantic relationships (Sánchez et al. 2011). Additionally, the drive to achieve academic and professional success, and its fulfilment, leads some women to necessarily postpone having children, which has been normalised in Europe and North America over the past 30 years, but remains unusual in Colombia. This educational and professional success means that some women have to deprioritise romantic relationships and may mean giving up the opportunity to have children altogether. For various reasons, this trade-off has no simple male equivalent, and therefore highlights an important gendered difference I will turn to next.

Non-fatherhood as expression of male ‘freedom’?

In contrast with the narratives above, men typically relayed their stories in subtly different ways. Pascale Donati’s (2000) study of childless women and men in France drew a suggestive distinction between men’s and women’s interpretations of non-parenthood: whereas men described a search for personal ‘freedom’ (in French, *liberté*), women tended to frame their own life stories in terms of a search for independence and self-reliance (*autonomie*). This may seem like a fine distinction, but it strongly resonates with the data from my Colombian interviews. While both non-mothers and non-fathers described valuing their personal freedom and framed this as intrinsic to their having an ‘independent’ personality, it was only women, and primarily voluntary non-mothers, who would couple the previous form of independence with the alternative definition that focused on securing a future *for oneself* – more like autonomy or self-sufficiency. This was particularly, though not exclusively, the case for those women who described themselves as voluntarily childless and was not a feature of any mothers’ or men’s narratives.

For example, when I asked **Sebastián** (40s, single, ‘temporarily’/semi-voluntarily childless) if he had ever wanted children, he gave me an extended answer, starting by

saying that he had only recently started to think about it, and, while he would like to be a father, he was not currently “looking for a mum”, as he put it. Then, he repeated how, due to his job and the travel and emotional investment it demanded, it would be very difficult for him to consider having a child at this point in his life. He viewed becoming a father at that point in time as a “complete liability” and went on to say:

...because for me, my personality, I really value my independence – a lot. I value independence, autonomy, freedom really highly [...] And so, having a child, to me, would mean giving a lot of that up. At least for now.

In contrast, though he was currently single, Sebastián viewed having a partner much more positively, as that would conflict with his professional goals far less than fatherhood. Similarly, when I asked **Camilo** (40s, single, ‘temporarily’/semi-voluntarily childless) to describe himself however he wished, he started by saying that the most important things in life were having friends and going cycling, before mentioning his job and other hobbies, like travelling. When asked to expand on this, rather than talking about his friends, given the primary importance he had initially attached to friendships, he instead told me how he “really enjoy[s] being alone”, relating this to cycling. He viewed cycling as his time to “spend five or six hours” on his own every weekend, just thinking. This was, for him, a non-negotiable part of his week, as was living on his own. He valued “coming home and spending all evening alone”, saying that, although he would like to have children, his current lifestyle would mean either having them in a non-traditional (i.e. non-cohabiting) relationship, or compromising on this desire for alone time. In essence, both Sebastián and Camilo valued a form of independence – as freedom, rather than self-reliance – that would be significantly compromised by fatherhood.

While there are certain similarities between men’s and women’s perspectives regarding the compromises necessary to be a good parent and the difficulty of balancing parenthood with other goals (addressed in Chapters 5 and 8), men never relayed their life histories in terms of seeking economic self-reliance, uncompromised by romantic partnerships. Instead, they framed their desires for independence as a way to secure time ‘alone’, unbothered by other commitments, and free to pursue the leisure activities they enjoyed and/or gratifying professional activities and goals in themselves. While the association between traditional masculinity and being a ‘provider’ is an example of a historical continuity in men’s roles, for women, single-

handedly taking on the ‘provider’ role and becoming economically self-reliant was a significant point of gendered transformation.

Continuity despite Transformation: ‘Failed’ and ‘Disruptive’ Women Questioning the Stigma Surrounding Non-Parenthood

Personal disposition, formative experiences, and the broader social, economic, and cultural circumstances are all key to understanding both the particularities within and commonalities between different women’s and men’s experiences of non-parenthood. However, in this section, I will argue that, although individual experiences of non-motherhood are no doubt shaped by age and generation of birth, there are, in fact, many areas of common experience across generations, some of which I will explore below. In other words, non-parenthood in Colombia tells a familiar story of continuities and discontinuities. While the educational and professional opportunities available to Colombian women have expanded over the past two generations, social expectations and definitions of ‘successful’ womanhood have mostly been far slower to adapt, and thus women who have not conformed to these expectations are often made to feel abnormal or like they have ‘failed’ in a key area (motherhood), despite being high achievers in other realms of life.

While about two-thirds of Colombians currently live in regions with fertility that is at or below the ‘replacement level’ of 2.1 children per couple, having fewer children overall does not necessarily mean that more women are having *no* children. In fact, in the Colombian case, the fertility decline can mostly be explained by women entering into motherhood at the same rate, but both wanting and having fewer children overall. Colombian women have not, on average, postponed their first romantic or sexual relationships, and most women are not delaying their entry into motherhood. In fact, like many other Latin American countries, teenage pregnancy rose throughout the 1990s and 2000s,⁷⁸ and in a pattern that has not changed over the past 50 years, most Colombian women will still be mothers by the time they reach their mid-twenties, i.e. over 50% are mothers by age 25. When thinking specifically about *non-motherhood*, as of the most recent data, only around 10% of Colombian women around age 50 (so, toward the end of their reproductive lifetime) were childless. This is in line with

⁷⁸ For example, in 1990, 12.8% of Colombian women aged 15-19 were mothers or were pregnant with their first child, rising steadily to a peak of 20.5% by 2005, before declining slightly to 17.4% in 2015, which was the same level as 20 years prior, in 1995 (ICF 2012).

estimates from Brazil (Cavenaghi 2013), although low compared to most Western European countries, where it rises as high as 20 or 30% (Miettinen et al. 2015).

Non-mothers mostly presented Colombian society as conservative when it came to family matters. Although **Teresa** (60s, single, voluntary non-mother) had been in a series of long-term relationships (one lasting 18 years), she had never cohabited with any of her partners, and expressed no desire for children. When I asked her about not having them, she addressed me as a foreigner, telling me how, “Here, in Colombia, [...] people think that *if you don’t have a child, your life’s over.*” She had had to push back against this idea throughout her life, sometimes responding to intrusive questions with brusque answers. Although Teresa was of an older generation, where both marriage and motherhood were arguably more expected and more central than today, **Andrea** (20s, single, voluntary non-mother), echoed her comments, when she described how she felt people viewed voluntarily childless women, specifically:

A woman who doesn’t want children is weird. You get asked ‘Why not?’ a lot, because people can’t understand that maybe you just don’t want them. An answer of ‘because I don’t want to [have them]’ is never enough. People assume it’s because you had some bad experience, that something has traumatised you, because it’s not seen as normal.

Not only is non-motherhood viewed as abnormal, but many women felt that being successful, and changing ideas around independence and autonomy had affected how others – particularly men who might be potential life partners – saw them. For example, Natalia and Diana both felt that their professional success and financial self-sufficiency had narrowed their partner choices and made dating more difficult, and even women in relationships, like Susana, felt their accomplishments threatened men (though not their own partners). **Natalia** (40s, single, voluntarily childless) illustrated a widespread feeling with an anecdote from a family gathering a few years before:

People say, ‘Ah, Colombians are very liberal, very this and that...’ I don’t believe any of it. Here, you see a woman alone and she’s a ‘*solterona*’ [spinster], or ‘*amargada*’ [bitter] because she hasn’t caught anyone’s eye and no one wants to marry her. [...] One day, a cousin just came out and told me, ‘Natalia, I’d never go out with a woman like you – you’re independent, you have your own salary, you do whatever you want to, you bought your own apartment, your own car, and you did a doctorate! I couldn’t date a woman who’s better educated and has more than me!’

By foregoing motherhood, and indeed, in some cases, simply by virtue of being professionally successful, women like Teresa, Andrea, and Natalia are disrupting ideas of socially-appropriate womanhood. Even non-parents recognised this difficult

relationship successful women had to finding a place within a still relatively traditional society. When I asked **Luisa** (40s, previously cohabited, mother of two), the mother of two teenage daughters, if she thought that people without children were treated any differently from parents, she replied, emphatically:

Yes, and for professional women, people say: ‘Ahh, she’s dedicated herself to achieving success, but she won’t find fulfilment as a woman.’ That’s the Colombian saying: ‘She won’t be fulfilled, *as a woman*’ [without children]. It’s awful!

Adriana and others also used this phrase, which emphasises that women’s happiness cannot come from professional endeavours, but rather, can only be gained once a woman has children. Traditional, maternal gender roles are felt strongly even by the privileged women who have been the prime beneficiaries of the social changes that opened up new, non-reproductive roles and opportunities for some (though by no means all) Colombian women over the past two generations.

Colombia, like many countries, also exhibits contradictory reproductive impulses that reflect Colen’s (1995) idea of ‘stratified reproduction’, or the way in which certain women – and men – are empowered to reproduce, while others are discouraged, or even prevented from doing so. When I asked if people without children are treated differently to parents, **Paola** (30s, married, uncertain/‘temporary’ non-mother) summarised what she saw as a particularly Latin American mix of sociocultural pronatalism and quasi-eugenic attitudes to fertility, poverty, and population growth, particularly in urban settings:

On the one hand, there’s this whole discourse around there being too many of us, you know? That’s the interesting thing about Colombia and Latin America. All these Malthusian attitudes towards poverty. But, of course, then people also say, ‘But you two, who are doing well, who are ‘good’ people, who are comfortable [economically]...’ You know? ... ‘You are the ones who *should* have children. In contrast, look at all the rest [of the people who are parents].’

As a well-educated, married, upper-middle-class couple, Paola and her husband are encouraged to have children, whereas poorer women, single mothers, and others are discouraged or judged when they do the same. Some of the voluntary non-parents themselves conveyed neo-Malthusian perspectives, when discussing ‘overpopulation’ (see Chapter 6), and these widespread views are expressed quite openly.⁷⁹ As Paola

⁷⁹ For example, Claudia Palacios, a well-known Colombian journalist, wrote an opinion piece for a respected national newspaper, entitled ‘Vasectomies for the Little Manly Men’, where she expressed

indicated, socially desirable and undesirable reproduction is also stratified along lines of partnership status.

Although single motherhood is very common, it is still generally viewed as less desirable than childbearing within a lasting partnership. For example, when we spoke, **Elisa** (50s, married, semi-voluntary non-mother) had been married for about 10 years, having married relatively late in life. She told me:

When I married Jorge, or whenever I was in a relationship before, all of my family would ask: 'So, *now* are you going to have kids?' ... As if it were a social duty. My mother still says 'Ay, it's that.... [inhales sharply through gritted teeth] ... she never had kids.' *As if it were a failure*. Like I'm faulty.

Despite this external pressure, which Elisa expressed as a 'social duty', she and her husband had decided early on not to try for children, as they had married when she was in her early 40s and he was significantly older. She articulated a sense of relief regarding non-motherhood, saying "thankfully, it never happened! I don't feel disappointed about that [*No lo vivo como una frustración*]." Although there were some exceptions, family and social pressure to have children was a recurrent narrative theme for women. Another example of this sense that childbearing was a woman's social duty came from **Susana** (30s, married, semi-voluntarily childless), describing how she thought that her own high level of education had backfired for her parents, particularly her father, and his rationale for sending her to prestigious (and expensive) schools and to university:

ultimately, what my dad wanted was that I study, like a good girl, but my future was supposed to be finding a husband who was economically solvent, and who could provide for me, so that I could be prepared for motherhood and the multiple children I would have [laughs] [...] as my dad says, 'Having children for the nation' [*Darle hijos a la patria*].

Susana used her father's saying of having children 'for the nation' repeatedly in our interview, repeating this framing of the duty to reproduce in patriotic terms, which she used jokingly, while implying it was a serious matter for her father. Susana's father would try to pressure her (and her husband) to have children to give him and his wife grandchildren in various ways, pressing emotional levers on her daughterly duty, as well. For example, he took to loudly introducing himself to new people he met (in

disgust at men who have many children that they cannot take care of, emotionally or economically, before arguing that they should be convinced to have vasectomies, comparing this to sterilising "street dogs" for public health (Palacios 2017).

Susana's presence) as a 'sterile grandfather' [*abuelo estéril*]. This phrasing was not unique, and emerged in other interviews with women, whose parents took to jokingly, or not-so-jokingly, referring to themselves as 'sterile grandparents', as in Virginia's case (though there, it was her mother). Adult children's voluntary childlessness is lived as involuntary 'grandchildlessness' for their parents. Although most people with multiple siblings did not feel as pressured by family, this was particularly a problem for women from smaller families of two children, like Virginia and Susana, especially if neither sibling chooses to undertake parenthood. In this framework, not only does non-parenthood change one's relationship to the next generation, it also affects relations to the previous generation.

A final point with respect to family pressure related to the sense that there was a change in emphasis over time, which transitioned from an initial injunction on 'too-early' childbearing (as academically-promising teenagers) to a strong pressure to have them, as the 'right' kind of educated, successful, well-off adult women, who would make 'good mothers'. Turning back to Susana, she described how, when she was younger, her father's greatest fear was that she would have "an adolescent pregnancy" saying "that was one of my father's greatest worries in life, so we [she and her sister] lived with the constant warning that we needed to be very careful, that 'You won't open your legs', and 'You won't this and that'". She went on to say that her mother now interpreted Susana's non-motherhood as a reaction to this, reproaching her husband: "It's because of all that garbage you said that Susana doesn't have kids! Look at our daughter's revenge!" While not usually framed in such explicit terms, there was a sense that women who had been academically-promising were encouraged to focus on their studies and, above all, avoid a teenage pregnancy, framed as a calamitous event that could alter a young woman's future forever. Susana's adolescence coincided with a period of increasing teenage pregnancy in Colombia, which went hand-in-hand with a policy and academic focus on studying the correlates of young motherhood (Angulo-Vasquez et al. 2013; Flórez & Núñez 2001; ICBF 2015), in an attempt to bring the teenage pregnancy rate down (see Appendix 7A for some recent *Profamilia* anti-teenage pregnancy campaigns). Some Colombian research has shown that level of parental control and contextual factors are indeed important determinants of teenage pregnancy (Flórez et al. 2004). Other research corroborated the usual links between adolescent pregnancies and lower levels of education (for example, in 2014, 76.3% of

girls aged 12-19 who were mothers were not in school, compared to just 12.9% of their childless peers (Pardo-Peña 2015: 22)), as well as the fact that lower levels of education are strongly correlated with lower-paid, less secure work in the informal sector (Rojas 2015), which contributes to cycles of poverty.

However, since teenage motherhood is relatively high and women who reach their forties without children are a numerically small minority in Colombia, non-motherhood is generally viewed as abnormal. The pressure to have children does not end with family members but extends to healthcare providers and others. **Rocío**, for example, told me how she had injured her ankle a few years before, and gone to her health insurance company's clinic for a semi-emergency appointment with a doctor she did not know. Rocío's interaction with the young, female doctor did not go well:

I arrived in terrible pain, and she started taking my medical history, and I said, 'I'm 39...' and the doctor stopped what she was doing at the computer and turned to me to say: 'Ma'am [*Señora*], and you haven't thought of having children?! Because at this age, it's important.' So, I looked at this young girl and told her, 'Look, *Señorita*, I didn't come here so that you could give me a family planning consultation, I came here because I hurt my ankle!' And she started panicking, like: 'But it's the protocol...' [...] It just struck me as so disrespectful and inappropriate, you know? I was there for something that had nothing to do with my reproductive history. That's a personal issue and I don't expect people to get into something that doesn't concern them.

Elisa and Maritza described similarly awkward interactions with doctors, who either encouraged them to consider having children, or asked why they had not. However, it was also a medical professional who helped advise Maritza in a way that eased her mind regarding her voluntary non-motherhood (see Chapter 6).

Apart from general curiosity and intrusive or inappropriate lines of questioning, other women felt that, by not having children, they had become more distanced from friends and peers who did become mothers. For example, **Eva**'s friends started having children in their 20s, whereas she did not. Although she had been in a committed, cohabiting relationship at the time, when she decided to separate from her then-partner, she told me her closest friends:

stayed in their relationships and... both had two kids. And when they had children, for me, everything changed. I distanced myself from them, because I felt that we no longer had so much in common. [...] And I felt like an outsider [*'ajena'*]. In part, I felt like I hadn't achieved something, you know? [...] But on top of not achieving it [motherhood], I didn't even want it. So, it was this contradiction, because it was like I hadn't managed to achieve this goal, but it wasn't a goal that I wanted for myself. [...]

My reaction was to distance myself from them, and it's a shame because we really cared for each other, but my friendships with them ended.

While this distancing is normal, it closes down the potential networks that childless women might have, since most people eventually become parents. Eva's closest current friends are both women without children, and in her personal narrative, she reflected on not measuring up to the social ideals that her university friends had fulfilled, describing how it had affected the way that she felt about herself ('like a failure'), and contributed to the end of important relationships at previous stages in her life. This phrasing is not unique to Colombia. In Ann Miles's study of Ecuadorian women living with lupus, the author discusses the experiences of women whose lupus began when they were young, affecting their life plans, noting that, due to being single and living with their parents well into their thirties, one "faces the knowledge, reinforced by her mother, that she is a permanently "failed" woman because she will not have children" (2013: 146). This contrasts sharply with men's experiences. No men described feeling like a failure in relation to non-fatherhood, and, in Chapter 5, Daniel reported that many of his male friends continued to act 'irresponsibly' or unfatherly, even after having children.

While fatherhood has always been optional, motherhood continues to be one of the most important sources of feminine identity, despite decades of contestation by feminists and other thinkers (Badinter 2011). Life circumstances, such as illness, or the pursuit of financial independence and stability in early adulthood, or simply the lack of a long-term partner with whom to contemplate having children, can make it difficult for women to pursue motherhood at the 'right' time, in a manner that simply has no parallel for men. Not only is their biological timeframe shorter, the social pressure exerted on women is far more intense, and not only are they constantly reminded of their non-motherhood, they sometimes face censure from the people closest to them. Finally, when thinking about parenthood, most men do not have to consider whether their partner (if female) would be a supportive co-parent, whereas most women simply cannot take this factor for granted.

7.4 Conclusions

As part of a small, cross-sectional study, this chapter has many limitations. A series of interviews with the same people over a number of years or decades (a 'longitudinal'

study, in demographic terms) would be an ideal way to explore life trajectories and narrative readjustments, as well as historical transformations. However, since that was unfortunately outside of the scope of this research, instead I have tried to focus on intergenerational changes against a context of substantial social, political, and demographic flux, by interviewing people of different ages and social circumstances, from their 20s through their 70s.

This chapter has sought to frame non-parenthood in historical terms, and as intrinsically linked to events at different social and historical scales. Though non-parenthood is not a modern phenomenon, the particular forms it takes in contemporary Colombia may be. Self-sufficient, self-fulfilled forms of middle-class non-motherhood, particularly, are contingent upon other social and demographic changes that reshaped what it meant to be a Colombian woman in the 20th and 21st centuries. Women have increasingly been encouraged to pursue their education, career, and to develop themselves personally. Yet, despite these important changes, the stigma felt by many non-mothers suggests that not all in Colombian society have fully adapted to non-traditional forms of ‘being fulfilled’ as a woman.

It is also important to emphasise that, here, as in Chapter 6, childless women’s search for self-fulfilment does not reflect an obviously selfish or inward orientation. Instead, I have argued that it can be construed as part of a strategy of social mobility: a way for women to maintain their autonomy, while also securing or improving their material conditions. In a way, this reflects a broader sense of mistrust in Colombian society. While most Colombians recognise that they cannot rely on the State for help, and thus expect to turn to family and friends, many of the non-mothers profiled above have decided that, rather than relying on potentially unpredictable romantic partners or children for support, they are better off focusing on providing independently for themselves. This self-reliance sometimes comes at the cost of motherhood and partnerships. Reflecting the literature from other Latin American countries (e.g. Miles 2013), the theme of ‘failure’ related to non-motherhood emerged again and again: in Eva’s self-doubt, Susana’s parents’ pressure, and Elisa’s mother’s judgments of her daughter’s life choices. While these women were comfortable with their non-motherhood, the wider culture still told them that they should want to have children; if not for themselves, then perhaps for others.

I ended this chapter hinting at this 'traditional' imaginary of family, and particularly motherhood, which dictates that female self-fulfilment is derived primarily from motherhood. However, what is viewed as 'good' motherhood is constrained socioeconomically, and temporally, as motherhood must be neither too early nor too late. Whereas in this chapter, I have tried to tie these issues back to specific historical transformations, in the next chapter, I will expand on a very modern, 'intensive' parental imaginary and explore how this relates to childbearing decisions.

Chapter 8: Social Imaginaries of Parenthood and Family

The family is the basic nucleus of society. It is formed on the basis of natural or legal ties, through the free decision of a man and woman to contract matrimony or through the responsible resolve to comply with it. [...] Family relations are based on the equality of rights and duties of the couple and on the reciprocal respect of all its members. (Chapter 2, Article 42, 1991 Colombian Constitution)⁸⁰

8.1 Introduction

I started this chapter with an excerpt from the 1991 Colombian constitution because, I would argue, it presents one version of the Colombian social imaginary. Cornelius Castoriadis defines the *imaginary* as “the sense of a society’s shared, unifying core conceptions” (Strauss 2006: 324). However, for Castoriadis, there are multiple versions of ‘the imaginary’. First, the *radical imaginary* is “the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is [...] in other words, the imaginative capacity”; secondly, the *social imaginary*, is “a society’s imaginings, rather than ideas about society (although it might include that)” (Strauss 2006: 324). Though critical of the idea that a ‘society’ might have an imaginative capacity, Strauss (2006: 326) further specifies that Castoriadis’s *social imaginaries* “may be the conception of many members of a social group – or, sometimes, dominant members of a social group, or ideologists of a social group – learned from participation in shared social practices and exposure to shared discourses and symbols.” In this sense, a document like the constitution arguably represents the government’s social imaginary of the society it governs, as well as a ‘radical’ imaginary to which it aspires. For example, the 1991 Colombian constitution was an attempt at a progressive revision of the country’s legal principles and protections,⁸¹ laying out the nominally shared ideals of the nation. This is undermined somewhat by the fact that any nation is made up of manifold subgroups, and many Colombian citizens continue to be denied the protections to which they have a constitutionally-guaranteed right.

However, rather than viewing the concept of the ‘imaginary’ as a synonym for the shared ideas of abstract, bounded ‘cultures’, Strauss (2006: 323) encourages anthropologists to employ the concept in an experience-near way; instead of “the

⁸⁰ Source of English translation from the original Spanish:

https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Colombia_2005.pdf [Accessed: 10/Oct/19].

⁸¹ For example, it endorsed a pluralistic view of the Colombian nation (which had, until then, been framed as Catholic and Hispano-centric), recognising and protecting the specific rights of indigenous groups, Afro-Colombians and other ethnic minorities.

imaginary of society”, we should analyse “people’s imaginaries”. Additionally, Castoriadis is not alone in theorising this area. Charles Taylor’s definition of the *social imaginary* is not dissimilar to Castoriadis’s, though for him it is not “a set of ideas” (2002: 91); rather, it is “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, [...] carried in images, stories, and legends. [...] [W]hat is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society” (Taylor 2002: 106). Here, individuals are agents embedded within specific geographical, historical, and relational contexts. To Gaonkar (2002: 10), this conception “involves a form of understanding that has a wider grasp of our history and social existence”, and he compares Taylor’s *social imaginary* to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, specifying its role as “a generative matrix”. Yet, he notes Taylor’s attempt to stretch the imaginary beyond embodied, relatively unconscious practice (similar to *habitus*) by linking it to expression at a symbolic level. Thus, the social imaginary occupies a middle ground between conscious and unconscious thought.

In this chapter, I will address the collective *social imaginaries* of Colombian society, seeking to understand contemporary Colombian imaginaries regarding family and parenthood in the context of demographic change and shifting gender relations. I briefly focus on examples of the construction of parenthood and family in recent historical events, before turning to a micro-level sense of imagination, in order to try and understand how childless women and men imagine their own lives and futures as parents and how this affects their desire for children. I contrast this with parents’ perspectives on parenthood. Finally, I explore more ‘radical’ imaginaries regarding constructing families and securing a future. Throughout, I seek to address the interplay between different imaginaries: on one hand, personal, individual, micro-level, and on the other, the macro-level, shared socio-cultural understandings.

Parenthood is still framed as quasi-essential event in the Colombian social imaginary of the adult life course, and though this version is slowly being contested, reworked, and reinterpreted, it has not yet been fully replaced by more ‘radical’ imaginaries. Peterson’s (2015: 183) argument that “[b]ecoming a parent is no longer a self-evident part of life but rather a choice that needs to be made” is increasingly echoed in the Colombian press. One example (amongst many) is from a January 2017 *El Espectador* newspaper article, written by a Medellín-based psychologist, who describes motherhood as a decision in explicit terms:

Now it is not an impromptu decision, because we have realised that motherhood is not a just a whim and nor is it doll's play; it's a serious, costly, and at the same time marvellous, decision. [...] There is [also] another group: women who do not want to have children. Behind them is an immense desire to experience other aspects of life to its fullest. [...] Social pressures are becoming weaker, and being a mother today is a more independent decision (Ramirez 2017).

For many women and men, having children is indeed increasingly a carefully considered choice. Badinter (2011: 10) labels this “the torment of freedom” since having a child is “the biggest decision most human beings will make in their lives.” However, research addressing parenthood (Sevon 2005) and non-parenthood (Blackstone & Stewart 2016) has shown that, instead of thinking about this as one, discrete decision, it is better framed as a series of decisions over the course of a person's lifetime. Parents may indeed have made a singular and final decision; in other cases, children may have resulted from a welcome (or, initially, unwelcome) accident. For many non-parents, however, this decision becomes a constant theme that people return to, both individually and with new partners, time and again, as they incorporate new information or circumstances and must re-evaluate their decisions over the course of years. Finally, many involuntary non-parents may never have had much true choice, despite making an affirmative decision to try to have children.

8.2 Boundary Skirmishes: Inclusive Redefinitions, Alternative Family Forms, and Conservative Pushback

Enshrined as the ‘nucleus’ of society in the Colombian constitution and relied upon to provide for its population where the State could not, ‘family’ was traditionally imagined as a biological and social unit for providing the types of emotional and financial support that I will describe through ethnographic examples in the following sections. Although ‘family’ has arguably always been a politically-loaded term, right-wing sectors of Colombian society have re-mobilised it in a reactionary fight against issues as seemingly different as a 2016 peace agreement between the government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and as part of a transnational movement against what is called ‘gender ideology’ [*ideología de género*]. In the Colombian case, these were merged together for strategic reasons (see Toro 2019). The right-wing, anti-‘gender ideology’ movement is proudly anti-transgender, anti-feminist, and anti-gay, and promotes opposition to progressive views of gender, sexuality, and women's rights, generally. In Latin America it largely draws in religious Christians and anti-feminists and reframes all of the above as a ‘children's rights’

issue. This is a classic example of ‘reproductive governance’, or the ways in which different actors, be they from governmental, non-governmental, religious, or other organisations, “use legislative controls, economic inducements, moral injunctions, direct coercion, and ethical incitements to produce, monitor and control reproductive behaviours and practices” (Morgan & Roberts 2012: 243).

As Careaga-Perez (2016) notes, conservative Catholic and other religious groups have, from the beginning, had “reservations” regarding *gender equality* as envisioned by the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD); instead, they hold that “gender inequalities and gender mandates imposed on women and men are *not* a social construction, but emanate from nature and are considered as divine and as contemplated in the scriptures.” There have been various ‘moral panics’ around Latin America, protesting gender equality under the ‘gender ideology’ banner (Careaga-Perez 2016). In Colombia, one significant such event was the 10th August 2016 ‘March for the Family’, attended primarily by religious, socially-conservative Colombians: a series of marches drawing large crowds across the country’s major cities to protest this ‘gender ideology’ bogeyman (see Figure 8.1).⁸² This conservative movement essentially exists to push back against recent sociocultural, legal, and policy changes in the capital city and beyond (see, for example, the posters in Figure 8.2), as well as against a more expansive view of the family itself. In short, I arrived in Bogotá in October 2016, to start my fieldwork addressing the general themes of family, parenthood and non-parenthood, at a time when these issues were being mobilised in an attempt to counter the intergenerational changes that formed the backdrop to my thesis.

⁸² Though part of the larger movement, the August 2016 marches were prompted by a specific backlash against the Ministry of Education, led by Minister Gina Parody, for supposedly introducing new sexual education workbooks which included pornographic material (claims which were false). In reality, the Ministry of Education was seeking to introduce an anti-bullying initiative, following some high-profile student suicides and an anti-discrimination Constitutional Court decision. Schools were asked to write their own so-called peaceful ‘Coexistence Manuals’ [*Manuales de Convivencia*] to help prevent bullying against pupils for their physical characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disabilities, amongst other things. (See a *Ministry of Education* video (Spanish-language only), here: <https://www.facebook.com/GinaParody/videos/10154514766083028/> [Accessed: 10/Oct/2019]).

Figure 8.1: Coverage of the ‘March in Defence of the Family’ held across Colombia, August 2016



Protest sign reading “I’m in favour of the original design... Long live the family!”

Photo montage of protests in cities across Colombia. Posted by right-wing politician Thania Vega, who captioned it: ‘This is how Colombians respond when you meddle with children and the family’.

Source: <https://www.elheraldo.co/nacional/me-duelen-los-insultos-que-escuche-en-las-manifestaciones-ministra-gina-parody-277549> [Accessed: 10/Oct/19].

Source: <https://diariodelcauca.com.co/noticias/nacional/fotos-masiva-participacion-de-los-colombianos-en-la-marcha-p-228873> [Accessed: 10/Oct/19].

Lois McNay (2000: 93) argues that “[t]he entrenched nature of narratives of gender can be seen in the confusion and forms of backlash that have occurred as a response to the process of gender restructuring which has been unfolding over the last thirty years.” These protests and the broader ‘gender ideology’ backlash are a good example of this entrenched heteronormative imaginary, which reifies ‘traditional’ schema regarding “romantic love, marriage, reproduction and fidelity” (McNay 2000: 93). In Colombia, the ‘gender restructuring’ has taken various forms, but three recent legal changes have drawn special ire from Conservative social and religious groups. First, in 2006, the Constitutional Court’s *Sentencia C-355* gave women rights to legal abortions, though access is still restricted in practice, and negative experiences of abortion-related care are not uncommon (see DePiñeres et al. 2017, for examples of insensitive, stigmatising, and unprofessional treatment of women seeking later-term abortions in public hospitals). Then, in 2015, a legal challenge (‘*tutela*’) brought by a lesbian couple from Medellín, who had legally married in Germany and had two children together via artificial insemination (though the children were only biologically related to one of their mothers), was upheld by the same Court, allowing for the non-biological mother to officially ‘adopt’ the children she had been raising with her partner. This

decision effectively protected the rights of single and gay people to adopt children,⁸³ and widened the Constitutional definition of a family as comprised by ‘a man and a woman’ to include other, less ‘traditional’ configurations. Finally, in 2016, same-sex marriage was also legalised in Colombia.

Figure 8.2: Bogotá Mayor’s Office posters promoting tolerance for sexual minorities



Bogotá Mayor’s Office Poster (2012): “In Bogotá, you can be lesbian” Issued under the *‘Public Policy for the Full Guarantee of the Rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender People’*

Bogotá Mayor’s Office Poster (2017): “My uncle is gay and he’s a great guy” “In Bogotá, you can be [yourself].” Issued for the *‘International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia’*

Source: <https://sentiido.com/la-diversidad-si-construye-ciudad/en-bogota-se-puede-ser/> [Accessed: 10/Oct/19].

Source: <http://www.bogota.gov.co/temas-de-ciudad/poblaciones-y-diversidad/comunidad-lgbti-bogota> [Accessed: 10/Oct/19].

This mobilisation of a ‘traditional’, Catholic, patriarchal family – which upholds a model of one man, one woman, and their biological children as an enduring moral ideal – is ironic given the Latin American reality, where family forms are, and always have been, notable for their diversity. In a review of the literature, Salles & Tuirán (1997: 142) emphasise the varied influences on the development of Latin American families, which developed as hybrid forms “combining influences inherited from Iberian, autochthonous-indigenous, and African patterns.” Sylvia Chant (2002: 546) echoed this in a slightly more recent review, where she asserted that, contrary to the idea that non-nuclear family forms are an innovative development (as in the ‘Second Demographic Transition’ model), instead, “it is increasingly recognised that baselines for change – where they can be established from available data – are themselves often highly complex and differentiated”. These authors, however, note that a few generalisations can be made about the ways in which Latin American families have

⁸³ See: <http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/RELATORIA/2015/C-683-15.htm> [Accessed: 5/Oct/19].

changed in the past 50 years: they have become smaller over time (as fertility declined across the region); separations and divorces are rising; women are having sex younger and working outside the home more often; there are more single mothers and female-headed households; and there continues to be a wide range of families, with “homosexual, single-parent, and reconstituted families, representing novel arrangements” (Salles & Tuirán 1997: 145). Many of these changes are interrelated and represent a loosening of religious and other social controls over private life (Pachón 2007). It is also important to note that this ‘family diversity’ was often structured along class, ethnic, rural/urban, and regional lines (see Gutierrez de Pineda 1994 [1975], for Colombia). Despite this diversity and these recent changes, many otherwise progressive, urban middle-class women and men, whether parents or non-parents, have strikingly traditional ideas regarding having and raising children.

8.3 ‘Intensive’ Parenting and Uncertain Childbearing Desires

In this section, I focus on how non-parents and parents alike conceive of having children, and argue that demanding, ‘intensive’ parenting ideals are one aspect of the contemporary Colombian, middle-class parental imaginary that keeps many non-parents questioning their desire to have children. Given that *intensive motherhood* has its origins in the mid-20th century – a period that was associated with a ‘baby boom’ not only in Europe and North America, but also in Latin America (Reher & Requena 2014, 2015) – it may seem paradoxical that it should discourage women (and men) from having children. Yet, for some, it is an important factor contributing to decisions to *remain* ‘childless’. Using Mexican data, LeVine et al. (1991) found that one pathway between women’s education and lower fertility related to pedagogical approaches to childrearing. More educated mothers adopted an interactional, ‘verbal’ style of parenting which “demands so much of their attention that fertility control becomes imperative”, and these changes transform both mothers’ and children’s life expectations (LeVine et al. 1991: 492). In turn, completely controlling fertility through non-parenthood may be a logical reaction to constantly-increasing expectations on both parents and children, as part of what Sharon Hays termed an “ideology of *intensive mothering*” which is “a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children” (1996: x, emphasis in original). This parenting style has arguably only grown stronger and more normative since the 1990s, and now applies to both mothers and fathers (Ishizuka

2019). Macdonald (2010: 22) adds that such parenting is also ‘child-centred’ and ‘expert-guided’, while others contrast middle-class ‘constant cultivation’ and working-class ‘natural growth’ approaches to nurturing children with more- or less-intensive orientations, respectively (Lareau (2003) in Ishizuka 2019: 33).

Though I focus primarily on women, the men I interviewed (apart from José, who was very voluntarily childless) typically also expressed intensive parenting ideals, and wanted to be active, hands-on fathers (see Chapter 5). They lamented what they viewed as ‘outdated’, earlier models of detached, unemotional fatherhood that they had either experienced themselves or knew to be in keeping with a certain masculine sociocultural norm. These women and men tended to dismiss the idea of having children if they themselves could not raise them, simultaneously dismissing the idea that they might turn to nannies, daycare centres or grandparents for supplementary care, while also feeling ambivalent about the time, economic and other commitments parenthood brings.

In contrast with non-parents’ more negative perspective, parents themselves typically adopted a more relaxed approach, employing a variety of childcare strategies, mixing formal and informal, or family-based, childcare support. However, the one stay-at-home mother I interviewed shared the intensive, very hands-on parenting ideals of many of her childless peers, and there was also a generational divide, wherein younger mothers typically expressed more intensive ideals than older mothers. Although the term ‘intensive’ parenting describes a range of different childrearing activities and attitudes, here, I use it to refer to a view of parenthood that emphasises a resource-, contact-, and labour-intensive approach to raising children.

Sara (20s, cohabiting, mother of two) was the youngest mother I interviewed, and her orientation towards ‘intensive’ parenting may, in part, be due to the fact that her children were still young when we spoke, alongside her status as the only full-time, stay-at-home-mother. Although she studied and worked before having her two sons, she gave this up when she became pregnant for the first time. She lived in the most ‘traditional’, male-breadwinner household of all the parents that I interviewed, was from a working-class background, and had married and had her children relatively young (in her early 20s). In contrast, **Catalina** (30s, cohabiting, mother of one) and **Juliana** (40s, married, mother of one), two other mothers of similarly young children,

both continued working full-time, and employed a variety of childcare arrangements to allow this, as their husbands also worked. These three women and **Francisco** (40s, married, father of two), the one father I interviewed, all had young children under 10. In contrast, **Luisa** (40s, formerly cohabited, mother of two), **Marta** (50s, married, mother of five), **Dora** (60s, cohabiting, mother of one), and **Mercedes** (70s, widowed, mother of five) all had older children, with the latter two also being grandmothers.

When I asked about her children, Sara briefly described their personalities, but then ran me through her parenting philosophy and day-to-day activities in detail. She emphasised that she does not allow them to use tablets, mobile phones, or even the family computer. She also described limiting their TV time, playing games and taking them to the park instead of sitting inside, staring at screens, and working with her husband to encourage the boys to read as much as possible. This ‘low-tech’, hands-on, and child-focused parenting requires substantial effort on Sara’s part, but she framed it as being what is right for her children and therefore the only real option. Her approach strongly reflects Sharon Hays’s original definition of ‘intensive mothering’, where “...child-centered rearing means doing what is best for your child rather than what is convenient for you as the parent; it means concentrating on what you can do for them rather than on what they can do for you. And this, many mothers tell me, is the way it *should* be” (Hays 1996: 114–115, emphasis in original). However, Sara also frames this time with her children as being the best thing *for her*:

I’m happy with my kids, like I told you, I didn’t want my children to be raised by a nanny. I just didn’t want that... that they might form a stronger attachment to her than me, or that I might miss the best moments with them [before they grow up and naturally become more independent].

By expressing this idea that she did not want her children to ‘be raised by a nanny’, Sara reflects a view expressed by only one other mother (**Marta**, who was both quite conservative and well-off⁸⁴), but which was shared by many childless adults. Sara was very conscious that her ability to stay home with her children is a privilege that not all women – including most of the women from her own (working-class) family of origin – have. Although Sara said she was very close to her mother and younger brother, she

⁸⁴ In our post-interview chat, Marta told me how she had returned to work when her children were young, leaving them with a nanny. However, when her oldest daughter started calling for her nanny instead of her mum when she awoke in the night, Marta cut back her working hours. Like Sara, she feared the child had developed a stronger attachment to the nanny than to her.

described a complicated relationship with much of the rest of her family of origin. Sara frankly told me that the root of her difficult relationship with one cousin, in particular, lay in the cousin's feelings of jealousy and resentment towards Sara for her comparatively privileged living and parenting arrangements. (Her cousin was a single mother who had children as a teenager and had had to work in low-paid jobs ever since, restricting the time she could spend with her own children.)

Sara's narrative was echoed by other women, like **Eva** (40s, previously cohabited, semi-voluntary non-mother): "To be a mother, I would have liked to have time to raise my children. That's one thing. At least a year or two to raise them myself, while having the money to give them everything they needed and not worry while I was raising them." However, due to a value mismatch with her ex-partner, Eva felt she did not have access to the financial and emotional support that would have supported her as a stay-at-home mother in a 'traditional' family setting. This meant that she ended up foregoing motherhood altogether. In contrast, **Elisa** (50s, married, semi-voluntary non-mother) communicated some of the ways that non-parenthood relates to less 'traditional' elements of intensive parenting. When she married her husband about ten years before, he had been open to children if she had wanted them. However, after carefully considering the question, Elisa decided they were both 'too old' to be "climbing trees, running after footballs, launching themselves into rivers or pools for hours at a time." She said clearly, "I just can't see myself doing that with children [now]".

Though she seemed at-ease with her decision, Elisa's concerns around older motherhood – worrying that she might not have the energy to engage in all these meaningful activities with her (hypothetical) children – are part of a relatively modern parental imaginary in two ways. First, her comments reflect a model of active parenthood in which parents expect to spend extended periods of time with their children, pursuing a range of physical (and other) activities with them, keeping children occupied and mentally stimulated. Secondly, the feeling that first-time motherhood in their late 30s/early 40s was 'too old' was common to many non-mothers and may partially reflect a norm of increasingly early childbearing in Colombia and most of Latin America, where women commonly 'start' and 'stop' having children in their twenties or even before. In the high-fertility environment of mid-20th-century Colombia, women commonly started childbearing early (in their

twenties), like today, but many would carry on having children every few years until their late thirties, or into their forties, which is now extremely rare. Additionally, having a first child in your forties is very different from having a last child at that age, as previous generations of older mothers with multiple children could, and would, have expected their older children and/or other family members, to help raise their younger children, taking some of the caring burden off of their plates (Caldwell 2005). Here, the broader demographic and sociocultural environment of contemporary Colombia is reflected in Elisa's comments about when is the 'right' time to have children, and why she chose not to.

Finally, **Paola** (30s, married, uncertain/'temporary' non-mother) was frank in her judgement of the demands that children place on parents, having observed friends:

You see other couples [with children] and you think: 'Oh no! What a drag!' ...Parenting has so many implications. You have to invest lots of time and money, make so many sacrifices. [...] That role [parenthood] just consumes so much, and it scares me. I worry about losing myself to it, you know? That's what makes me reluctant.

Whereas Elisa worried about the physical demands of parenting, Paola expresses concern regarding the economic and psychological toll, worrying that, whether you intend to sublimate your entire being for the benefit of your children or not,⁸⁵ it might happen nonetheless. **Daniel** (40s, married, semi-voluntarily childless) echoed Paola's concerns. Though he was from a big family and had originally wanted children, Daniel and his wife had decided against parenthood (see Chapter 6). After telling me about his friends' and siblings' experiences of having children, he reflected on the losses, rather than gains associated with parenthood, saying: "For me, when you have a child, you lose your autonomy. You really pour everything into the child, and you don't really have time for yourself, everything becomes about the child." Middle-class fatherhood, too, is now imagined as all-consuming, and this acts as a disincentive for many 'undecided' women *and* men, as well as playing a part in the childfree adults' reproductive reasoning. Though Paola is undecided and Daniel is semi-voluntarily childless, the desire to retain some personal freedom is also common in studies of childfree adults (Gillespie 2003). These particular parental imaginaries make the

⁸⁵ Here, interestingly, the middle-class, American *intensive mother* intersects with the widely-contested trope of *marianismo* (modelled on the Virgin Mary), as a form of Latin American woman-/motherhood which is "self-sacrificing, modest, [...] focused entirely on her husband's and children's needs rather than her own" (O'Connor 2014: 9).

prospect of balancing work and family life appear exceedingly difficult, though as both Sara, above, and as Erin O'Connor's (2014) work on Latin American motherhood shows, these ideals tend to be heavily classed.

While working-class Latin American mothers may also aspire to stay at home with their children and devote themselves to reading with them and playing in the park, structural inequalities make it more difficult for them to opt-out of either work or motherhood, and many must combine both regardless of the personal costs. In Chapter 7, I sought to show how Mercedes's experiences of motherhood, and those of her daughter, diverged from her own ideals and those other women expressed. Yet, Mercedes had never imagined a life without motherhood; in her narrative, it was a natural, unquestioned next step following marriage. In contrast, women like Eva, Elisa, and Paola, who benefitted from a higher level of education and wider range of opportunities and choices, imagined their lives very differently. For them, the prospect of taking on the additional responsibility of a child in circumstances other than those they deemed exactly 'right' is imagined as too daunting for them, and also less-than-ideal for hypothetical children.

8.4 Relational Concerns Revisited: Parents and non-Parents

If, as Daniel and Paola argued, parenthood leads women and men to risk 'losing themselves' and their 'autonomy', then why undertake it at all? First, for many women and men, parenthood is viewed as a pleasurable activity. Rather than being an altruistic act, many have what Badinter terms 'hedonistic' motivations for undertaking it (2011: 10–11). This true for both women and men, with fatherhood seen to provide men with "a powerful emotional bond that brought responsibility and pleasure" (Guzman (2001) in Barker 2006: 63). For others, like single mothers in a small-town Colombian study, women described their motherhood as a primary motivator in life and what gave their lives 'meaning' (Toro-Campo 2015: 88); some men, too, seek parenthood as part of their search for meaning (Gerson (1993) in Blackstone & Stewart 2016: 297). Raising children is also a socially-desirable role, still undertaken by the majority of the world's population, and one that is widely validated, especially when it conforms to the middle-class, child-centred, resource-intensive version described above. In low-fertility environments, it is also highly valued by governments and policy-makers (McDonald 2006). However, relationships with children form an important part of

many non-parents' lives, and in their personal narratives, most of those whom I interviewed judged themselves 'good' with children. In this section, I explore how mothers describe their relationships to their children, and how non-parents view adult-child relationships, including those with other people's children, since many women who are not *biologically* parents will still engage, at some point or throughout their lives, in forms of mothering or pseudo-mothering behaviours, as sisters, aunts, friends, or even as part of their jobs. This is also true for men.

Although **Luisa** (late 40s, previously cohabited, mother of two) was frank when I asked her why she had children, and replied that it had been an 'accident', she was also adamant that she had always wanted to have children, and that, from early in life, she felt having a family was "a mandate" for her personally. She described a "very close", but "respectful" relationship to her two teenage children, and said that, to her, "[m]otherhood is a learning process. It's having two teachers who teach me things about myself, about life, about the world. That's what it is."

Luisa described a hands-off approach to parenting that contrasted with the more 'intensive' ideologies in the previous section, but she framed having children as a form of personal growth – focusing on her *own* learning process and how they enriched her life. She told me that she had always wanted to have children, and implied that the person she had them with was almost incidental. This 'self'-focused rationale goes against the perception that parenting is an altruistic act, at least in a modern context where the investments and effort are expected to flow from parents to children rather than the other way (see Ariès 1980). Both Sara, Luisa, and the other younger mothers I interviewed described having an intense desire to have children. Sara had told me that both of her children were "*super* wanted" and that, after her first child, she became 'obsessed' with having a second, even though she worried about bringing children into the world to suffer when they had no choice in the matter. While I addressed this theme in Chapter 6 as part of the altruistic presentation of voluntary non-parenthood, parents, too, worried for their children. This suffering was framed in both concrete and abstract terms: from the experience-near worries around intense pressure at school, bullying, violence and other hostile environments children face, to more abstract, global problems like climate change.

In contrast, for many non-parents who wanted to have children in future, having a child was framed as a contingent decision, influenced not only by an innate desire for children, but also by their relationship with a specific person. For example, **Amalia** (mid-40s, previously cohabited, involuntarily childless; previously voluntarily) had recently entered a new relationship. Although she had discussed having children with previous partners, they had always framed it as ‘If you [Amalia] want children, I will have them with you.’ In contrast, Amalia described a conversation about children with her new partner as revelatory:

He said ‘Yes, I want to have a child, I want to have one *with you*.’ That, to me, truly just felt so powerful, I don’t know... It made my heart beat faster and my thoughts start racing, and my soul... Really, it affected me. [...] And I don’t know, but I would like to have a child with him. [...] It was like him saying that was so wonderful and gave me the permission to... to want the same thing.

In Amalia’s retelling, and unlike Sara and Luisa, she had never felt an internal urge to be a mother until her current partner expressed his own desire in the most personal, specific terms possible. This was not a matter of wanting a child in the abstract or feeling ‘broody’. It was the specificity of wanting to have and raise a child together, *with her*, that was so powerful for Amalia. In this conception, the adults’ relationships with the imagined child becomes a key part of their relationship to one another.

Mónica (40s, previously cohabited, ‘unsure’ non-mother) also described this type of connection with her ex. Mónica had recently experienced a difficult breakup, from a man whom she described to me as someone she had imagined being “the father of my children. I wanted him to be that.” In contrast with strongly voluntary non-parents, whose negative view of society and the future influenced their decision against parenthood (see Chapter 6), Mónica saw having a child as an opportunity to shape alternative futures – to raise children in a way that rejects the capitalist system. Her negative view of society influenced her desire to *have* children as one way to make a small, positive impact. She told me:

... we even said, ‘The best way to start a revolution in this society is to have a family.’ [C: Ahh yeah? Why is that?] Because we have a weak State, and one that is extremely consumerist. [...] the way we saw it, having children was about having a family in which you could really think about solidarity, and teach different values.

Mónica’s shared values with her ex were an important part of her desire to have children with him. However, following their split, she was unsure whether she still

wanted children at all. Although some women (and men) want children so fundamentally that they become single parents *by choice*, for most of the undecided or semi-voluntarily childless women and men I interviewed,⁸⁶ this relational element was key to desires for or decisions against having children.

Regardless of motivations for having them in the first place, children were viewed as a lifelong responsibility and a potentially unpredictable source of both heartache and joy. Non-parents usually framed this unpredictability as a reason to avoid parenthood, thereby gaining a greater sense of control over their vulnerability to suffering, whereas parents described the difficulties in a more accepting way and emphasised the joys of parenting, for example, the love they felt for and from their children, and the company they provided them.

Dora (60s, cohabiting, mother of one) expressed this view, and though her son was himself a 30-something father to two young children, she still supported him financially and emotionally. She paid for his children's private schooling and helped him with childcare, and she framed her son's need for support as partly 'her fault', for 'spoiling' him too much as a child. Yet, she also sympathised that he had chosen to go into a difficult and competitive profession. In fact, when I asked what Dora would change about her current life if she could change anything, she had told me she would work less. However, while her work was stable and well-paid, her son's work was not, and she helped him as much as possible. When I asked what motherhood meant to her, she thought carefully and replied: "Being there all the time. Right? Even when they're grown. Being a mother is just that. [...] It's being there through the good and bad, forever, by their side. I believe." The way Dora described her relationship to her adult son exemplified this as her lived experience:

"It's been a difficult year, a year with a lot of crises. First, a family crisis – he and his partner separated. And then, he also started his own business. Now, I see that he's getting better, but he's still just starting out, so we have to help him a lot – help him economically, and, at the moment, emotionally, as well. [The separation] was really hard for me, too, but he's a really loving, lovely person."

By accompanying her son in his life, 'forever', Dora vicariously suffered through his difficulties and experienced the happiness of, for example, being an involved grandmother and spending every other weekend with her granddaughters. Although

⁸⁶ This was also true for some voluntarily childless adults, as discussed in Chapter 6.

kin ties and financial responsibilities to both biological and ‘fictive’ kin are often framed as a vital source of support in low-income settings (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2011: 93), there is also an analogy amongst richer individuals, who transfer large volumes of financial support to their children and other kin. In Dora’s case, although her son is not in a lucrative profession, her help has given him and his children a ‘glass floor’, paying for their private schooling, and for extras they would not have otherwise.

A more devastating example of the pain of parenthood came from **Mercedes** (70s, widowed, mother of five), who experienced the death of two of her children. When I asked Mercedes about any sacrifices she had had to make as a mother, she redirected the conversation to something her mother had told her growing up: that she would “‘know a mother’s pain when [she had] a child’.” However, Mercedes corrected the record:

That’s a lie! I told her once, ‘No, it’s not when they’re born, it’s when you lose them.’ That’s really the pain that you feel, when you lose a child, after they have died. I told her, ‘*Mamá*, that’s a mother’s pain... when a child dies in your arms.’ That’s really hard. [...] When you have a baby, you feel pain, and the baby’s born, but you return to how you were.

While being a mother changes you, you soon regain some sense of normalcy and adjust to a different life. In contrast, when your child dies, there is no return to normal. Mercedes turned my question around from having missed out on something because she was a mother to a question of having missed out on mothering a child she wanted, which was, to her, far more painful. Here, she voices the ultimate risk of parenthood.

While voluntary non-parents avoid this potential devastation altogether, involuntary non-parents experience a parallel suffering to that of a parent losing a child, when they imagine a life filled with a type of happiness they have been told can only come from a parent-child connection, and then are unable to experience this. It is the pain of missing out on a child who is imagined as the centre of an unattainable world. Few of my interviewees were involuntarily childless, but **Alejandra** (40s, married) and **Luz María** (50s, married) came closest. While more voluntary non-parents emphasised the benefits, in terms of personal autonomy, free time, disposable income, etc., Alejandra recognised these things as positives, but also wanted a child deeply, illustrating this with an anecdote:

A friend at work told me the other day, 'Oh, Alejandra, how wonderful that you and your husband can go to the movies, and go out to eat [freely]!' [...] And I told him, 'That's not 'how wonderful'... you don't know what I would do to *not* do those things and to have a child!' And he was like, 'Oh, no, of course, you're right.'

Whereas Alejandra and her partner would have given anything to be able to have a child, viewing the positives as far outweighing the negatives, other non-parents thought of childfree their state as providing all the benefits without the costs, since they could temporarily engage in maternal or paternal work. For example, *Teresa* (60s, single, voluntary non-mother) lived with her parents and described being very close to many of her friends' children. Her role as a non-parent allowed her to enjoy being around children (or in some cases, now, young adults), without taking on the ceaseless responsibilities and worries of parenthood:

[Talking about a younger friend's 5-year old son] He opened my eyes, he took me to another world, [it was] really lovely. But he arrives here during the day and he stays until 6, sometimes 8, in the evening, and then his mum or dad take him home and I have no more responsibilities. It's wonderful [*'divino'*]!

Teresa viewed raising children as a risky endeavour and was grateful not to have her own, since it is impossible to know how children will end up. She illustrated this by recounting a friend's experience of parenting a persistently runaway daughter, and another who had a son battling drug addiction. These difficult experiences contrast with the way that she describes her relationship to her other friends' children, as a caring give-and-take, but one where her responsibilities and worries end when they go home. In Teresa's telling, not having children has allowed her to have it all: a successful career, a fulfilling social life (that includes children), and a low-stress home life. In this way, not only do many non-parents derive pleasure from being around other people's children (contradicting the stereotype that they have not had their own children because they dislike them in general), they also voluntarily take on some 'parenting' work, albeit neither constantly nor permanently. However, not every non-parent was as satisfied with their situation as Teresa, and some openly worried about loneliness and isolation in their futures.

8.5 Radical Non-parental Imaginaries: Alternatives to Family and Alternative Families

Planning for the future: Alternatives to (Traditional, Nuclear) Family

When I interviewed **Sebastián** (40s, single, semi-voluntarily/‘temporarily’ childless), he reflected deeply on Colombian society, illustrating the ‘traditional’ social imaginary regarding the role of families:

For this country’s entire history, family was traditionally the primary social welfare system. The family was expected to substitute for what in Europe or other socioeconomically developed countries would have been provided by the welfare state. Since our State could not provide its citizens with those protections, there was the family.

Thus, ‘the family’ was conceptualised as a network of support, in a context where the Colombian State cannot or will not provide this. Mercedes’s thoughts and living situation reflected this perspective. When I asked for her definition of ‘family’, she told me that, to her, “a family means that each person has the support of the other, so that as individuals, we never feel alone.” I will come back to the issue of ‘feeling alone’ due to lacking family, but I should note that Mercedes had previously explained how she was a “good mother”, a “good sister”, and a “good friend” because she was materially generous, literally using the example of sharing food, and then mixing this with emotional support:

Yesterday, I bought a parcel of potatoes, and I gave one to my daughter, another to my son, and another to my granddaughter. I share whatever I can. If I have a loaf of bread, I’ll share it with them, and they do, too. They’re very caring, they call me all the time just to ask how I am.

Mercedes’s comments reflect a network of material and emotional support, which she worried childless older people might not have: the childless live “a bit more cut off [*más alejado*] from others, because they don’t know what it is to love a child like a parent does [...] and they don’t have that support from their children, either.” A generation or two ago, this familial support network would have been large, as the average Colombian woman in 1960 had approximately seven children. By the 1980s, when many of my interviewees were born, this had already shrunk to just around three children. While most of my interviewees had siblings, they tended not to come from very large families, though there were some exceptions. As Mercedes’s worries illustrate, for those women and men who do not have any children, this can pose problems for support in later life, especially if they have not planned for this

eventuality. However, the childless people I interviewed repeatedly argued that this worry is misplaced and are making plans that provide them with an alternative to ‘traditional’ families, defined in nuclear terms as the relations between parents and children.

A common way of framing the social imperative to parent rests in the idea that a woman (or man) should have children to avoid being alone in older age, and to provide them not only with social or emotional support, but also financial maintenance, in a country where not everyone has access to a pension. Although this was one of the most pervasive themes when non-parents discussed the pressure to have children, applied by friends, loved ones, and even strangers (perhaps out of genuine concern for their futures), this line of questioning appeared to frustrate or infuriate most of the women I interviewed. For the middle-to-upper-class non-parents I interviewed, having children was vehemently not about old-age security, and all emphasised how children were no guarantee of a financially- or emotionally-comfortable third age. For example, **Elisa** (50s, married, semi-voluntary non-mother) reflected on parents who still end up without any older-age support: “How many older people do you see alone? And with tens of children, but they’re still alone. Having kids is no guarantee.” Elisa also clearly rejected what she framed as her family’s view of having children:

People like my mother, or my aunts, believe that you should have children to accompany you in your old age. I disagree, and I imagine my later years differently [...] I have friends who don’t have children either, and one of them, my best friend, she says ‘No, when we’re older we’ll both be alone. We have to buy a single-level house together – no stairs! – and hire a driver, so that he can take us to our medical appointments, a lady to help us with the housework, and so all we need is to have the money to pay for this future!’

This plan to pool resources with friends and live communally was very common, especially amongst non-parents towards the voluntary end of the spectrum. Women like Elisa and her friend realise that, without alternative forms of planning, they might indeed be ‘alone’, as they are married to older men who will likely pass away before them. However, the ability to pay for this (rather expensive-sounding) later life option is linked to having a formal-sector job and making contributions not only to the social security system, but most likely also having the resources to fund additional retirement or investment plans.

In our many meetings and in my interview with **Eva** (40s, formerly cohabited, semi-voluntary non-mother), she said frankly how she *did* worry that she might need support in old age and not have any kin to provide it (her family of origin was small), but she then went on to echo Elisa's thoughts above:

However, I have also seen lots of older people who have several kids, and they all disappear! None of them care, and instead, it's a friend who ends up taking care of them. So, having children is no guarantee that they will provide economic or emotional support, you know? In my case, I am conscious that I don't have children, and of the potential future risks, so, I've prepared myself to be able to take care of my own needs and my emotional support... In my work, I save, I contribute to the pension system, I'm preparing...

Eva had property insurance for her apartment (which she owned), a pension, savings, and supplementary medical insurance to cover unforeseen costs and a higher quality of care than basic insurance coverage offers (known as 'prepaid insurance' [*prepagado*]). **Diana** (30s, voluntary non-mother) and **Amalia** (40s, previously cohabited, involuntary non-mother; previously voluntary) also both ran me through their own investments and preparations when I interviewed them, and women often emphasised the need, *as women*, to be prepared, autonomous, and financially independent in their present and future lives. Interestingly, the men I spoke to seemed less certain of their futures, and worried openly about their financial and/or emotional well-being in a future without children. For example, Daniel worried that he and Susana, his wife, were ill-prepared financially for a future without children, as they were still renting their apartment, and he felt they were both "bad with money" (this was in response to a question about whether he thought not having children might affect them in any way in the future, rather than to any direct questions about finances).

In contrast, when I asked **Camilo** (40s, semi-voluntary/'temporary' non-father) the same question about whether he thought not having children might affect him in future, it was the prospect of social and emotional isolation that he worried about:

I've thought about it, now that you see so many crazy, little old men [*viejitos locos*] around. Yeah, that scares me a bit, thinking about who will accompany me... Not who will *take care of* me, because I have a pension and I'll pay for my own care, but the idea of being a little, abandoned old man. (emphasis added)

While both men had stable, professional jobs, and partners (in *Daniel's* case, he was married and lived with his wife) they still worried that not having children would leave them vulnerable in their old age, and not without reason. In the context of a largely

familistic welfare system, childlessness can indeed increase the risk of both social isolation and financial difficulties in older age, as it “compounds social and economic disadvantage and carries unmistakable implications for elderly social exclusion and powerlessness” (Kreager 2004: 35). However, the literature on childlessness in older age and social support often focuses on ‘functionally’ childless adults (some of whom are biological parents), and as so many of my interviewees pointed out, having children is no guarantee of old age security. Based on research conducted in Argentina, Lloyd-Sherlock & Locke (2008: 799) concluded that, although older people’s wellbeing is strongly affected by relationships with their children, such relationships “tend to be unpredictable, and norms of intergenerational obligations are complex.”

Alternative Families: Pet Parents?

A recurrent theme throughout my fieldwork in Bogotá was how thoroughly the pet services industry seemed to have proliferated middle-to-upper-class society, with pet daycare centres, spas, hotels, and grooming services, including mobile vans (which regularly parked in my neighbourhood; see Figure 8.3), all ubiquitous. A Colombian *Ministry of Health* webpage on ‘Responsible Pet Ownership’ (Ministerio de Salud 2012), recognises that animals play “an important role in the emotional, affective, and psychological development of individuals” and that, in return, we have a responsibility not only to take care of their basic needs, but also to treat them with “love and respect”. A recent article in national news magazine went further and sought to start a debate about ‘Children with Four Paws’ (Semana 2018), arguing that “[p]ets are the new spoiled children in Colombian families. Clothes, psychologists, schools, and restaurants are just some of the eccentricities that now exist for them.” Alongside this interest in the treatment of animals, there are many other articles which focus on the growing pet services market, from an economic perspective. For example, in advertorials promoting the benefits of pet ownership, one of which noted that nowadays “couples without children” want to “fill their homes with love” by becoming ‘pet parents’ (using the English phrase) (El Tiempo 2018). This was not the only feature to tie the increasing trend in pet ownership to directly lower fertility (La Nota Economica 2018) or to childless individuals and couples seeking non-human objects for their affection (Avila-Forero 2016). There is also a growing body of research addressing not only non-human kinship and multispecies families, but also direct connections to fertility and the potentially different role of pets in parents and non-

parents’ lives (Peterson & Engwall 2019). Early studies of childless adults’ pet-keeping habits showed that about half of pet owners treated their pets like children and the rest had “casual attitudes towards their companion animals” (Veevers 1985: 23), although these attitudes have almost certainly shifted in the intervening decades, as the treatment of pets has changed across society.

Figure 8.3: Some examples of the growing Colombian pet services economy



Front & back of ad/coupon for *Superguau* (‘Superwoof’/‘Superwow’) Pet “School, Hotel and Daycare”: “Solutions for behavioural problems, training, directed play, and lodging.”

Guau Petmovil (‘Woof’/‘Wow’ Petmobile), a “canine groomer/spa delivered to your door”. Parked on a side street, Chapinero, northern Bogotá.

Source: Own photos, Bogotá (2017).

This section focuses on the relationship between urban, primarily childless, middle-class Colombians and their pets (or ‘companion animals’), by drawing on semi-structured interview data and wider fieldwork, including informal observation, discussions with pet-owning friends, and internet-based research. Though I rarely saw other animals in public, there were three main types of urban dogs that I encountered on a daily basis: pets; strays; and workers (acting as security dogs, sniffer dogs, or sometimes accompanying the city’s recyclers).⁸⁷

At least 13 of the 35 people I interviewed owned pet cats and/or dogs (Camila, Paola, Natalia, Eva, Amalia, Maritza, Elisa, Dora, Nicolás, Daniel & Susana, and Gabriela & José), most of whom were childless, though this amounted to 11 pet-keeping

⁸⁷ Although, in 2009, I would often see recyclers on mule- or horse-drawn carts (called ‘zorrás’), by 2016-17, they had disappeared, seemingly due to city policies banishing horse-drawn vehicles except for tourism (see Angel 2017).

households (of 33), as both married couples had pets. Unfortunately, I did not ask people about their animals unless they mentioned them first, so this could be an underestimate. Other people may have had pets they deemed unimportant to our discussion, but the fact that about a third of interviewees introduced the topic themselves attests to the importance of non-human relationships in people's lives. While many wove their pets into their stories at multiple points, others simply mentioned the fact that they lived with an animal without elaborating much further. Additionally, though **Virginia** (40s, divorced, voluntary non-mother) did not have her own pets (as she felt it unfair to leave them alone all day), she was a self-described "animal lover" who, at one point, paused the interview to show me smartphone photos of one of her sister's dog, taken by her own mother earlier that day. Neither Virginia nor her sister had children, and her mother was one of the parents who described themselves as a 'sterile grandmother [*abuela estéril*]'. When Virginia told me that, she said, "It's very clear that she's not going to have any [grandchildren]. At least none apart from my sister's dog!" Like many grandparents to human children, Virginia's mother took care of her sister's dog all day while her sister was at work.

Like Virginia, **Nicolás** (30s, cohabiting, 'temporary' non-father), too, paused our interview to show me photos of his dog. Where I interviewed pet owners (or 'caregivers') in their homes, the animals generally made themselves known in the background (meowing or barking) or by directly seeking attention. In my interview with **Susana** (30s, married, semi-voluntary non-mother), *Oso*, her dog, came up to us part-way through and she took a moment to comfort him, as he appeared distressed by noises outside. Susana and her husband, **Daniel**, had decided against parenthood but embraced the highs and lows of caring for a dog. When I asked Daniel if he would change anything about his life, he said he would like to make *Oso* "more relaxed and calm" providing examples of how difficult it was to leave him alone. This meant they sometimes had to meet family or friends separately:

[W]e can't leave *Oso* alone in a storm because he gets stressed and scared. I would like more control over our lives, like before we had him. *It's just like having a child*. I wouldn't change him, he's wonderful. [...] I would never change him, but I do wish he were more independent, to be able to leave him on his own, and recover some of that time on *our own* that Susana and I had before.

Daniel and Susana largely organised their life around him, the way that they would have had to organise their lives around having a baby. *Oso's* nervousness has changed

the dynamics of their relationship, making it more difficult to go out together, though they could rely on Susana's parents to dog-sit (like Virginia's parents did for her sister's dog, and like many grandparents babysit human children). When they were unavailable, Susana and Daniel felt they had to pay someone else to come and stay with him,⁸⁸ as Oso was afraid of bad weather, amongst other things, and they worried about leaving him alone. Daniel blamed Oso's anxiety on his own nervous demeanour. When he talked about non-parenthood, Daniel's experiences with Oso were relevant, as he worried about transferring his anxiety to a child, as well, framing anxious parenting as a negative parenting style. Both Susana and Daniel were deeply invested in their dog's health and wellbeing, and Oso's relationship to his caregivers had cost them time and money, like a child would. Though not a "child substitute" (Charles 2016: 4), the way Susana and Daniel framed their responsibility for Oso suggested he was an important part of their family for whom they were willing to make not-insubstantial sacrifices.

Like others, **Amalia** directed her attention to her dog, *Carlito*, at various points in our interview, noting how he kept coming up to us to "flirt", presumably because my presence was denying him the usual attention Amalia paid him every evening. Carlito was obviously an important part of her life, and she described how the dog had been a "joint project" with her ex-partner, as she put it.⁸⁹ When I asked if they were still on good terms, she replied:

We have a strong friendship, really strong. First, because the dog was a joint project [laughs]. So then, we separated, but I look after him [*lo mantengo*] from Monday to Friday and we see each other on Fridays when I hand Carlito over. He has him from Friday to Saturday, and returns him to me on Sunday, or sometimes Carlito stays the whole weekend with him. ... We joke that he's the child of separated parents.

We found him [on the street] and raised him [*lo criamos*] together, so he's like a child to both of us. [...] We do know that a child is something different, but Carlito is our responsibility, so we communicate well around him and stay on good terms.

Here, Amalia uses the same words you would to describe a child or other (human) dependent – '*mantener*' ('to support' or 'provide for') and '*criar*' ('to raise' or 'rear'), and she describes what is essentially a shared custody arrangement for the dog,

⁸⁸ They remarked that having a dog was, in certain ways, more disruptive than having a child, since you can take a baby more places than a dog, and the baby would eventually grow-up and become independent, whereas dogs are eternal dependents.

⁸⁹ This contrasted with the way she talked about other aspects of her life, such as her apartment, which she had bought alone, despite having been with her ex at the time.

emphasising that she and her ex are still on good terms, partly because of their shared responsibility and shared love for Carlito. Although all the pet owners I interviewed emphasised their understanding that a dog or cat is not comparable to a human baby, they also used language that slipped between the two, highlighting the important emotional role their pets played in their lives as objects of care and affection. This mirrors the findings of other studies of ‘interspecies families’ and ‘pet parenting’ in other contexts, especially amongst childless adults (Laurent-Simpson 2017; Peterson & Engwall 2019). However, while these Colombian pet owners often drew on parenting vocabulary, saying their dog was ‘like’ a child, none explicitly referred to themselves as ‘pet parents’. Despite this, most spoke of/treated their pets as an important part of their family.

Many non-parents, like **Paola** (30s, married), also preferred pets, contrasting them explicitly with children: “You know they say, ‘A dog will love you forever’ [...] Whereas, with a child, you never know.” However, caring for companion animals was also framed as a way to experience some of the demands of parenting before committing to children, with Paola saying: “We just got her, and this is the closest we’ve come to ‘starting a family’. This, I think, will help us decide if we want children or not.” Some animal rights activists and scholars working on human-animal relations, like Donna Haraway, interpret the approaches to dog ownership described above as problematic, rejecting the dog/child analogy:

To regard a dog as a furry child, even metaphorically, demeans dogs and children—and sets up children to be bitten and dogs to be killed [...] the status of a pet puts a dog at special risk in societies like the one I live in—the risk of abandonment when human affection wanes, when people’s convenience takes precedence, or when the dog fails to deliver on the fantasy of unconditional love (2003: 37–38).

The risk of ‘abandonment’ that Haraway highlights is clear in Bogotá, where street dogs (some formerly pets) roam the city alone or in small packs. They search through garbage for food, sleep in doorways and on the pavement, and dart across frighteningly busy roads. Some pets may be abandoned to the street when, as Haraway argues, they fail to live up to human expectations. However, there is also movement in the other direction, as most of the pets I knew in Colombia were adopted, either from shelters or directly ‘rescued’ from the streets by their owners, as Amalia’s dog was. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine any of the dog owners I knew abandoning their companions, given their strong emotional bonds with these animals. All displayed a deep sense of

responsibility for these living beings, and many imagined this in parental terms, either explicitly or implicitly.

What is remarkable in the Colombian case is the extent to which the inequalities between humans are reflected back in the dog world alone: blocks away from stray dogs foraging in the garbage, pets are picked up for ‘doggy daycare’. Some of these daycares ferry their charges in specially-adapted transportation vans, from the polluted city centre to the quiet, green fringes of the city. Both the services’ marketing materials and the pet owners speak of these daycare services in a way that emphasises parallels with the ‘countryside’ campuses of fancy private schools to the north of the city. A friend who had relatively flexible working hours and could spend time at home with her dog chose to send him to ‘daycare’ a few times a week for the purposes of ‘socialisation’ – there, her dog was able to play with his friends, be stimulated by new environments and activities all day long, and, as an added bonus, it provided him with more exercise than she could just by taking him for walks in the city. Well-off pets are treated like Bogotá’s well-off city children. While pets were traditionally an important part of middle-class childhood socialisation (Charles 2014: 716), they are now an important part of middle-class non-parenthood, as well, there to emotionally connect with adults’ needs as much as they were previously used to teach children lessons about responsibility. In other cases, as Paola shows, non-parents use pets as part of a thought experiment around having children. Whereas non-parents’ imaginaries of parenting children were largely negative, ‘parenting’ or caring for animals was largely imagined and experienced as a smaller, albeit very serious, commitment, whose payoffs in terms of reciprocal love were more guaranteed.

8.6 Conclusions

I would like to end this chapter with a final example from the field. Most of the people I worked with in Bogotá had the advantages and opportunities associated with a high level of formal education and tended towards politically progressive positions. They also generally had inclusive ideas about families, sexual diversity, and gender roles. In interviews, I asked most men and women for their personal definitions of ‘family’, partly as a rough proxy for their political views, but also because of its relevance to my research questions. Most definitions were open-ended and did not specify specific gender roles or consanguinity, instead focusing on relationships of care, sharing, and

support. Only two women (both mothers) made it very clear that, to them, a family is “a man, a woman, and their children”. This is the technical definition in the Colombian constitution, though not the one that even the *Colombian Institute for Family Welfare* (ICBF) officially adheres to today, instead preferring a more inclusive interpretation, which allows for same-sex and single-parent adoptions. At the other end of the spectrum, one of my closest friends in Bogotá, a married non-mother in her late 30s, who lived with her partner and their pet dog and cat, routinely referred to her partner and their pets as her ‘pack’ [*manada*]. She explicitly rejected the human terminology of ‘family’, preferring to employ vocabulary associated with animals instead. On a few occasions, I made the mistake of referring to them as her ‘family’, and she would always correct me, as her personal imaginary of the ‘family’ carried the negative associations of her family of origin, with whom she had a difficult relationship. By refusing the terminology of ‘family’ altogether, she also sought to negate the conservative religious associations the term carries in the Colombian context. She purposefully distinguished the relational nucleus that she and her partner had created for themselves, both from the ‘family’ that she came from and from the claims of the religious right and other conservative forces in Colombian society that seek to constrain and control others.

Using the idea of social and personal imaginaries of family and parenthood (first at the macro-level of nominally ‘shared ideas’ and then at the micro-level of individual ‘imaginings’), I have tried to show the ways in which Colombian women and men, with and without biological children, imagine and experience family and parenthood, as well as alternative ways of living and arranging one’s life. While parenthood is now framed as a choice, it is *imagined*, especially by non-parents in an idealised form which is an increasingly time-, resource-, and emotionally-intensive undertaking, for both women and men. I have argued that these ‘intensive’ parental imaginaries feature heavily in non-parents’ accounts of their hesitancy regarding parenthood. Additionally, by rejecting a ‘traditional’ imaginary of family as emerging from intergenerational ties between parents and children, non-parents find more inclusive redefinitions of family or alternatives to it altogether, in different imaginings of their present, their future, and their interhuman and interspecies connections.

Conclusion

A Colombian SDT?

This thesis set out to explore the magnitude and meanings of childlessness as a Colombian phenomenon in recent decades, in order to contribute to a Latin American anthropological demography. Inspired by previous work suggesting that Latin America might be experiencing features of the so-called ‘Second Demographic Transition’ (SDT) (Esteve, Garcia-Roman, et al. 2012; Gutierrez de Pineda 2005), I began by framing childlessness, particularly where voluntary or semi-voluntary, in the context of other important social and demographic transformations that had manifested themselves over the course of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Starting with the concept of the SDT, I asked what it could contribute to our understanding of Colombian sociodemographic change, and how studying childlessness in Colombia might, in turn, contribute to our theorisations of ‘demographic transitions’ and ‘childlessness’, which are largely based on a European and North American model.

As explained in Chapter 1, the SDT is characterised by a set of sociodemographic features that result from hypothesised shifts in cultural attitudes and a loosening of social control. These features include: increasing levels of cohabitation before, and as an alternative to, marriage; increasing divorce rates; more childbearing outside of marriage; sub-replacement fertility; increasing voluntary childlessness; and the postponement of marriage and childbearing (van de Kaa 1987). Additional stipulations include the need for a connection between sub-replacement fertility and union/childbearing postponement, as well as the importance of increasing female autonomy, greater social acceptance for different lifestyles and family types, and a connection between these demographic changes and shifting sociocultural values (Lesthaeghe 2010).

Recent Colombian demographic history is characterised by several features consistent with the SDT. Cohabitation increased dramatically in the late 20th century, particularly amongst more educated women who previously avoided unmarried cohabitation (Esteve et al. 2016). Divorce rates have increased over time (Pachón 2007), and childbearing outside of marriage, and even outside of cohabitation, has also increased substantially (Laplante et al. 2015, 2018). With a TFR around 2.0, Colombia’s fertility is also below the replacement level. Additionally, Rosero-Bixby et al. (2009) analysed

unadjusted census data, and suggested that Colombian women were starting to postpone their first births (thus, remaining childless longer). Although all of these pieces of evidence are supportive of the SDT, there is also some counter-evidence; for example, Colombian women are not postponing their first unions (Esteve et al. 2013). Other open questions regarding a Colombian SDT related primarily to increasing childlessness (particularly voluntary). By focusing on this issue, I have sought to engage with and contribute to the growing demographic literature exploring SDT features in Latin America.

My analysis presented results that were both supportive and contradictory to the idea that an SDT is unfolding in Colombia. Contrary to Rosero-Bixby et al. (2009), I found little evidence of childbearing postponement amongst all women. In fact, using a pooled dataset of all DHS round from 1990-2015, I showed that, once adjusted for their changing sociodemographic profile, the proportion of all women who were still childless at ages 25-34 actually *decreased* significantly between the 1990s and 2010s. The same was true for ‘definitive’ childlessness amongst older women (aged 35-44), and, whether considering all women together, or only those who have ever been in a union, I found no evidence childlessness has increased over time in this older group. This goes counter to the SDT theory.

However, when examining childlessness amongst ever-partnered women only, I found a small but significant increase in ‘postponement’, which could be interpreted as a form of ‘voluntary’ childlessness. In Chapter 4, using a different measure (‘ideal’ childlessness), amongst all women aged 15-49, I confirmed the statistical significance of this increase in ‘voluntary’ childlessness. Although their numbers have grown, ‘ideally childless’ women still comprise a small minority (just 3% of all women and 9% of all childless women). This increase largely reflects changing attitudes amongst younger women, a growing proportion of whom express an ‘ideal’ of zero children. Taken together, these results tentatively suggest that voluntary childlessness is rising; however, modestly and mostly amongst younger women. This result provides some limited support for the SDT.

With respect to the ideational and sociocultural elements of the SDT, in Chapter 8 I highlighted successful recent moves to ‘liberalise’ Colombian legislation around abortion, same-sex marriage, and adoptions by non-‘traditional’ families, even if this

is not as widely accepted in popular culture. The substantial increase in women's educational levels, alongside their relatively high rate of labour force participation (LFP), which is highest amongst more educated women,⁹⁰ are arguably signs of growing female autonomy (one of the stipulations of the SDT), though this has not led to significant postponement of either first union or motherhood. When compared to less educated women, those with a 'higher' education *are* more likely both to postpone their births and to remain 'definitively' childless. Yet, when comparing women with a 'higher' education in the 1990s and 2010s there is *no* increase in childlessness over time and no evidence of increasing first birth postponement across birth cohorts (see Esteve & Flórez-Paredes (2018) for more on why).

Turning back to voluntary childlessness, when I compared 'ideally' childless women to their peers using DHS data in Chapter 4, they were not only more likely to be highly educated than mothers/non-ideally childless, they also had more liberal attitudes towards sexual minorities and less favourable attitudes towards 'traditional' women's roles. Again, this finding is predicted by the SDT theory, which would suggest that voluntarily childless individuals should have a generally open/accepting view of others. This quantitative finding was confirmed by my qualitative interviewees. Though I cannot say whether they are *more* progressive than others, the voluntarily childless individuals I interviewed in Bogotá all held socially progressive views of sexual minority rights, women's and men's gender roles, and 'new' family forms. Yet, as I argued in the final chapters of this thesis, while some sectors of Colombian society, especially in large cities, are making a concerted effort to widen acceptance of social difference and foster 'progressive' attitudes (e.g. towards sexual minorities), there is also a popular and well-organised conservative movement pushing back against this.

Lesthaeghe (2011: 188) argues that, during Europe's 'First Demographic Transition' (FDT), there was a convergence around a singular breadwinner/housewife model, for both 'material' and normative 'moral'/religious reasons, which promoted "a single family model" that was "served by highly ordered life course transitions: no marriage without solid financial basis or prospects, and procreation strictly within wedlock." He then contrasts this with the divergent family forms that characterise the SDT. However, while convergence around a single family model may have occurred in Europe's FDT,

⁹⁰ E.g. in 2015, approximately 70% of 25-54-year-old women worked outside the home, rising to 80% of those with a 'higher' education (Novta & Wong 2017: 30).

owing to regional, class, and ethnic-based variation in actual and ideal marital and childbearing patterns, this has arguably never been true in the Colombian case, either currently or historically (see Gutierrez de Pineda 1994).

Lesthaeghe (2011: 187) goes on to say that “much of the FDT is an integral part of a development phase in which economic growth fosters material aspirations and improvements in material living conditions.” In Europe, he focuses on the period from 1860-1960, when societies were preoccupied by: increasing average incomes; raising health, living, working standards; improving human capital (through education); and developing social welfare systems to provide for citizens. This allowed individuals to shift their priorities away from material concerns and familistic social security systems, and towards self-fulfilment and Maslow’s ‘higher order needs’, arguably setting the SDT in motion. Thus, “[o]nce the basic material preoccupations, and particularly that of long term financial security, are satisfied via *welfare state provisions*, more existential and expressive needs become articulated” (Lesthaeghe 2011: 188, emphasis added). In other words, young adults become more focused on “‘*self-actualization*’ in formulating goals, *individual autonomy* in choosing means, and recognition for their *realization*” (Lesthaeghe 2011: 188, emphasis in original). This contrasts with the situation in Colombia (and many countries in the Global South) where life expectancy, health, wealth, and education have all increased, but where this has been accompanied by only small improvements in the social welfare system that provides for the poor, disabled, ill, and/or elderly. Given that the standard of even the most threadbare European-style social safety nets seem far off in a context such as Colombia, most people have not yet been able to truly turn away from the ‘old’ system of familistic social support and towards self-fulfilment.

While some of the factors that preceded the SDT have occurred in Colombia, others have not. Instead, and in the absence of generous State support, this partial transition has led some women who are able to do so to jointly prioritise self-fulfilment *and* material conditions, as I sought to show in Chapter 7. They turn neither to their family nor to the government (viewed as corrupt, ineffective, and barely able to provide for destitute Colombians) for support, but instead to self-provision. By prioritising their own educational and professional goals, many women achieve a sense of autonomy and independence, at the cost of motherhood: a cost perceived to be higher for some women than others. For these women, ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ order needs are not

opposed but work in concert. While they have chosen Lesthaeghe's 'autonomous' means to achieve their goals, the goals themselves reflect a combination of 'self-actualization', 'recognition', and material concerns. In Colombia, being able to buy oneself private insurance, to guard against the worst potential outcomes (as the State is unlikely to step in), co-exists with the prioritisation of 'autonomy' (especially for women), and self-improvement through travel, culture, and other typically bourgeois activities. There is some evidence that the socioeconomically advantaged women and men I interviewed in Bogotá are prioritising self-fulfilment through educational and professional achievements, in line with the changes postulated by the SDT. However, the SDT alone does not provide a satisfactory answer for why childless Colombians are *not* having children, or why most Colombians continue to have children, and have them relatively early, in comparative international terms.

Aníbal Quijano (2000: 556) argued that

[t]he Eurocentric perspective of knowledge operates as a mirror that distorts what it reflects, as we can see in the Latin American historical experience. [...] we possess so many and such important historically European traits in many material and intersubjective aspects. But at the same time we are profoundly different.

Quijano expresses an important idea: though there are many cross-currents between Europe and Latin America, we must try to understand Latin American countries on their own terms. A Latin American SDT, for example, would not necessarily 'fit' a Euro-American mould. While the average life expectancy, health, and educational level of Colombians have improved markedly since the mid-20th century, these averages hide substantial variation across social groups and sub-populations. Whereas some women may be able to choose to forego motherhood in favour of other forms of self-fulfilment (like my interviewees in Bogotá, who were largely highly-educated, urban women with professional occupations), millions of their fellow Colombians have never been presented with paths to self-fulfilment other than through family life. Opportunities for education, professional careers, and even leisure activities like travel are still largely structured along class lines, and even women living in the same city are likely to experience different social and demographic 'regimes' and personal motivations, conditioned by the vast inequalities that characterise Colombian society. Having focused primarily on more privileged groups in this thesis, it is also important to highlight Colombia's socioeconomic and demographic diversity. It is in this vein that I turn back to anthropological theory to nuance the SDT idea.

Stratified Transitions

In Chapter 1, I introduced the key anthropological concept of ‘stratified reproduction’, or the way that reproduction is valued and experienced differently along pre-existing lines of inequality, such as social hierarchies of class, race/ethnicity, and migration status, amongst others (Colen 1995). It describes the devaluation of the fertility of poorer women, ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, and others with characteristics deemed less desirable by the neo-Malthusian and eugenic undertones of populationist thinking. For a deeper discussion of the stratification inherent in what they term “demopopulationism”, or “the knowledge processes and politics that call for intervening in human populations to produce ‘optimal’ population size and composition”, see Bhatia et al. (2020: 337). Given Colombia’s substantial socioeconomic inequalities and the unequal exposure to the violence and displacement that characterise its long civil conflict, stratified reproduction is a valuable way to conceptualise reproductive inequalities, and the ways in which reproduction (and thus important demographic events, like births) are mapped onto pre-existing advantage or disadvantage.

It is also important to note the intersectional nature of advantage or disadvantage, whereby social characteristics (like gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) are drawn into ‘multiple systems of oppression’, which may overlap to increase or decrease vulnerability to negative outcomes (Carastathis 2014). For example, women are still overrepresented amongst Colombia’s numerous internally displaced persons (IDPs), 80% of whom live in extreme poverty, and most of whom have low levels of education and restricted access to healthcare, as well as an increased likelihood of having experienced rape or sexual violence (Alzate 2008: 134). These women face a limited range of options precisely because they are multiply disadvantaged. For example, their access to reproductive healthcare and contraception is limited, and an estimated one-third of adolescent IDPs are pregnant or parenting, compared to one-fifth of non-IDPs (Quintero & Culler 2009). Additionally, the unintended pregnancy rate is 40% higher for IDPs than other women of reproductive age (Quintero & Culler 2009). Research addressing the relationship between sexual violence (whether perpetrated by a spouse/partner or another actor) and unintended pregnancies amongst Colombian women under 25 has found that women who experienced sexual violence were significantly more likely to have unintended pregnancies, less likely to use

contraception despite wanting “to delay or avoid pregnancy”, and more likely to have unmet contraceptive needs (Gomez 2011: 1353). Pallitto & O’Campo (2004) had previously shown that, amongst reproductive-age Colombian women, those who had experienced intimate partner violence had elevated odds of unintended pregnancy, though this finding was only statistically significant in the Atlantic and Central regions. It is, however, important to note that unintended does not necessarily mean *unwanted*, regardless of a woman’s social position (Gomez et al. 2018).

While many internally displaced women and others who have personally experienced sexual violence have undoubtedly made positive choices to have children, some births are likely to have resulted from forced sexual encounters or restricted access to contraceptives and abortion. In the latter circumstances, pregnancy and motherhood may be less of a choice than a potentially unavoidable outcome of sexual activity. I do not wish to portray IDPs and other disadvantaged women only as victims devoid of agency, but it is necessary to highlight how their agency may be more constrained by structural factors than that of women in more socioeconomically advantaged positions. These constraints might, in turn, affect their perceived options and ambitions for the future. For example, Flórez et al. (2004: ii) illustrated the steep socioeconomic gradient that characterises adolescent motherhood, with the poorest girls having sex, entering unions, and having children far earlier than others. Through interviews with young women and men in Bogotá and Cali, they also found that these young women viewed motherhood as central to their identity and imagined futures, partly in the absence of other opportunities and alternative paths to self-fulfilment (Flórez et al. 2004). This provides further evidence that, even where pregnancy is not planned, it may not be unwanted, while also highlighting the gap between the options open to poorer and richer women.

Turning back to demographic trends, Lima et al. (2018) recently observed that entrenched inequalities are increasingly visible in fertility graphs: namely, a ‘bimodal’ fertility pattern has emerged in several Latin American countries, where age-specific fertility rates peak twice. This is because socioeconomically disadvantaged young women typically have their children young (causing a first peak amongst women in their early 20s), while advantaged women have their children later (causing second, early-30s peak). Though Lima et al. (2018: 15) view this as a sign of Latin America’s “strong reproductive polarization by social status”, they note that such patterns have

also been observed in other countries, including the US, UK, and some Southern European countries. While Lima et al (2018)'s bimodal pattern is not yet visible in Colombia, there is a socioeconomically-stratified reproductive polarisation underway: as noted previously, whereas teenage pregnancy is heavily concentrated amongst the poorest youths, later motherhood and non-motherhood continue to be associated with relative educational and socioeconomic advantage. Although Colombia's overall fertility rate is low, women in the poorest wealth quintile continue to have a higher 'unwanted' fertility rate than those in richer wealth quintiles,⁹¹ meaning that this 'dual' regime exists not only in timing, but also in terms of intentionality of births. Whereas some women would like to limit their fertility further, others would like it to be higher, if only the circumstances were different, as I showed in my qualitative analysis.

Non-reproduction, too, can be understood as stratified, since it is concentrated amongst women who possess other forms of advantage that allow them to, first, conceptualise childbearing as a choice and, secondly, access contraceptives that facilitate this choice. Additionally, stratified non-reproduction is, in unexpected but direct ways, connected to stratified reproduction and to the entrenched injustices in Colombian society. Some non-mothers explicitly framed their decisions not to reproduce as a protest against the deficiencies of the Colombian State and its poor record of supporting its most vulnerable citizens. Women like **Isabel** (a married, voluntary non-mother in her 30s) felt that, because of its failings in this respect, Colombia did not merit new citizens, and had opted out of childbearing entirely. Here, the choice not to reproduce is directly related to the perceived failures of successive Colombian governments and, to some extent, Colombian society at-large. The SDT has been criticised for being both gender-blind and somewhat structurally ignorant: it concentrates on ideational changes (at the individual and societal levels), while largely ignoring the influences of the State policies and other macro-structures, such as those I have attempted to draw attention to, above. The relevance of stratified reproduction (and non-reproduction) should be obvious in the Colombian case, and, as I concluded in the previous section, though the evidence regarding a Colombian SDT is mixed, the extent to which we can say that

⁹¹ For example, in the 2015 DHS, 15-49-year-old women in the poorest quintile had a TFR=2.8, but a 'wanted' TFR=2.0, compared to a TFR=1.3 and a 'wanted' TFR=1.2 amongst those in the richest wealth quintile (DHS StatCompiler (ICF 2012)). In the DHS, "a birth is considered wanted if the number of living children at the time of conception of the birth is less than the ideal number of children as reported by the respondent" (Rutstein & Rojas 2006: 66).

the SDT model is relevant to the Colombian context depends partly on *which* Colombians we are considering.

Although I have focused primarily on women so far, it is important to consider men, too. Given the limited DHS data, I cannot say whether male voluntary childlessness has increased over time, though in 2015, men and women did have similar levels of ‘ideal’ childlessness. Additionally, men are more likely to be childless than women at all ages, and the social patterning of their childlessness is more complicated than women’s. While younger men’s childlessness (i.e. postponement between ages 25-44) does follow the same pattern of advantage as for women, men’s ‘definitive’ childlessness (around age 50) is associated with socioeconomic *disadvantage*. This cannot be explained by the SDT, though it does conform to what we know about male childlessness elsewhere. A comparative European study by Miettinen et al. (2015) also showed that larger proportions of men are childless (overall) than women, and that, unlike female childlessness, male childlessness is associated with less education. In Poland, the Czech Republic, and Finland, for example, around 40% of the least educated⁹² men aged 40-44 report having no children (Miettinen et al. 2015: 19). While these European figures are far higher than in Colombia (where around 17% of 40-44-year-old men with primary education or less are childless), the inverted male and female patterns are obviously common to multiple contexts. Stratification is just as important for men as for women, yet the way this relates to childlessness exhibits important gender differences. My findings thus support previous assertions that a more explicit consideration of both gendered effects and macro-level policies and inequalities could help improve the SDT model and its relevance across different contexts, including Europe.

The SDT is far from the only demographic theory which seeks to explain low fertility and other sociodemographic changes. For example, the incomplete ‘gender revolution’ (England 2010; Goldscheider et al. 2015) schema is attractive because it also seeks to explain low fertility, but unlike the SDT, it does so in explicitly gendered terms. In Chapter 1, I explained how this genre of theories broadly suggests that a mismatch between women’s relatively equal public roles (e.g. as working professionals), and the still-unequal division of domestic labour, including childcare, disincentivises large

⁹² ISCED 0-2, indicating a lower-secondary education or less.

family sizes, as women seek to avoid too large a 'second shift' (Hochschild & Machung 1990). Women then either forego marriage and childbearing altogether or substantially limit their fertility (leading to far below replacement level fertility). Though childlessness could be seen as the ultimate an extension of low fertility at the individual level, I did not find compelling evidence to suggest that unequal domestic labour was contributing to Colombian women's or men's decisions regarding having or not having children. There are important gender inequalities in Colombian society, which persist in both the public and private sphere, but the narratives of the childless women and men I interviewed were actually more consistent with the SDT's postulated drive for self-fulfilment and a concomitant de-prioritisation of parenthood than with gendered conflicts regarding the public and private sphere.

This may be partly due to my interview sample, who, perhaps unlike many Europeans (and unlike many other Colombians), could largely afford to hire domestic help. This, in turn, might smooth over the most obvious aspects of women's and men's unequal responsibilities regarding domestic labour. For example, when I asked **Alejandra** (40s, married, 'involuntarily' childless) how the domestic chores were divided in her home, she started by saying:

The important thing is that, since we live in Colombia, and we're a developing country, there's a lady [*una señora*] who comes to our house twice a week and *saves our lives*. She comes and does all the laundry, she irons, and cleans everything. It's really important.

This was a common refrain, and, for many parents, these women also helped watch the children. Again, social inequalities are key to understanding Colombian society and its social and biological reproduction. However, this also exemplifies the relatively advantaged nature of my interview sample and how these findings might not apply more broadly across Colombian society; for example, the women cleaning and caring for children might have very different perspectives on their work and home lives.

I initially hypothesised that the unequal society, cheaper labour costs, and wide availability of domestic workers would reduce the 'opportunity costs' of having children for highly-educated, high-earning Colombian women, leading to higher fertility. This relied on the assumption that middle-class women would be able to easily return to work without worrying about childcare. However, both the demographic and anthropological evidence contradicts this assumption. First of all, the richest 20% of

Colombian women have had a TFR well below replacement level for at least thirty years (declining from 1.7 in 1990 to 1.3 in 2015). Secondly, both parents and non-parents emphasised the high costs of raising middle-class children in Colombia (from paying for schooling and healthcare to astronomical university fees compared to local earnings). Non-parents, particularly, emphasised not only the high economic costs, but also the emotional costs of parenthood (as shown in Chapter 8). Additionally, despite their widespread availability, most childless women and men expressed negative views of parents who relied on non-parental caregivers, such as nannies and grandparents. Many openly questioned why parents would have children if they could not devote themselves to raising them. This leads me to a final consideration of the parenting ideals of childless Colombians and how this contributes to stratified non-reproduction.

Family Ideals Limiting Achieved Fertility

Though I have drawn on arguably Eurocentric grand theories, and used international comparisons to contextualise Colombia's demographic patterns and trends, when it comes to motivations, childless Colombians are not simply importing ideas about non-parenthood from other countries. Though I found some evidence that educated, middle-class Bogotanos/as, particularly those without children, expressed a highly 'intensive' imaginary of parenting, which could be construed as an American import, childless Colombians also typically expressed concerns related to their specific context. They largely perceived that raising middle-class-and-above children in Colombia requires proportionally more economic investment and more time and attention (due to the general insecurity in society) than would be required in Euro-American settings.

Additionally, though the men I interviewed were, like the women, largely middle-to-upper-class, highly educated professionals, it was striking that their ideals regarding *how* to be a father were similar to women's. Both genders aspired to a highly involved, resource-, time-, and labour-intensive form of parenting. While this type of ideal has been analysed previously, and is consistent with what Hays (1996) labelled 'intensive motherhood', it differs here in that it pertains to women *and* men. The forms of 'intensive motherhood' described by Hays (1996) and others were originally just that – applying only to mothers, and accompanying strictly gendered roles, with a male provider and female caregiver who devotes herself completely to her children and

partner. Amongst Bogotá's middle classes, however, I found that both women and men expressed a strong preference for an active, involved, intensive parenting style. Yet, these preferences were simultaneously framed as incompatible with non-parents' actual lives, suggesting that intensive parenting ideals are at least one factor contributing to some women's and men's semi-chosen childlessness. Many of their narratives implicitly asked: if you cannot be the type of devoted parent you would ideally want for your children, might it be better not to have them at all?

Women often answered this question affirmatively or semi-affirmatively. Non-mothers across the spectrum of intentionality, from Mónica ('uncertain') to Eva ('semi-voluntary' non-mother) to Teresa ('strictly' voluntary non-mother), specified that they would only consider having children in what they defined as their ideal circumstances. This usually meant within the confines of a stable (married or cohabiting) partnership with a man who was collaborative and supportive, though not necessarily the 'primary breadwinner'. Each woman made this latter factor clear: while they ruled out single motherhood, they were not looking for a partner who would go to work while they stayed at home; instead, they expected to share both the economic and caring burdens. These women therefore mixed 'traditional' imaginaries of motherhood (to the extent that their personal ideals excluded single motherhood and relied on co-residing male and female partners) with non-traditional imaginaries of womanhood, which was viewed as unbounded by dependence on a man or on having children. The clash between these discordant ideals regarding motherhood and womanhood was an important factor in many urban, middle-class women's pathways to non-motherhood. Men expressed similarly collaborative ideas regarding home and work life and a similar clash. Most had an arguably non-traditional ideal of caring, domestically-engaged fatherhood, which was hindered by their experiences of 'traditional' manhood, defined by high workloads and the desire to build a successful career. While women's and men's narratives both highlighted the relationship between changing gender roles/expectations and non-parenthood, the way that these changes were framed and experienced exemplify subtle gender differences.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has many limitations, some of which point to important avenues for further research. First, though the DHS and census collect valuable information

regarding fertility, they stop short of allowing us to understand people's motivations for having or not having children, nor do they meaningfully address parenting practices amongst women and men who have children. Though the series of both of these data sources allow us to compare cross-sectional 'snapshots' of fertility every 5-10 years, the DHS stops short of a truly longitudinal perspective, where the same group of women and/or men are interviewed repeatedly over the course of years, allowing researchers to carefully analyse the relative timing of different events. Retrospective fertility and partnership histories go some way towards filling this gap, but other DHS information is purely cross-sectional (e.g. wealth quintiles and highest level of education). This means that, although I could determine the broad profile of women who are childless, for example, showing that childlessness is positively associated with wealth, I *cannot* definitively determine the causal relationship between them. Open questions remain, such as: are most childless women from richer backgrounds to start with, or is there evidence that some began life in more modest circumstances, transitioning upwards over time? Using qualitative interview data from Bogotá, I argued that, for some women, childlessness may be part of a strategy of upward social mobility. However, these data are suggestive rather than conclusive, and are limited both by their retrospective, cross-sectional nature, as well as by the unrepresentativeness of my interview sample. Future research could build on these findings by studying one cohort of women (and men) over time, using repeated interviews to gather information as they experience different life events and make decisions that lead them down the path towards childlessness or parenthood. Understanding the evolution of childlessness in all its complexity and various forms is best served by longitudinal studies, visiting and revisiting the same people over a period of years or even decades, to follow-up on their thoughts and circumstances as they develop. Unfortunately, there are no such Colombian cohort data, and the time constraints of a doctoral thesis ruled out the development of a novel longitudinal study.

Returning to sampling, my interviewees' uncharacteristically advantaged profile is another limitation, and partly the result of relying on snowball sampling over other purposive or non-probability sampling techniques. Snowball sampling capitalises on social networks to access people who might otherwise be hard to find. However, because of this, it potentially results in selection bias and tends to produce samples that are fairly socially similar (Atkinson & Flint 2011). In my case, this meant a more

highly educated and economically stable sample than average. By triangulating my quantitative and qualitative findings, I know that, though the women I interviewed in Bogotá fit the ‘typical’ profile for childless women (e.g. only 3% of primary educated women aged 35-44 are childless, compared to 16% of those with ‘higher’ education), the men, who were also highly educated and middle class, only reflected the typical profile of male ‘postponers’, but not the ‘definitively’ childless. Though generalisability is not a primary aim of most anthropological research, this skewed profile unfortunately limits what I can say about working class people’s experiences of both parenthood and non-parenthood. For example, it would be interesting to know what factors have contributed to working class women’s non-motherhood and, where it results at least partially from choice, why they have foregone motherhood. Do working class non-parents share the ‘intensive’ parenting ideals that I showed were important to childless, middle-class Bogotanos/as, and the perception that the economic and emotional costs of having children might outweigh the benefits, or are their motivations completely different? Are children’s roles framed in the same way? How accepted is non-parenthood amongst their family and friends? How are they planning for a future without children? Unfortunately, the voices of less advantaged childless women and men are not represented here, though future research should prioritise them. Whereas richer Colombian women and men might be able to cope without the social safety net provided by family (including children), poorer individuals may struggle more, highlighting an important social policy issue.

Finally, Colombia’s regional diversity means that studying childlessness in rural areas, and outside of Bogotá, should be another priority, for example, in the ‘Central’ region that includes Medellín, where childlessness is particularly high. This regional variation remains underexplored.

Final Reflections

I will end by returning to Francy Uribe, the successful, childfree Colombian journalist from relatively humble, rural beginnings with whose story I began. Francy expressed how she had wanted to be ‘a different kind of woman’, someone who had goals and interests aside from motherhood. Though she liked children, she witnessed how all-encompassing the transition to motherhood could be, and questioned her own desire for children, eventually deciding she was happy without them. Francy’s story dovetails

with that of many other Colombian women, like those I interviewed, who expressed similar sentiments regarding motherhood, womanhood, and the gradual but determined decoupling of the two.

In contrast, for many Latin American men, fatherhood provides an opportunity to live out a different kind of manhood. Though my qualitative sample is both limited and unrepresentative, it chimes with other portraits of manhood and fatherhood in transition (Gutmann 1996; Viveros-Vigoya 2001). Far from the destructive stereotypes of Latin American men as macho, absentee father, or gangsters, Nicolás spoke of wanting to himself ‘be a mother’, explaining this as a form of fatherhood that is not only ‘responsible’, but also deeply caring; a vision which empowers men to throw off ‘traditional’ masculinity for a softer approach, which relishes in the minutiae of their children’s daily lives. As a small number of Colombian women forego motherhood to build a different kind of womanhood, a perhaps equally small number of men seek a type of ‘mothering’ fatherhood (I unfortunately do not have statistical evidence regarding changing fatherhood practices). Even those women and men whose non-parenthood was rooted in imaginaries of ‘intensive’ parenting represented a cognitive shift in the way that childbearing and childrearing are carried out. Having fewer children allows, and even encourages, parents to focus intensely on the wellbeing of those they have. In contrast, having no children allows adults to focus not only on their own wellbeing and self-improvement, but also to invest their energy into other people’s children and constructive social projects. In the end, the SDT provides only an imperfect and partial explanation for the social and demographic changes occurring in Colombia, and one which requires significant adaptation to the local context, particularly paying attention to social inequality and changing gender roles.

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Appendices

Introduction: Appendix

Intro. Appendix A: Supplementary Table

Table A1: Population of Colombian departments with at or below replacement-level fertility (2005-2015)

Department	2005			2010			2015		
	TFR	% Nat'l. Pop.	Pop.	TFR	% Nat'l. Pop.	Pop.	TFR	% Nat'l. Pop.	Pop.
Antioquia	--	--	--	1.8	13.3	6,066,003	1.4	13.4	6,456,299
Bogotá, D.C.	--	--	--	1.9	16.2	7,363,782	1.8	16.3	7,878,783
Boyacá	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.8	2.6	1,276,407
Caldas	2.0	2.3	968,586	1.6	2.1	978,342	1.3	2.0	987,991
Córdoba	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.1	3.5	1,709,644
Huila	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.1	2.4	1,154,777
Meta	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	2.0	961,334
Nariño	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.8	3.6	1,744,228
Quindío	1.7	1.2	534,506	1.7	1.2	549,662	1.7	1.2	565,310
Risaralda	1.8	2.1	897,413	1.7	2.0	925,117	1.7	2.0	951,953
Santander	--	--	--	2.1	4.4	2,010,393	1.8	4.3	2,061,079
Valle (del Cauca)	2.0	9.7	4,161,470	1.7	9.6	4,383,277	1.6	9.6	4,613,684
Arauca	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.1	0.5	262,315
Casanare	2.1	0.7	295,276	--	--	--	2.1	0.7	356,479
Guaviare	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.7	0.2	111,060
Putumayo	2.1	0.7	310,132	--	--	--	1.8	0.7	345,204
San Andrés & Providencia	--	--	--	2.1	0.2	73,320	2	0.2	76,442
Total (Depts Above)	--	16.7	7.17m.	--	49.1	22.35m.	--	65.4	31.51m.
Total (National)	2.4	100	42.89m.	2.1	100	45.51m.	2.0	100	48.20m.

Source: Own calculations, using TFRs from the DHS StatCompiler (<http://www.statcompiler.com/en/>) and same-year population estimates from DANE, via http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/poblacion/proyepobla06_20/Municipal_area_1985-2020.xls. [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

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Ch. 2) Appendix A. Description of Quantitative Data Sources

Colombian Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) / Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud (ENDS)

Table 2A.1: Colombian Demographic and Health Survey Sample Sizes, from 1986-2015

DHS Year	Number of Women, 15-49 yrs (13-49) ¹	Number of Men, 15-59 yrs (13-59)	Number of variables in Women's (Men's) dataset	Number of Households	Number of Household Members	Representative at what geographical level? (Number of sub-units)
1986	5,329	--	1,305	5,329	-	Regions (5)
1990	8,644	--	2,153	7,412	-	Subregions (13)
1995	11,140	--	2,387	10,112	-	Subregions (13)
2000	11,585	--	4,071	10,907	47,520	Subregions (13)
2005	38,143 (41,344)	--	5,146	37,211	157,840	Departments (33) & Subregions (16)
2010	49,562 (53,521)	--	5,995	51,447	204,459	Departments (33) & Subregions (16)
2015	35,979 (38,718)	33,037 (35,783)	5,769 (1,443)	44,614	162,459	Departments (33) & Subregions (16)

Source: Adapted from Table 3 of Flórez & Sanchez (2013: 18) and own calculations using DHS microdata.

¹**Note:** All numbers of women/men are for the unweighted sample, as are the numbers of households and household members. In 2005-2015, the individual female and male samples included all women/men aged 13-49/59, which is the count given in parentheses.

For more information on the Colombian *Demographic and Health Surveys* (or those for any other country where the programme is carried out), see: <http://www.dhsprogram.com/>. As Table 2A.1 shows, the DHS sample size has increased steadily over time, and in 2005, the level at which it is representative also increased in granularity (from 'subregions' to 'departments'). In this year, the sample was expanded to include 13 and 14-year-olds, though I have excluded them from my own analyses. Although men have always been included in the Colombia DHS household survey, detailed demographic and fertility-related information was only collected using the 'individual' survey questionnaire, administered to women of reproductive age (13/15-49-years-old) only, until 2015, when men of reproductive age (13-59-years-old) were included for the first time. Elderly people are sometimes included for special subject samples, like nutritional status, but not for the general fertility survey. The DHS is nationally-representative when disaggregated by

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region/subregions, and since 2005, at the ‘departmental’ level, as well. Subregions have always included Bogotá as a separate area, but since 2005, the ‘metropolitan areas’ of the next three largest cities, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla, have also constituted their own DHS ‘subregions’. Additionally, the sample is designed so that it can be representatively disaggregated by rural/urban residence, age and age group, sex, wealth quintiles, and educational level (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social & Profamilia 2017: 636).

Table 2A.2 contains information regarding the overall (total) response rate, and the individual (mostly women, but in 2015, men, too) and household survey response rates. In 2015, the response rates for households and women were lower than in previous years, and the men’s survey had particularly low rates, comparatively. The survey designers partially explained that demographic factors may have affected response, for example, shrinking Colombian household sizes: whereas in 2005, the average household consisted of 4.1 members, it had declined to 3.6 by 2015, just 10 years later. This means that the average number of eligible women residing at each sampled household address has also declined over time, and this effect, combined with a higher level of ‘absence’ from the home than in previous DHS rounds led to the lower-than-expected women’s response rate (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social & Profamilia 2017: 641). Importantly, where household or individual interviews were not completed for an identified residence/individual in the sampling frame, this was primarily due to a household’s or person’s absence, rather than because they refused to be interviewed. In the 2015 women’s individual survey, for example, the 25% of interviews that could not be completed in Bogotá were primarily to a woman’s ‘absence’ from the home (in 22.9% of cases, with only 1.8% being due to ‘refusal’, and the final 0.7% due to ‘other’ reasons) (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social & Profamilia 2017: 638).

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Table 2A.2: Total, Individual, and Household Response Rates/Sample Completeness

Year	Tot. Resp. Rate	Lowest / Highest Total Resp. Rate	Indiv. Resp. Rate	Lowest / Highest Indiv. Resp. Rate (Area)	Household Resp. Rate	Lowest / Highest Household Resp. Rate (Area)
1986	--	--	--	--	--	--
1990 ¹	82.0%	72.0% (Bogotá) / 88.3% (Atlantica)	89.7%	85.9% (Bogotá) / 94.4% (Oriental)	91.4%	83.7% (Bogotá) / 96.5% (Atlantica)
1995 ²	85.2%	70.8% (Bogotá) / 92.0% (Atlantica)	92.2%	85.6% (Bogotá) / 94.7% (Atlantica)	92.5%	82.7% (Bogotá) / 97.2% (Atlantica)
2000 ³	85.9%	77.0% (Bogotá) / 91.1% (Atlantica)	92.5%	89.8% (Bogotá) / 94.0% (Atlantica)	92.9%	85.8% (Bogotá) / 96.9% (Atlantica)
2005 ⁴	80.7%	53.6% (Bogotá) / 88.4% (Atlantica)	91.8%	82.4% (Bogotá) / 95.0% (Orinoquia & Amazonia)	87.9%	65.0% (Bogotá) / 94.3% (Atlantica)
2010 ⁵	85.8%	72.8% (Bogotá) / 93.3% (Orinoquia & Amazonia)	93.6%	90.5% (Bogotá) / 96.7% (Orinoquia & Amazonia)	91.6%	80.4% (Bogotá) / 96.5% (Orinoquia & Amazonia)
2015 ⁶ Women	74.3%	51.9% (Bogotá) / 87.0% (Cauca & Nariño)	86.6%	74.6% (Bogotá) / 90.1% (Cauca & Nariño)	85.8%	69.6% (Bogotá) / 93.6% (Cauca & Nariño)
2015 ⁶ Men	64.1%	39.4% (Bogotá) / 77.1% (Cauca & Nariño)	74.7%	56.6% (Bogotá) / 82.3% (Cauca & Nariño)	""	""

Source: Own construction, aggregating figures from the Final Reports for Colombia DHS 1990-2015, available from: https://dhsprogram.com/Where-We-Work/Country-Main.cfm?ctry_id=6&c=Colombia&Country=Colombia&cn=&r=6 [Accessed: 7/Nov/19].

Notes: ¹1990 Colombia DHS Final Report (Profamilia 1991: 190)

²1995 Colombia DHS Final Report (Profamilia & Macro International 1995: 180)

³2000 Colombia DHS Final Report (Profamilia 2000: 224)

⁴2005 Colombia DHS Final Report (Ojeda et al. 2005: 424)

⁵2010 Colombia DHS Final Report (Ojeda et al. 2011: 564)

⁶2015 Colombia DHS Final Report, Volume II, Appendix F (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social & Profamilia 2017: 637-640)

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The Colombian Census

In the latter half of the 20th century, there have been Colombian censuses approximately every 10 years, including: 1964, 1973, 1985, 1993, and 2005. As yet, it is unclear when the 2010-round of the Colombian census will be held; therefore, the most recent data are from 2005 and are at least 10-years old, which could be a significant limitation. I expect that some of this disadvantage should be offset by using more recent DHS data (from 2010 and 2015).

I limited my analysis to three census rounds: 1985, 1993, and 2005, although information for the two previous rounds is included below.

Table 2A.3: Colombian Censuses, 1964-2005

Census Year	Number of Individuals in IPUMS Sample (% of total population)	Population Unit Sampled	Estimate of Population Coverage	Enumeration method
1964 ¹	349,652 (2%)	Individual	98.2%	<i>De facto</i> , with direct enumeration
1973 ¹	1,988,831 (10%)	Household	92.8%	<i>De facto</i> , with direct enumeration
1986	2,643,125 (10%)	Dwelling	91.2%	<i>De jure</i> , with direct enumeration
1993	3,213,657 (10%)	Dwelling	88.5%	<i>De jure</i> , with direct enumeration
2005	4,117,607 (10%)	Dwelling	96.3%	<i>De jure</i> , with direct enumeration

Source: Adapted using data from https://international.ipums.org/international/sample_designs/sample_designs_co.shtml [Accessed: 12/Sept/19].

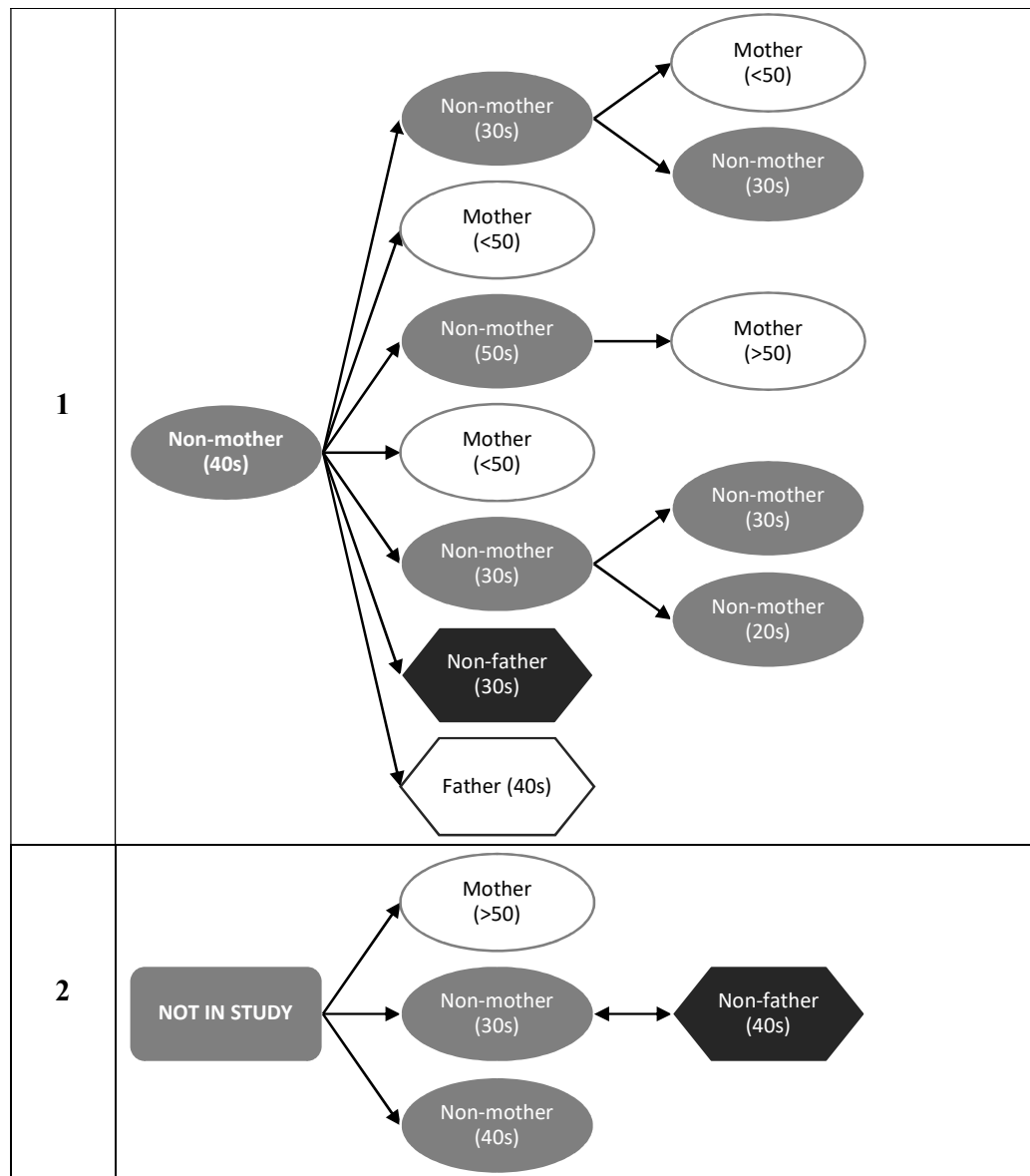
¹**Note:** Greyed-out squares indicate that I did not use the data from these census rounds. Information included as background only.

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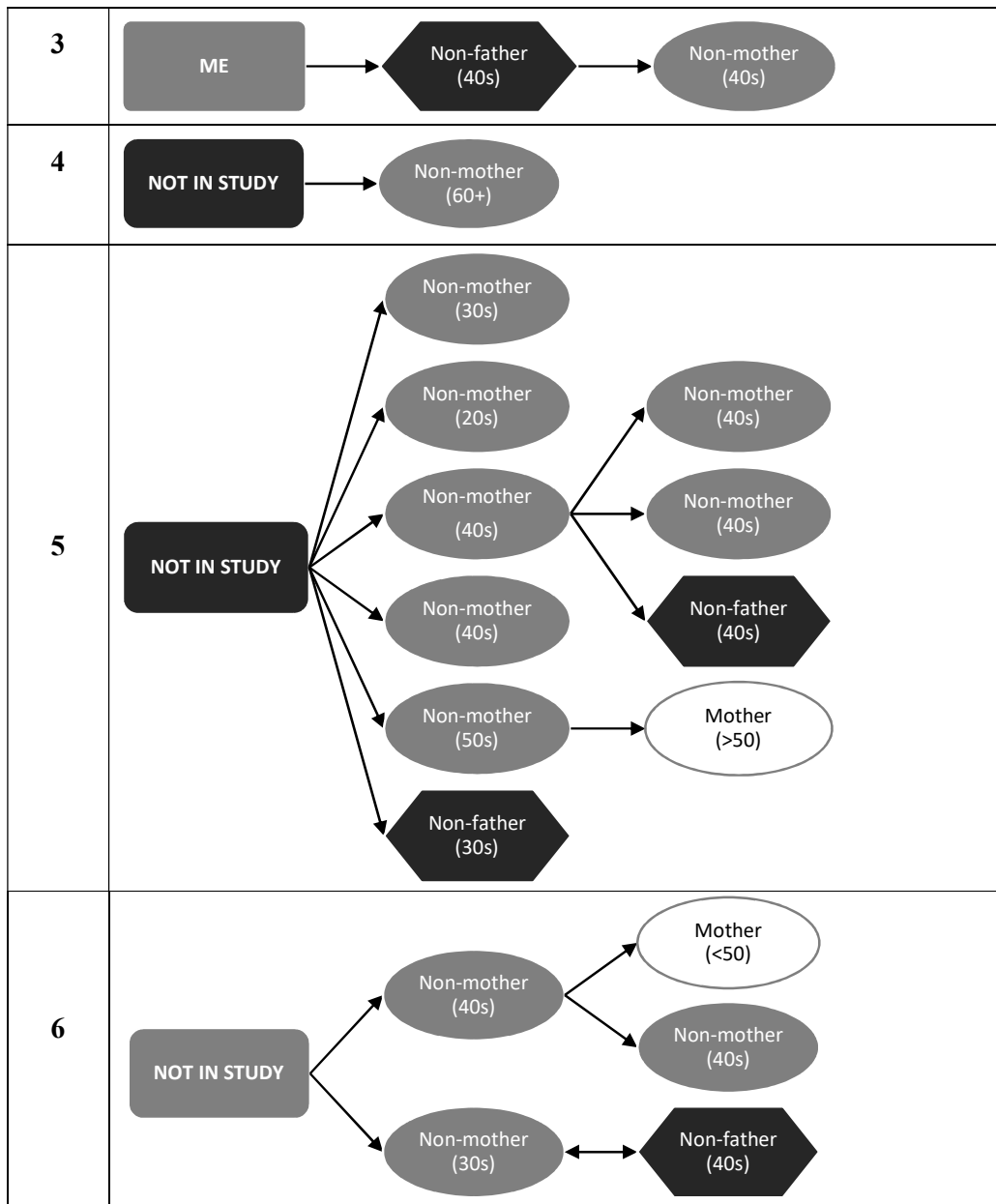
Ch. 2) Appendix B: Snowball Sample Clusters

Note: In the diagrams in Figure 2B.1, below, the visual shorthand uses *lighter grey* to indicate a female interviewee or referrer and *grey-black* for a male interviewee and/or referrer. Only in Cluster 1 did the original referrer also take part in an interview. In all other clusters, the original referrers were friends who did not take part in the study themselves, though none had children, and all are colour-coded in the same way as other interviewees. In cluster 3 (next page), I asked a friend if I could interview him and he subsequently referred me to another friend of his.

Figure 2B.1: Interviewee Sample Clusters (or ‘Seed Nodes’) & Referral Chains within Clusters



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Ch. 2) Appendix C: Socio-Demographic Questionnaire

CUESTIONARIO SOCIODEMOGRÁFICO

Numero de Entrevista o Participante: *	Fecha:

*Guardaré separadamente el listado que une los nombres de cada participante con el número de entrevista o participante.

A) DATOS BÁSICOS

1. Género: _____
2. Edad actual: _____
3. Año de nacimiento: _____
4. Lugar de nacimiento: _____
5. ¿Cuántos años lleva viviendo en su ciudad de residencia actual (Bogotá)? _____
6. ¿En qué barrio vive actualmente? _____
7. ¿Qué estrato es el barrio o el edificio en el que Ud. vive actualmente? _____
8. ¿Ha vivido en otras partes de Colombia o del mundo? Sí / No
9. Si su respuesta al número 8 fue 'Sí', ¿dónde, aparte de Bogotá, ha vivido Ud.? _____

B) EDUCACIÓN

10. Por favor, elija el más alto nivel de educación que Ud. tiene: *Ninguna educación formal / Primaria / Secundaria / Pregrado / Posgrado / Otro* (especifique por favor): _____

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11. Actualmente, ¿está estudiando? *Sí / No*

Si su respuesta al número 11 fue 'Sí', ...

a. ¿Qué tipo de estudios está haciendo Ud. (nivel y carrera / especialización)?

b. Está estudiando a: *tiempo completo / tiempo parcial / otro* (por favor especifique): _____

c. Aproximadamente, ¿Cuántas horas por semana se dedica a sus estudios?

C) TRABAJO

12. ¿Ha Ud. trabajado fuera de casa alguna vez en su vida? *Sí / No*

13. Actualmente, ¿trabaja Ud. fuera de casa? *Sí / No*

Si su respuesta al número 13 fue 'Sí', ...

a. ¿Cuántos años ha Ud. trabajado fuera de casa? _____

b. ¿Cuál es su ocupación? (¿Qué hace Ud. como trabajo?) _____

c. Actualmente, ¿cuántas horas por semana trabaja Ud. fuera de casa? _____

14. Si su respuesta al número 13 fue 'No', pero Ud. ha trabajado fuera de casa alguna vez en su vida...

a. ¿Cuándo trabajó Ud. fuera de casa? _____

b. ¿Cuál era su ocupación? _____

c. ¿Por qué ya no está trabajando? _____

D) ESTADO CIVIL / PAREJA ACTUAL

15. ¿Cuál es su estado civil? *Soltero(a) / Cohabitación o Unión Libre / Casado(a) / Divorciado(a) / Separado(a) / Viudo(a) / Otro* (especifique por favor): _____

16. Si Ud. está en una relación actual, ¿cuánto tiempo llevan juntos?: _____

17. ¿Si Ud. tiene un compañero/a en relación estable, cuál es su ocupación?

18. Su compañero/a ... *trabaja actualmente / trabajaba antes / nunca ha trabajado fuera de casa / otro* (especifique por favor) _____

19. Elija el más alto nivel de educación que su compañero tiene: *Ninguna educación formal / Primaria / Secundaria / Pregrado / Posgrado / Otro* (especifique por favor): _____

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E) HISTORIA Y PREFERENCIAS DE FECUNDIDAD

20. ¿Tiene Ud. hijos? Sí / No

Si Ud. tiene hijos, por favor responda a preguntas 21 y 22; si no tiene hijos, por favor omítalas.

21. Número de hijos e hijas (total): _____ # de Hijos: _____ # de Hijas: _____

22. Edad, año de nacimiento, y sexo de cada hijo, si Ud. tiene hijos:

Hijos (Número en orden de nacimiento)	Edad Actual	Año de nacimiento	Sexo
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

Preguntas acerca del futuro, tomadas de la Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud (ENDS), *Sección 7: Preferencias de Fecundidad* (Informe Final de la ENDS 2010, p. 688):

23. Número deseado de hijos:⁹³

a. Si Ud. no tiene hijos: ¿Le gustaría tener un hijo o preferiría no tener ningún hijo? *Tener un hijo / Ninguno / Indecisa o no sabe / Otro* (especifique por favor): _____

i. Si Ud. quisiera tener hijos, ¿cuántos le gustaría? _____

b. Si Ud. tiene hijos: ¿Le gustaría tener otro hijo o preferiría ya no tener más hijos? *Tener otro hijo / No más / Indecisa o no sabe / Otro* (especifique por favor): _____

i. Si Ud. quisiera tener más hijos, ¿cuántos le gustaría?

24. Número ideal de hijos: Si Ud. pudiera elegir exactamente el número de hijos que tendría en toda su vida (sin considerar limitaciones prácticas, económicas o sociales, y sin considerar el número de hijos que ya tiene, si Ud. tiene hijos), ¿cuántos serían? _____

⁹³Note: Questions 23-24 were adapted from the Colombia DHS questionnaires to: pose question 23 separately to parents and non-parents (unlike in the DHS, where it is a combined question), and, in question 24, add language to emphasise that 'ideal' number of children is counterfactual, and refers to a world/situation where the person did not have to worry about practical limitations on their 'ideals'.

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F) HISTORIA FAMILIAR

25. ¿Cuántos hermanos tiene (total)? ___ # de Hermanos: ___ # de Hermanas: ___
26. ¿Quién lo/la crio a Ud.? (por ejemplo, ambos padres, madre soltera, padre soltero, abuelos, etc.) _____

27. ¿Vivían sus padres juntos cuando Ud. nació? Sí / No
a. Si Ud. lo sabe, por favor escriba si ellos ¿estaban casados, en 'unión libre' o en otro tipo de pareja / compromiso / relación en esa época?

28. ¿Viven sus padres juntos actualmente? Sí / No
a. Si Ud. respondió 'No', por favor escriba por qué (por ejemplo, divorcio, separación, enviudado(a)): _____
29. ¿Se considera Ud. religioso(a)? Sí / No
a. Si Ud. respondió 'Sí', por favor especifique el tipo de religión (p. ej., Iglesia Católica Romana, otro tipo de Cristiano, Judaísmo, Islam, etc.):

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Ch. 3) Appendix A: Census and DHS Estimates of Women with Zero 'Children Ever Born' (CEB)

Table 3A.1: CENSUS ESTIMATES – Unknown CEB (U_i), Declared Zero CEB (Z_i) & Corrected Estimates of 'Zero' CEB (Z_i^*)

Census Round	5-year Age Group							Total N
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
1985								
Total N	1,637,827	1,550,302	1,255,521	953,012	834,239	601,297	519,130	7,351,328
U_i (% 'Unknown' CEB)	19.6	18.9	10.4	7.1	6.0	5.6	5.7	
Z_i (% No CEB), Uncorr.	69.2	34.5	18.2	10.4	7.9	7.1	6.7	
Z_i^* (% No CEB), el-Badry 'Corrected'	83.4	48.0	23.1	12.2	8.5	7.3	7.0	
$U_i + Z_i$ (% 'Unknown' + % 'Zero' CEB)	88.8	53.4	28.5	17.5	13.9	12.7	12.4	
1993								
Total N	1,645,260	1,610,590	1,526,530	1,360,860	1,136,590	857,460	660,330	8,797,620
U_i (% 'Unknown' CEB)	31.6	24.1	14.1	8.8	6.6	6.0	5.7	
Z_i (% No CEB), Uncorr.	54.5	26.1	15.4	9.3	6.6	5.7	5.7	
Z_i^* (% No CEB), el-Badry 'Corrected'	81.4	45.6	24.9	13.4	8.6	7.0	6.8	
$U_i + Z_i$ (% 'Unknown' + % 'Zero' CEB)	86.1	50.2	29.5	18.1	13.2	11.6	11.4	
2005								
Total N	1,920,078	1,833,626	1,675,828	1,504,995	1,515,295	1,410,853	1,195,367	11,056,042
U_i (% 'Unknown' CEB)	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.9	3.3	
Z_i (% No CEB), Uncorr.	82.5	49.1	28.4	16.0	12.0	10.6	10.7	
Z_i^* (% No CEB), el-Badry 'Corrected'	82.2	48.9	28.2	16.0	12.0	10.3	10.9	
$U_i + Z_i$ (% 'Unknown' + % 'Zero' CEB)	85.0	51.8	31.2	19.1	15.1	13.1	14.2	

Note: Rows highlighted light grey for each census round indicate the preferable estimate of childlessness (the el-Badry 'corrected' estimate, Z_i^* , for 1985 & 1993, and the 'uncorrected estimate', Z_i , for 2005).

Source: Own calculations using women's IPUMS-I Colombia census (10% Sample) data from 1985, 1993, 2005.

Table 3A.2: DHS ESTIMATES – Declared Zero CEB (Z_i)

DHS Round		5-year Age Group							Total N (15-49)
		15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
1986	Total Women (N)	1,208	1,080	906	736	593	428	381	5,332
	Z_i (% No CEB)	89.5	50.3	24.2	12.2	8.6	6.2	3.5	
1995	Total Women (N)	2,166	1,938	1,814	1,637	1,393	1,222	969	11,139
	Z_i (% No CEB)	86.5	45.3	22.7	14.5	9.2	6.3	9.2	
2005	Total Women (N)	6,903	6,344	5,653	5,119	5,196	4,758	4,379	38,352
	Z_i (% No CEB)	83.8	46.9	26.1	12.8	9.4	8.2	6.9	

Source: Own calculations, using Colombia DHS individual women's microdata from 1986, 1995, 2005.

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Ch. 3) Appendix B: Assessing Variation in the Numbers and Proportions of Childless Women caused by Including or Excluding First-time Pregnancies in the 'Childless' Category

The tables, below, present survey weighted numbers and proportions from all available rounds of the Colombian DHS. Table 3B.1 shows the number of women who have no 'children ever born' (CEB) in each survey round and age group (Columns A in Table 3B.1). This includes all women with no biological children, whether they were pregnant or not when surveyed. Some of these women (numbers shown in Columns B of Table 3B.1) were pregnant with their first child when surveyed, therefore they will shortly move out of the 'No CEB' group Table 3B.2 shows that whether we include women currently pregnant with their first child in calculations or not makes little difference, as this is a relatively small group (see Column C, below), comprising between 1.5-2% of all women aged 15-49 across DHS survey rounds. However, there are variations, and although very few (nearly none) of the women in their late 30s or 40s when surveyed were pregnant with their first child, between 2.5 and 4.4% of all women in their teens and early 20s were pregnant with their first child in different rounds of the DHS.

Table 3B.1: Numbers of Women with No ‘Children Ever Born’ (No CEB), Women with No CEB who are Currently Pregnant, and Total Number of Women in each DHS Survey Round, by 5-year age groups

Col.	Five-year Age Groups																				
	15-19			20-24			25-29			30-34			35-39			40-44			45-49		
DHS Year	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N	A No CEB	B 1 st Preg	C Tot N
1986	1081	37	1208	543	27	1080	219	13	906	90	8	736	51	1	593	27	0	428	13	0	381
1990	1609	57	1780	851	49	1683	410	26	1467	133	3	1193	102	4	955	49	0	737	42	0	673
1995	1874	84	2166	878	86	1938	412	34	1814	237	7	1636	128	3	1393	77	0	1222	89	0	969
2000	1923	91	2264	964	63	1989	399	24	1727	238	12	1625	125	2	1569	105	2	1337	87	0	1075
2005	5782	296	6902	2976	200	6346	1476	80	5652	657	28	5120	491	18	5197	389	4	4760	302	0	4379
2010	7661	337	9100	3756	257	7760	1818	132	7327	873	33	6787	486	17	6290	412	2	6483	455	0	6071
2015	5275	228	6107	2990	176	6021	1488	88	5611	743	33	5186	368	27	4740	277	0	4297	249	1	4337

Note: **Column A** = Women with no ‘children ever born’ / **Column B** = Women with no ‘children ever born’, who are currently pregnant for the first time / **Column C** = Total number of women in each age group in each survey year (with or without children). The women in the ‘No CEB’ group (Column A) includes all women who have never given birth (both those who are currently pregnant and those who are not). To obtain the number of women who are truly ‘childless’ in each survey round (i.e. women with no CEB who are *not* pregnant), subtract Column B from Column A. Column C is the total number of women (mothers and non-mothers, whether pregnant or not) in each age group for each survey round. Subtracting Column A from Column C, above, gives the number of mothers in each age/survey year group.

Source: Own calculations using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) microdata, 1986-2015.

Table 3B.2: Proportion of women with no ‘children ever born’ (no CEB), including and excluding pregnant women (Columns A & B, respectively), as well as the difference between the two proportions, by 5-year age groups (Column C)

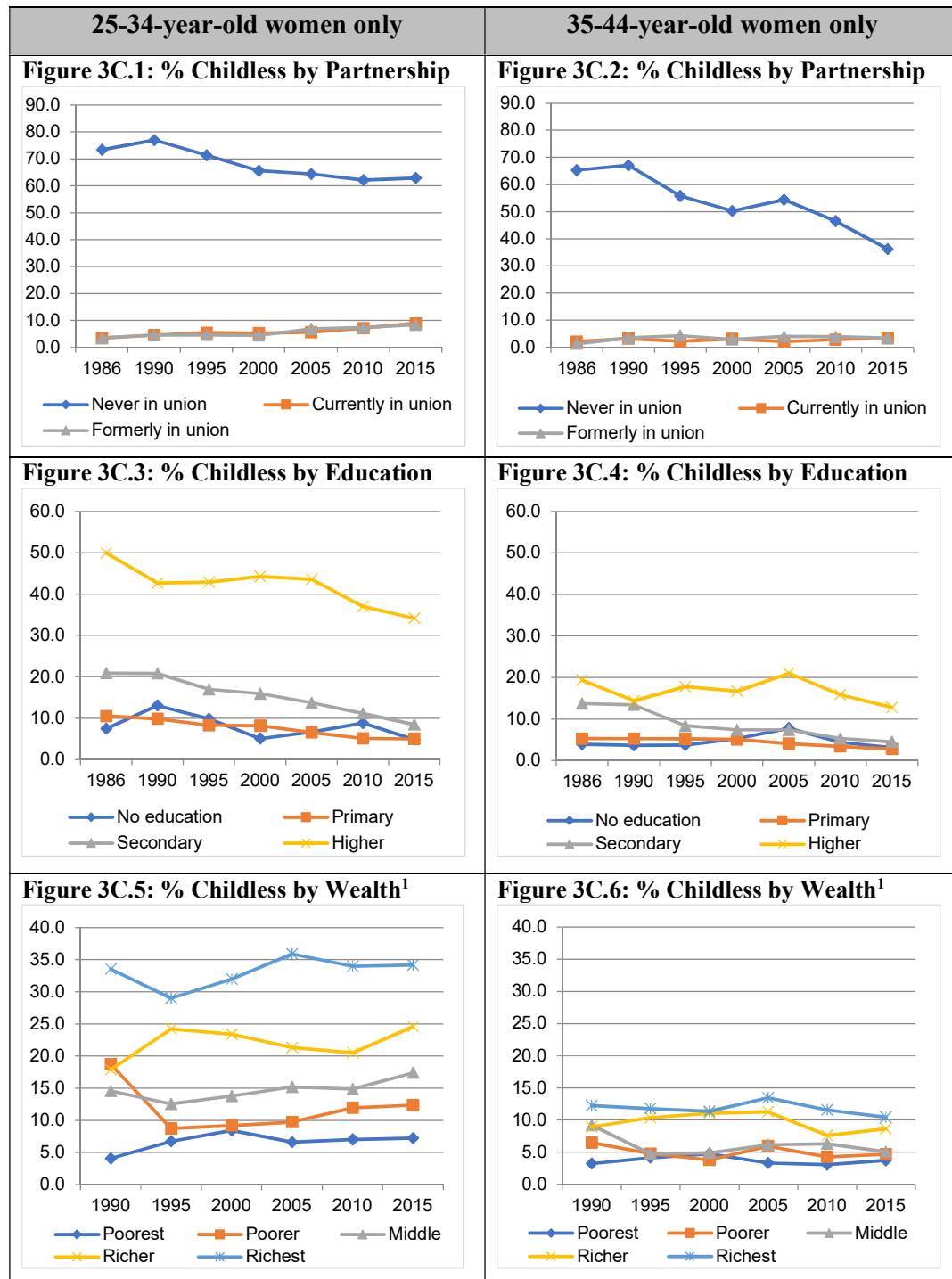
Col.	Five-year Age Groups																					TOTAL (% of All Women 15-49)		
	15-19			20-24			25-29			30-34			35-39			40-44			45-49					
DHS Year	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg	% No CEB incl preg	% No CEB excl preg	1 st Preg
1986	89.5	86.4	3.1	50.3	47.8	2.5	24.2	22.7	1.4	12.2	11.1	1.1	8.6	8.4	0.2	6.3	6.3	0.0	3.4	3.4	0.0	38.0	36.3	1.6
1990	90.4	87.2	3.2	50.6	47.7	2.9	27.9	26.2	1.8	11.1	10.9	0.3	10.7	10.3	0.4	6.6	6.6	0.0	6.2	6.2	0.0	37.7	36.0	1.6
1995	86.5	82.6	3.9	45.3	40.9	4.4	22.7	20.8	1.9	14.5	14.1	0.4	9.2	9.0	0.2	6.3	6.3	0.0	9.2	9.2	0.0	33.2	31.3	1.9
2000	84.9	80.9	4.0	48.5	45.3	3.2	23.1	21.7	1.4	14.6	13.9	0.7	8.0	7.8	0.1	7.9	7.7	0.1	8.1	8.1	0.0	33.2	31.5	1.7
2005	83.8	79.5	4.3	46.9	43.7	3.2	26.1	24.7	1.4	12.8	12.3	0.5	9.4	9.1	0.3	8.2	8.1	0.1	6.9	6.9	0.0	31.5	29.8	1.6
2010	84.2	80.5	3.7	48.4	45.1	3.3	24.8	23.0	1.8	12.9	12.4	0.5	7.7	7.5	0.3	6.4	6.3	0.0	7.5	7.5	0.0	31.0	29.5	1.6
2015	86.4	82.6	3.7	49.7	46.7	2.9	26.5	25.0	1.6	14.3	13.7	0.6	7.8	7.2	0.6	6.4	6.4	0.0	5.7	5.7	0.0	31.4	29.9	1.5

Note: **Column A** in this Table is the ‘Proportion of All Women who have No Children Ever Born’. **Column B** in this table is the ‘Proportion of All Women who have No Children Ever Born and are not Currently Pregnant’. **Column C** is the proportion of women in each age group/survey year who are currently pregnant with their first child (subtracting Col. A from Col. B).

Source: Own calculations using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) microdata, 1986-2015.

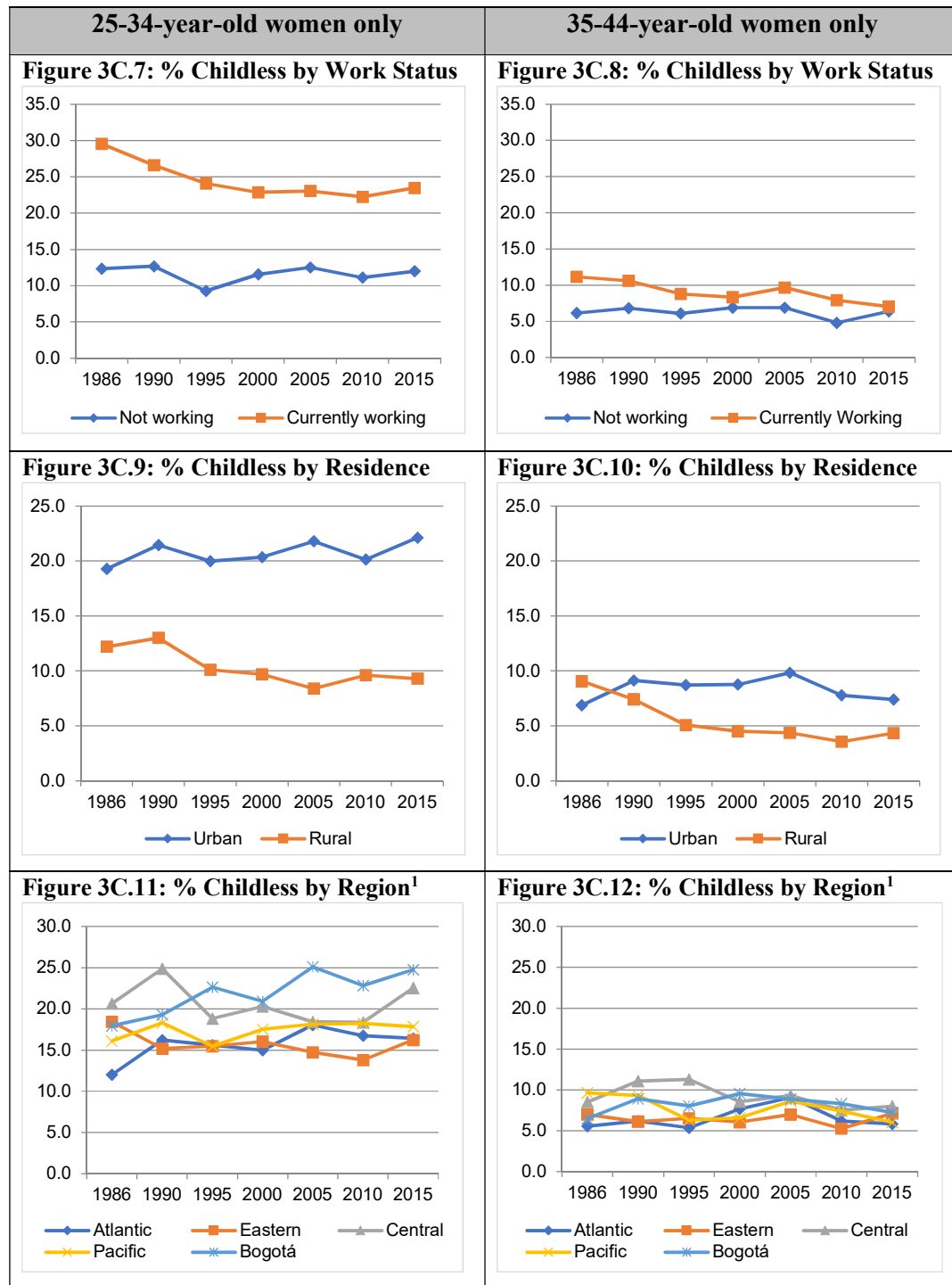
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Ch. 3) Appendix C: Period Trends over time in proportions childless around ages 30 and 40 (DHS 1986-2015)



¹Note: The Colombia DHS in 1986 did not include information regarding wealth quintiles.
Source: Own calculations using women's individual DHS microdata, 1986-2015.

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¹Note: Graphs exclude 'National Territories', or Orinoquia/Amazonia.

Source: Own calculations using women's individual DHS microdata, 1986-2015.

Figures 3C.1 and 3C.2 show that whereas women around age 30 and 40 who have ever been in a union are unlikely to be childless (generally less than 10% of the younger

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group and 5% of the older group), amongst women who have never been married or cohabited, these figures are substantially higher: in 2015, around 60% of the younger women and 35% of older women. With respect to the trend over time, a decreasing proportion of women who have never cohabited or married (in both age groups) is childless over time (1986-2015): from around 73% to 63% of the younger women and from 65 to just 36% of the older women. The decreasing childless amongst younger women who have never been in union is accompanied by a steady, although modest, increase in childlessness amongst women who are currently or formerly in union: from about 2.5% to 8.5% in the same period. Childlessness amongst women ever in union in the older group has been steady, perhaps giving us an indication that a larger proportion of women in union are postponing their first births than definitively not having a child.

Based on the literature from other countries, we would also expect that larger proportions of women with a higher level of education and higher socioeconomic status will be childless (Cavenaghi & Alves 2013; Fieder et al. 2011). Childlessness in Colombia does indeed vary according to educational outcomes, in the expected direction, whereby the highest proportions childless are found amongst women with a 'higher' level of education in both around age 30 and 40, as can be seen in Figures 3C.3 and 3C.4. Secondary education appears to have a relatively negligible (and declining) impact on childlessness.

Figures 3C.5 and 3C.6 demonstrate that wealth quintiles have a similar, although less pronounced effect than education on childlessness, particularly in the younger group, where the poorest women have the lowest levels of childlessness, and this increases relatively consistently across wealth quintiles. Although the richer/ richest older women also have higher levels of childlessness than the other groups, the patterns over time and between groups are less clearly visible.

The proportions childless, stratified by *occupational status* (currently working outside the home or not), display different patterns over time in the younger and older age groups. Figure 3C.7 shows that the proportion of working younger women who are childless is decreasing over time, whereas amongst those who do not work, it has remained steady. However, even in 2015, there was a substantial gap between the approximately 10% of non-working women who were childless versus almost 25% of

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those who were working. Amongst older women in 2015, the gap had narrowed to such an extent that around 7% of both working and non-working women were childless, as can be seen in Figure 3C.8. This declining proportion of working women who are childless could perhaps be due to more mothers joining the workforce over the 30 year reference period (Amador et al. 2013), meaning that the share of working women who are childless has decreased modestly over time.

Finally, and turning our attention from individual to geographic characteristics, the patterns displayed according to urban or rural residence in Figures 3C.9 and 3C.10 also display a difference in the expected direction, whereby urban women have consistently higher rates of childlessness than their rural counterparts. In the younger age group, urban women have a fairly steady level of childlessness (around 20%, although very modestly increasing over time), whereas amongst the younger rural women around 10% are childless, with a modestly decreasing trend over time, indicating a small increase in rural-urban polarisation according to motherhood/non-motherhood. Figures 3C.11 and 3C.12 illustrate the regional patterns of childlessness (excluding the 'National Territories' because the DHS collected no data in this region until 2005). Although the regional trends are not entirely clear (particularly in the older age group), amongst younger women, Bogotá and the Central region (home to Medellín, Colombia's second-largest city), have consistently had the highest proportions childless since the 1980s. Bogotá, in particular, also appears to exhibit a modest upward trend over time, from 18% in 1986 to 25% by 2015.

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Ch. 3) Appendix D: Additional Interactions for Younger Women's Logistic Regression Models (DHS 2010)

Tables 3D.1 and 3D.2, below, first display the unadjusted estimates for each independent variable in relation to childlessness (with OR>1 indicating an increased risk of non-motherhood), followed by the 'Full' model for childlessness (or maternal postponement) amongst 'younger' women, aged 25-34. Then, Table 3D.1 contains the results of two additional interactions between the union/'partnership' variable and: area of residence (interaction model 1), as well as current work (interaction model 2).

Table 3D.1: Logistic Regression Models for Union Interactions

Indep. Variables	Younger: Women Aged 25-34 Only (N=14,114)			
	Unadj. Assocs.	Full Model: No Interactions	Interaction Model 1: Union*Area	Interaction Model 2: Union*Work
	OR	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)
Age (Contin.)	0.86***	0.90 (0.87-0.92) ***	0.90 (0.87-0.92) ***	0.90 (0.87-0.92) ***
Partnership: Ever in union	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never in union	21.3 ***	15.7 (13.4-18.3) ***	14.5 (12.3-17.1) ***	22.4 (16.7-30.2) ***
Education:				
Primary or less	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Secondary	2.2 ***	1.3 (1.0-1.7) *	1.3 (1.0-1.7) *	1.3 (1.0-1.7) *
Higher	10.5 ***	4.0 (3.1-5.2) ***	4.0 (3.1-5.2) ***	4.0 (3.1-5.2) ***
Wealth index:				
Poorest	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Poorer	1.8 ***	1.4 (1.1-1.9) *	1.5 (1.1-2.0) *	1.4 (1.1-1.9) *
Middle	2.3 ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***
Richer	3.4 ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.0 (1.4-2.9) ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***
Richest	6.8 ***	3.1 (2.1-4.4) ***	3.1 (2.1-4.5) ***	3.0 (2.1-4.4) ***
Currently working: No	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Yes	2.3 ***	1.3 (1.1-1.6) ***	1.3 (1.1-1.6) ***	1.6 (1.3-2.0) ***
Area of residence:				
Urban	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Rural	0.4	1.5 (1.1-2.0) **	1.2 (0.9-1.7)	1.5 (1.1-2.1) **
Region: Bogotá	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Atlantic	0.68 ***	1.8 (1.4-2.4) ***	1.8 (1.4-2.4) ***	1.8 (1.4-2.4) ***
Central	0.76 *	1.4 (1.0-1.8) *	1.4 (1.0-1.8) *	1.4 (1.0-1.8) *
Eastern	0.54 ***	1.0 (0.8-1.4)	1.0 (0.8-1.3)	1.0 (0.8-1.3)
Pacific	0.76 *	1.5 (1.1-1.9) **	1.5 (1.1-1.9) **	1.4 (1.0-2.0) *
National Territories	0.44 ***	1.4 (1.0-2.0) *	1.4 (1.0-2.0) *	1.5 (1.1-1.9) **
Interaction:				
Union*Area				
Never*Rural	--	--	1.7 (1.1-2.7) *	--
Interaction:				
Union*Work				
Never*Curr. Working	--	--	--	0.61 (0.44-0.85) **
Intercept	--	0.28 (0.11-0.69) **	0.29 (0.12-0.72) **	0.24 (0.10-0.60) **
Rao-Scott F-Test for Interaction	--	--	Working 2logLR= 5.0605; p= 0.0255	Working 2logLR= 8.3659; p= 0.0041
AIC	--	8675.2	8668.8	8663.8
BIC	--	8777.2	8776.4	8771.8

Statistical significance: ***p<0.001 / **p<0.01 / *p<0.05 / .p<0.10

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Table 3D.2 also displays the results of two additional interactions, here, between the ‘education’ variable and: union/‘partnership’ status (interaction model 3), as well as ‘region’ (interaction model 4).

Table 3D.2: Logistic Regression Models for Education Interactions

Indep. Variables	Younger: Women Aged 25-34 Only (N=14,114)			
	Unadj. Assocs.	Full Model: No Interactions	Interaction Model 3: Ed*Union	Interaction Model 4: Ed*Region
	OR	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)	AOR (95% CI)
Age (Contin.)	0.86***	0.90 (0.87-0.92) ***	0.90 (0.87-0.92) ***	0.90 (0.88-0.93) ***
Partnership: Ever in union	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never in union	21.3 ***	15.7 (13.4-18.3) ***	22.5 (14.3-35.5) ***	15.9 (13.6-18.5) ***
Education:				
Primary or less	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Secondary	2.2 ***	1.3 (1.0-1.7) *	1.4 (1.0-2.0) .	1.9 (0.5-6.7)
Higher	10.5 ***	4.0 (3.1-5.2) ***	5.1 (3.6-7.2) ***	10.0 (2.9-34.2) ***
Wealth index: Poorest	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Poorer	1.8 ***	1.4 (1.1-1.9) *	1.4 (1.1-1.9) *	1.5 (1.1-2.0) **
Middle	2.3 ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.1 (1.5-3.0) ***
Richer	3.4 ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.0 (1.4-2.8) ***	2.2 (1.5-3.1) ***
Richest	6.8 ***	3.1 (2.1-4.4) ***	3.0 (2.1-4.4) ***	3.2 (2.2-4.7) ***
Currently working: No	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Yes	2.3 ***	1.3 (1.1-1.6) ***	1.3 (1.1-1.6) ***	1.3 (1.1-1.6) ***
Area of residence:				
Urban	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Rural	0.4	1.5 (1.1-2.0) **	1.5 (1.1-2.0) **	1.5 (1.1-2.0) **
Region: Bogotá	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Atlantic	0.68 ***	1.8 (1.4-2.4) ***	1.8 (1.4-2.4) ***	4.8 (1.4-16.9) *
Central	0.76 *	1.4 (1.0-1.8) *	1.4 (1.0-1.8) *	3.5 (1.0-12.4) .
Eastern	0.54 ***	1.0 (0.8-1.4)	1.0 (0.8-1.3)	3.0 (0.8-10.7) .
Pacific	0.76 *	1.5 (1.1-1.9) **	1.4 (1.1-1.9) *	2.2 (0.6-8.0)
National Territories	0.44 ***	1.4 (1.0-2.0) *	1.4 (1.0-2.0) *	1.1 (0.3-4.3)
Interaction 3:				
Ed*Union				
Secondary*Never			0.8 (0.5-1.4)	
Higher*Never			0.6 (0.3-0.9) *	
Interaction 4:				
Ed*Region				
Secondary*Atlantic				0.7 (0.2-2.6)
Higher*Atlantic				0.3 (0.1-1.0) *
Secondary*Central				0.6 (0.2-2.5)
Higher*Central				0.3 (0.1-1.1) .
Secondary*Eastern				0.5 (0.1-1.8)
Higher*Eastern				0.3 (0.1-1.1) .
Secondary*Pacific				1.1 (0.3-4.4)
Higher*Pacific				0.6 (0.1-2.1)
Secondary*Natl Territ.				2.3 (0.5-10.2)
Higher*Natl Territ.				1.4 (0.3-5.8)
Intercept	--	0.28 (0.11-0.69) **	0.25 (0.10-0.63) **	0.12 (0.03-0.53) **
Rao-Scott F-Test for Interaction	--	--	Working 2logLR= 8.1965; p=0.0169	Working 2logLR= 29.0593; p=0.0044
AIC	--	8675.2	8667.3	8662.3
BIC	--	8777.2	8781.4	8830.4

Statistical significance: ‘***’p≤0.001 / ‘**’p≤0.01 / ‘*’p≤0.05 / ‘.’p≤0.10

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Of the tested interactions, only those which had a significant Rao-Scott F-test are presented here. These are additional candidate models for explaining variations in childlessness amongst younger women, which provided statistically significant improvements on the full model with *no interactions*, as well as having slightly lower AIC values (indicating the better model). However, in all but one case (interaction model 2 between union and current work), the BIC value for the interaction models increases (indicating that they are worse than the simpler model with no interactions).

Interaction Model 1: Union & Area of Residence

Table 3D.3 shows that, although the magnitude of the association between never having been in union and childlessness differs between urban and rural areas, the direction is the same: compared to women who have ever cohabited/married, those who have not experience significantly increased odds of early-age childlessness, or maternal postponement.

Table 3D.3: Area-stratified ORs for Relationship between Union Status and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Union/Partnership Status	Area of Residence	
	Urban	Rural
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Ever in Union (ref)	1.0	1.0
Never in Union	14.54 (12.35-17.12)	24.54 (13.14-45.84)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

In contrast, Table 3D.4 shows that, once stratified by union status, it is only amongst women who have never been in union that living in a rural area increases the odds of childlessness. The odds of childlessness for younger women in rural and urban areas are not statistically different if they have ever been in a union.

Table 3D.4: Union-stratified ORs for Relationship between Area of Residence and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Area of Residence	Union/Partnership Status	
	Ever in Union	Never in Union
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Urban (ref)	1.0	1.0
Rural	1.22 (0.88-1.70)	2.07 (1.34-3.19)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

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Interaction Model 2: Union & Current Work

Table 3D.5 presents the relationship between union status and childlessness, stratified according to whether a woman was working when interviewed for the 2010 DHS. Again, the relationship between not having married/cohabited and remaining childless around age 30 is very strong, with greatly increased odds amongst both working and non-working women, though the positive relationship is stronger amongst non-working than working women.

Table 3D.5: Work-stratified ORs for Relationship between Union Status and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Union/Partnership Status	Currently Working?	
	Not working	Working
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Ever in Union (ref)	1.0	1.0
Never in Union	22.45 (16.69-30.19)	13.70 (11.50-16.31)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

As for area of residence, Table 3D.6 displays evidence of the differential relationship between current work and childlessness, depending on union status. Amongst women who have ever been in union, currently working is associated with slightly increased odds of childlessness, whereas amongst those who have never been in union, there is no difference in childlessness according to work status.

Table 3D.6: Union-stratified ORs for Relationship between Current Work and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Currently Working?	Union/Partnership Status	
	Ever in Union	Never in Union
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Not Working (ref)	1.0	1.0
Working	1.64 (1.32-2.03)	1.00 (0.77-1.30)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

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Interaction Model 3: Education & Union

Table 3D.7 shows that, although the association between never having been in union and childlessness is strongest in the least educated women and decreases in magnitude across the secondary and higher-educated groups, the direction of the association is always positive, as expected.

Table 3D.7: Education-stratified ORs for Relationship between Union Status and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Union/Partnership Status	Level of Education		
	Primary or Less	Secondary	Higher
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Ever in Union (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Never in Union	22.53 (14.30-35.50)	18.76 (14.60-24.11)	12.74 (10.30-15.77)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

Table 3D.8 is similar to 3D.7, in that though the strength of the association between higher education and childlessness differs according to union status, it is always positive. However, education is more strongly related to childlessness amongst younger women who have ever been in union, when compared to those who have not. Amongst women who have ever cohabited or married, those with a higher education are five times more likely to postpone maternity than those with a primary education or less, providing strong evidence of the educational gradient to childlessness, even amongst women who have (or have in the past had) the opportunity to have children within a cohabiting or marital relationship.

Table 3D.8: Union-stratified ORs for Relationship between Education and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Level of Education	Union/Partnership Status	
	Ever in Union	Never in Union
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Primary or Less (ref)	1.0	1.0
Secondary	1.40 (0.99-1.97)	1.17 (0.79-1.72)
Higher	5.07 (3.57-7.21)	2.87 (1.94-4.23)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

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Interaction Model 4: Education & Region

Table 3D.9 shows that the greatest regional variations in childlessness appear to be experienced by less educated women. When compared to young women in Bogotá, there is a substantial difference between women with primary education or less in the Atlantic region, and amongst secondary-educated women in the Atlantic, Central and Pacific regions as well as the National Territories. These women are all more likely to be childless around age 30 than their peers in Bogotá. In contrast, amongst women with a higher education, there do not appear to be significant regional variations in the odds of childlessness.

Table 3D.9: Education-stratified ORs for Relationship between Region and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Region of Residence	Level of Education		
	Primary or Less	Secondary	Higher
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Bogotá (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Atlantic	4.79 (1.36-16.91)	3.21 (1.90-5.42)	1.29 (0.92-1.80)
Central	3.46 (0.97-12.35)	2.17 (1.28-3.69)	1.05 (0.73-1.49)
Eastern	2.97 (0.83-10.65)	1.37 (0.79-2.36)	0.85 (0.59-1.22)
Pacific	2.23 (0.63-7.97)	2.47 (1.47-4.14)	1.22 (0.83-1.81)
National Territories	1.07 (0.27-4.31)	2.43 (1.34-4.43)	1.46 (0.91-2.34)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

Table 3D.10 shows educational effects, stratified by region. Here, we can see that, when compared to women with a primary education or less, it is only women with higher education who have higher levels of childlessness, whereas secondary education appears to have an insignificant effect, everywhere but the Pacific and National Territories. Finally, in Bogotá, higher education is associated with substantially (10 times) increased odds of childlessness.

Table 3D.10: Region-stratified ORs for Relationship between Education and Childlessness amongst Younger Women

Level of Education	Region of Residence					
	Bogotá	Atlantic	Central	Eastern	Pacific	National Territories
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Primary or Less (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Secondary	1.85 (0.51-6.74)	1.24 (0.82-1.87)	1.16 (0.71-1.91)	0.85 (0.52-1.41)	2.05 (1.29-3.24)	4.20 (1.94-9.06)
Higher	9.98 (2.91-34.23)	2.68 (1.74-4.12)	3.01 (1.83-4.97)	2.85 (1.73-4.70)	5.46 (3.27-9.13)	13.56 (6.22-29.58)

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual 2010 DHS microdata, from Table 3.3. Survey design-adjusted confidence intervals calculated using R "svycontrast" command.

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Ch. 3) Appendix E: Supplementary Tables – Significance of Changes over Time to ‘Postponement’ and ‘Definitive Childlessness’

Table 3D.1 presents the results for ‘postponement’, restricting the sample of women only to those whose first relationship started five or more years prior to their DHS interview.

Table 3E.1: ‘Postponement’ – Odds Ratios (ORs) from logistic regression models predicting childlessness amongst Colombian women ages 25-34 from 6 DHS from 1990-2015

Individual / Contextual Characteristics	First Union Started 5+ Years Ago (Women Aged 25-34), N=30,863							
	Model 1: Period only (Control for Age)		Model 2: Period + All Controls Except Time Since First Union		Model 3: Period + All Controls		Model 4: M3 Reduced (Final)	
	OR	Signif	OR	Signif	OR	Signif	OR	Signif
DHS Round: 1990-95	1		1		1		1	
2000-05	1.26		1.13		1.10		1.11	
2010-15	1.80	***	1.36	*	1.47	**	1.49	**
Age at Interview (Contin.)	0.96	*	0.94	***	1.06	**	1.06	**
Number of Unions: One			1		1		1	
2 or more			1.05		1.56	***	1.57	***
Union Type: Currently Married			1		1		1	
Currently Cohabiting			1.09		1.10		1.09	
Formerly in Union			1.57	***	1.66	***	1.65	***
Yrs. since first union (Contin.)					0.81	***	0.81	***
Education: Primary or Less			1		1		1	
Secondary			1.19		0.99		1.01	
Higher			2.60	***	1.81	***	2.00	***
Wealth: Poorest			1		1		1	
Poorer			1.18		1.16		1.10	
Middle			1.52	*	1.45	.	1.31	.
Richer			1.67	**	1.59	*	1.43	*
Richest			1.89	**	1.73	**	1.59	**
Occupational Group: Not working			1		1			
Agricultural			0.84		0.82			
Manual			1.20		1.13			
Sales & Services			1.16		1.13			
Clerical			1.27		1.15	.		
Prof. / Technical / Managerial			1.67	*	1.42			
Residence: Urban			1		1			
Rural			1.23		1.22			
Model Intercept	0.06	***	0.05	***	0.02	***	0.02	***
AIC	8771.6		8475.2		8177.3		8167.1	

Note: Odds Ratio (OR) > 1 indicates increased odds of childlessness.

Statistical Significance: ‘***’p≤0.001 / ‘**’p≤0.01 / ‘*’p≤0.05 / ‘.’p≤0.10

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Table 3E.2 presents the results for ‘definitive’ childlessness, again restricting the sample only to women whose first union began five or more years prior to the DHS.

Table 3E.2: ‘Definitive Childlessness’ – Odds Ratios (ORs) from logistic regression models predicting childlessness amongst Colombian women ages 35-44 from 6 DHS from 1990-2015

Individual / Contextual Characteristics	First Union Started 5+ Years Ago (Women Aged 35-44), N=34,141							
	Model 1: Period only (Control for Age)		Model 2: Period + All Controls Except Time Since First Union		Model 3: Period + All Controls		Model 4: M3 Reduced (Final)	
	OR	Signif	OR	Signif	OR	Signif	OR	Signif
DHS Round: 1990-95	1		1		1		1	
2000-05	0.93		0.79		0.72	*	0.71	*
2010-15	1.15		0.84		0.84		0.82	
Age at Interview (Contin.)	0.99		1.01		1.12	***	1.12	***
Number of Unions: One			1		1			
2 or more			0.72	.	1.29			
Union Type: Currently Married			1		1		1	
Currently Cohabiting			1.54	**	1.37	*	1.38	**
Formerly in Union			1.82	***	1.89	***	1.90	***
Yrs. since first union (Contin.)					0.85	***	0.85	***
Education: Primary or Less			1		1		1	
Secondary			1.28	.	1.10		1.22	
Higher			2.98	***	1.96	***	2.64	***
Wealth: Poorest			1		1			
Poorer			1.15		1.12			
Middle			1.11		1.05			
Richer			1.46		1.39			
Richest			1.44		1.29			
Occupational Group: Not working			1		1			
Agricultural			1.21		1.09			
Manual			0.96		0.80			
Sales & Services			1.05		0.97			
Clerical			1.50	.	1.27			
Prof. / Technical / Managerial			1.65	*	1.27			
Residence: Urban			1		1			
Rural			0.99		0.96			
Model Intercept	0.03	***	0.01	***	0.001	***	0.002	***
AIC	8072.2		7720.7		7216.7		7201.2	

Note: Odds Ratio (OR) > 1 indicates increased odds of childlessness.
Statistical Significance: ‘***’p<0.001 / ‘**’p<0.01 / ‘*’p<0.05 / ‘.’p<0.10

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Ch. 4) Appendix A: DHS Questions Addressing ‘Children Ever Born’, Fertility Intentions/Desires and Ideals (Women & Men)

Questions regarding desired and ideal fertility in the DHS are phrased differently depending on a woman’s/man’s fertility status. The question regarding desire for (more) children is asked differently of pregnant and non-pregnant women (and men with pregnant/non-pregnant partners). Ideal number of children is phrased differently for parents and non-parents. In 2015, these questions were phrased as follows in Tables 4A.1 (Women’s questions) and 4A.3 (Men’s questions).

Table 4A.1: Phrasing of Colombia DHS 2015 Questions regarding fertility intentions and ideals for Women (Individual Questionnaire)

Question	Phrasing 1	Phrasing 2	Possible Answers
Q 201: Children Ever Born	<i>Now, I would like to ask you about all the births you have had in your life.</i>		- Yes - No
	<i>Have you had any live-born daughters or sons?</i>		
Q 702: Desire for (more) children	<i>For women who are not pregnant / unsure: Now I have a few questions about the future. Would you like to have a(nother) child or would you prefer not to have any (more) children?</i>	<i>For pregnant women: Now I have a few questions about the future. After the child that you are waiting for, would you like to have a(nother) child, or would you prefer not to have any more children?</i>	- Have a(nother) child - None / No more children - Cannot get pregnant - Undecided / Does not know / Unsure o Pregnant o Not pregnant/Unsure
Q 720: Ideal number of children	<i>For women with no live children: If you could choose exactly the number of children you would have in your lifetime, how many would you have?</i>	<i>For women with live children: If you could go back to a time before you had children and you could choose exactly how many you would have in your lifetime, how many children would you have?</i>	- Number: ____ - None - Other answer Additional Directions: If the answer is non-numeric, probe: (Specify) __

Source: Taken from the *Individual Questionnaire* in Appendix B of the Colombia DHS 2015 Final Report, Vol. I (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social & Profamilia 2017: 324, 342, 349) and translated from the original Spanish by the author.

Men’s DHS questions are phrased slightly differently, as they include a response of ‘Does not know’, which is not an option in the women’s questionnaire. Instead of asking men whether they have had any live-born children, as for women, they are instead asked:

Now I would like to ask you about any children you have had in your life. I am interested in all of the children that are biologically yours, even if they are not legally yours or do not have your last name. Have you ever fathered any children with any woman? (DHS 2015, Question 201).

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This is the core question for determining childlessness (repeated below, in Table 4A.1, in English, and 4A.4 in the original Spanish).

Table 4A.2: Phrasing of Colombia DHS 2015 Questions regarding fertility intentions and ideals for Men (Individual Questionnaire)

Question	Phrasing 1	Phrasing 2	Possible Answers
Q 201: Children Ever Born	<i>Now, I would like to ask you about all the sons / daughters you have had in your life. We are interested in all those you have fathered ('engendrado'), even if they are not yours legally or do not have your last name.</i>		- Yes - No - Don't know
<i>Have you had a son or daughter with any woman?</i>			
Q 604: <i>Desire for (more) children</i>	<u>For men whose partner is not pregnant / they are unsure:</u> <i>Would you like to have a(nother) child or would you prefer not to have any more children?</i>	<u>For men whose partner is pregnant:</u> <i>After the child that you are waiting for, would you like to have a(nother) child, or would you prefer not to have any more children?</i>	- Have a(nother) child - None / No more children - Partner cannot get pregnant - Undecided / Does not know / Unsure: o Partner pregnant o Partner not pregnant/does not know
Q 615: <i>Ideal number of children</i>	<u>For men with no children:</u> <i>If you could choose exactly the number of children you would have in your lifetime, how many would you have?</i>	<u>For fathers:</u> <i>If you could go back to a time before you had children and you could choose exactly the number of children you would have in your lifetime, how many would you have?</i>	- Number: ____ - None - Other answer <u>Additional Directions:</u> If the answer is non-numeric, probe: (Specify) ____

Source: Taken from the *Individual Questionnaire* in Appendix C of the Colombia DHS 2015 Final Report, Part 1 (Profamilia 2016, pgs. 378, 392 & 394) and translated from the original Spanish by the author.

Variable Derivation

The questions in Table 4A.1/4A.2 are transformed into two variables addressing (future) fertility preferences (*V602*) and ideal family size (*V614*), described in Table 4A.3, which I used to determine the *intentionality of childlessness*, or the degree to which it is voluntary or involuntary.

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Table 4A.3: 2015 DHS derivation of main outcome measures for intentionality of childlessness

Original Variables	Categories
1. V602 (Women’s “Fertility Preference”, from Q702)	1 = Have another 2 = Undecided 3 = No more 4 = Sterilized (respondent or partner) 5 = Declared Infecund
2. MV602 (Men’s “Fertility Preference”, from Q702)	1 = Have another 2 = Undecided 3 = No more 4 = Sterilized (respondent or partner) 5 = Declared Infecund 6 = Never had sex 7 = Man has no partner
3. V614 (“Ideal Number of Children (grouped)”, from Q720)	0-5 = Numeric answers 6 = 6+ (grouped) 7 = Non-numeric answer
4. Childless - Created using V210 , ‘Total number of children ever born (CEB)’	0 = Childless (no CEB) 1 = Not Childless (1+ CEB)

Data Comparability Over Time and by Sex

Although women and men can be compared using information regarding ‘children ever born’ (Q 201) and ‘ideal number of children’ (Q 615), the question regarding ‘desire for (more) children’ (Q 604) cannot be used to compare women and men equally. As shown in Table 4A.3, whereas all women in 2015 were asked this question, regardless of their union status, only men in a current union were asked this question, leaving those men not in a union and/or who had been sterilized out. Additionally, for those men who reported having ‘Never had sex’, this was noted as the response. Although women in all DHS rounds can be compared using information regarding ‘ideal number of children’, only women from 2000-2015 can be compared like for like when using the ‘fertility preference’ information.

Table 4A.4 summarises this variation across survey periods, for women, and in 2015, between women and men.

Children Ever Born (CEB)

In all rounds, women of all ages (whether partnered or not when interviewed) were asked whether they had ever had any children, which is the information used to create V210, or the “Total number of children ever born (CEB)”.

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Ideal Number of Children

Similarly, all women in all rounds were asked how many children they would ideally have.

Table 4A.4: Variations in the way this Information was Collected between DHS Rounds:

DHS Round	(M)V602: "Fertility Preference"	(M)V614: "Ideal Number of Children (Grouped)"
1986	Only women in a current partnership asked.	All women asked / provided full range of answers.
1990	Only women in a current partnership asked.	All women asked / provided full range of answers.
1995	All women (except sterilised) asked; only women who had ever been sexually active provided full range of answers.	All women asked / provided full range of answers.
2000	All women (except sterilised) asked / provided full range of answers.	All women asked / provided full range of answers.
2005	All women (except sterilised) asked / provided full range of answers.	All women asked / provided full range of answers.
2010	All women (except sterilised) asked / provided full range of answers.	All women asked / provided full range of answers.
2015	All women (except sterilised) asked / provided full range of answers. Only men in a current partnership, who were not sterilised were asked. For men who had never had sex, this was marked as their answer (as for women in 1995).	All women <i>and men</i> asked / provided full range of answers.

Note: By 'current partnership', I mean men or women who were in a cohabiting or married partnership. This excludes individuals who have never cohabited/been married, as well as those who formerly cohabited or were married (i.e. separated, divorced, and widowed women and men).

Desire for Children in Future

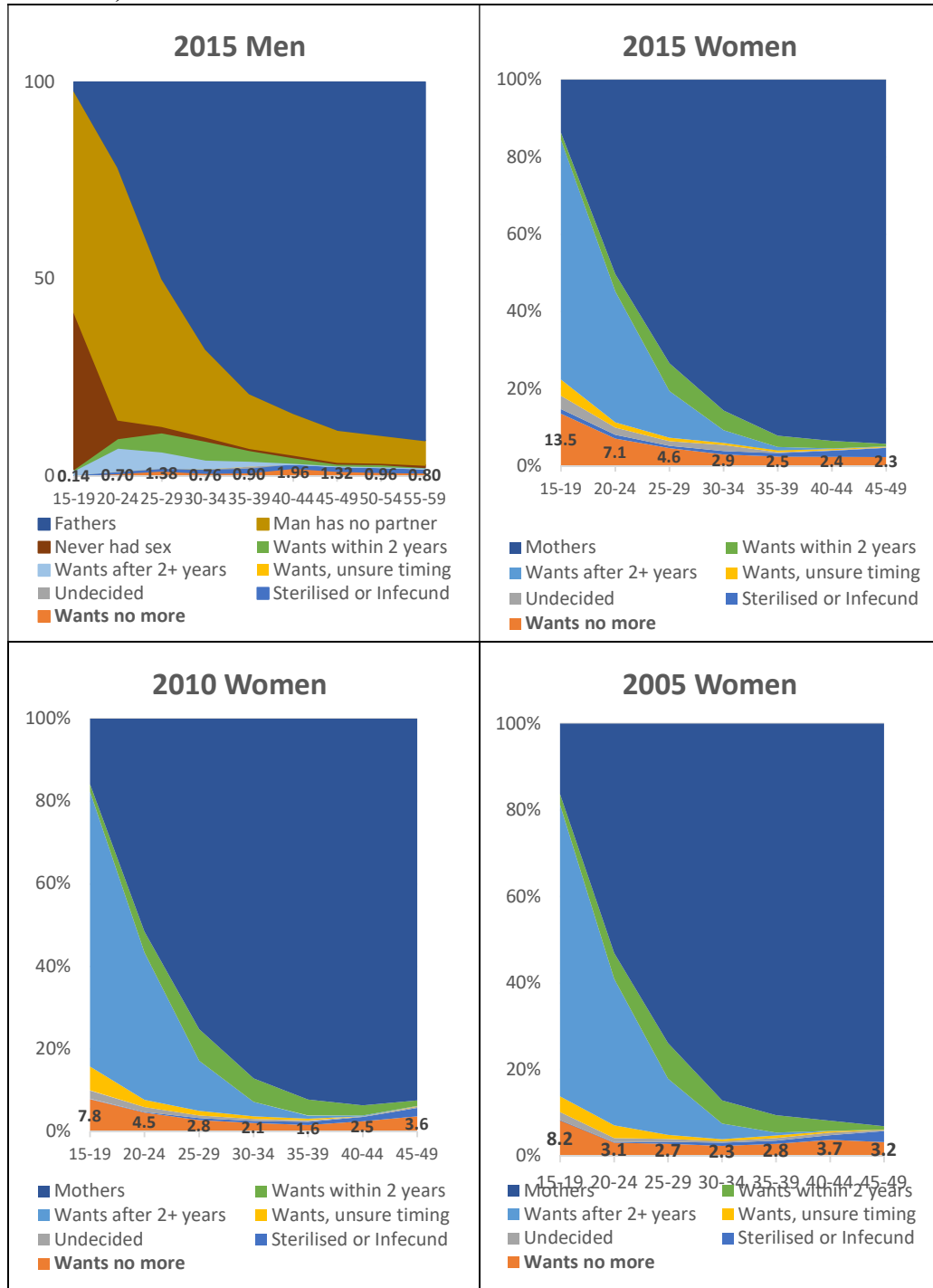
This information is the source of a great deal of inter-survey (and inter-gender) variation. In 1986 and 1990, only women currently in a partnership were asked these questions. In 1995, all women (whether partnered or not) were asked this question, but 'Never had sex' was considered a valid response, meaning that women who had not yet had sex when interviewed were excluded from providing the range of answers that could be applied to other women. However, from 2000-2015, in the individual women's questionnaire, *all* women were asked these questions, and 'Never had sex' was not a valid response.

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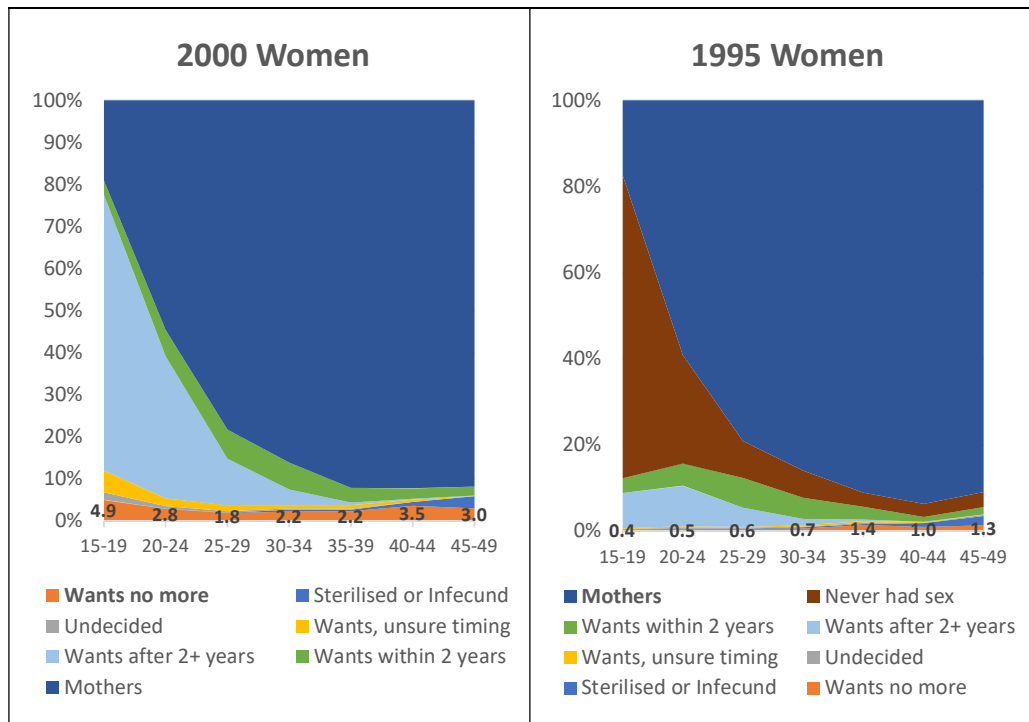
Ch. 4) Appendix B: Visual Representations of Detailed Future Fertility Desires & 'Ideal' Childlessness

Future Fertility Desires across the Reproductive Life Course

Figure 4B.1: Age-specific proportions of all men who are fathers, women who are mothers, and childless men/women grouped by fertility desires (DHS (M)V605, from 1995-2015)



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Sources: Own calculation and construction, based on:
2015 Men—Using data from 2015 men’s individual DHS. Total (weighted) N = 33,737 (14,583 Non-fathers).
2015 Women—Using data from 2015 women’s individual DHS. Total (weighted) N = 36,301 (11,392 Non-mothers).
2010 Women—Using data from 2010 women’s individual DHS. Total (weighted) N = 49,818 (15,462 Non-mothers).
2005 Women—Using data from 2005 women’s individual DHS. Total (weighted) N = 38,357 (12,074 Non-mothers).
2000 Women—Using data from 2000 women’s individual DHS. Total (weighted) N = 11,579 (3,836 Non-mothers).
1995 Women—Using data from 1995 women’s individual DHS. Total (weighted) N = 11,133 (3,692 Non-mothers).

The most important part of the figures above is the orange band at the bottom, which highlights the women/men in each age group who have no children and have answered DHS Question 702 (regarding desire for more children in future) by saying that they “want” *no* children. Although I view this category as somewhat analogous to the idea of ‘fertility intentions’, it is a less concrete version, as the expression of a *desire for* having children in future, rather than a specific intention to have a child in the next two years, after the next two years, or in an as-yet undetermined time period (all of which are shown separately here).

These graphs also illustrate an important data limitation, which is that the way this variable was defined and the population to which it applied, changed over time (amongst women). This issue is even more complicated when comparing women and men in 2015. All women, regardless of their union status or whether they had ever had

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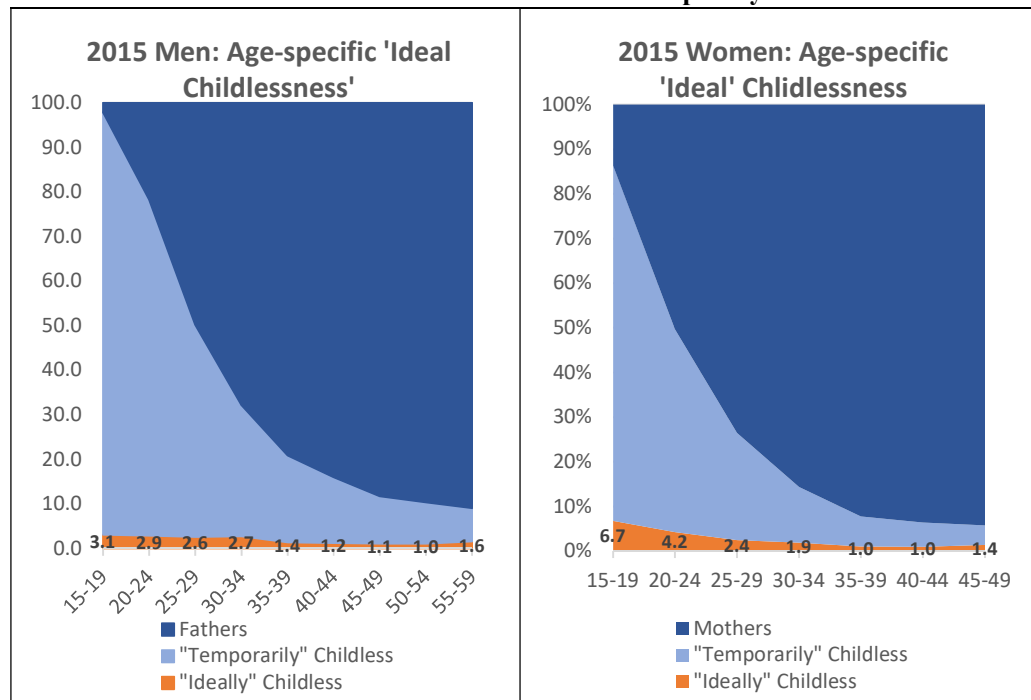
sex were asked if they ‘desired’ children in future. For obvious biological reasons, men must have (at least a fleeting) female sexual partner in order to become a father. Perhaps this was why, in the 2015 men’s DHS, only men who were ‘currently’ in a married/cohabiting partnership were asked about their fertility future desires, while others were excluded. Men who had never had sex were also excluded from providing a ‘valid’ answer of desiring to have a child in future (or not), because ‘Never had sex’ was considered a valid response, as it had been for women in 1995. This makes the male and female data from this question essentially incomparable, because of the small number of men who were able to provide valid answers regarding their future fertility desires.

Partly for this reason, I have taken fertility ‘ideals’ as a proxy for desires/intentions, despite being less concrete. The study population asked about their fertility ‘ideals’ in the DHS is more consistent across survey years for women, and for comparing women and men in 2015, making it the best option for time- and gender-based comparisons. All women aged 15-49, or men aged 15-59, who were included in the ‘individual’ interview, were asked what their ‘ideal’ number of children would be. Very few women and men replied to this question by stating an ideal of ‘zero’; as noted in the chapter, where a man or woman has no children and has an ideal of ‘zero’ children, I consider them to be ‘ideally’ childless. This is my preferred form of ‘voluntary’ childlessness, considering the limitations detailed above.

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'Ideal' Childlessness across the Reproductive Life Course

Figure 4B.2: Age-specific Proportion of Colombian Men and Women by Fatherhood/Motherhood and 'Ideal' or 'Non-ideal'/'Temporary' Childlessness



Source: Own calculations, with data from 2015 Colombia DHS, men's individual microdata. Total (weighted) N = 33,777 (14,584 Non-fathers)

Source: Own calculations, with data from 2015 Colombia DHS, women's individual microdata. Total (weighted) N = 36,298 (11,389 Non-mothers)

The orange portion of the graphs above show the differences in the proportions of men and women who are childless and 'ideally' so, as a proportion of all men or women of a particular age. This shows that, although about 7% of all teenage women are 'ideally' childless, this only applies to about half that proportion (3%) of men in the same 15-19-year-old age group. Similarly, a slightly higher proportion of all women than men in their early 20s are 'ideally' childless. However, by the time women and men reach their late 20s/early 30s, the proportions 'ideally' childless are very similar for women and men and continue to be similar throughout their later reproductive lives, when only about 1-1.5% of all women and men are 'ideally' childless. Although Colombian women typically have lower fertility ideals (whether childless or mothers), a larger proportion of all men are childless overall, leading to this seeming later-life similarity, when examining the ideally childless as a proportion of all women/men.

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Ch. 4) Appendix C: Unweighted Numbers of Women and Men in each category

Table 4C.1: Unweighted Numbers presented in Chapter 5, Table 4.1

		1986	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Total N, Unweighted	'Ideally' Childless	49	102	81	172	609	795	754
	'Strictly' Voluntarily Childless	--	--	81 ¹	168	576	762	723
	All Childless Women (15-49)	2011	3277	3640	3755	11607	14465	10546
	All Women (15-49)	5329	8644	11140	11585	38143	49562	35979

Source: Own calculations, using women's individual DHS microdata, 1986-2015.

Note: The proportions of 'strictly' voluntary childlessness are only presented from 1995 on, because prior to this, only women *in union* when interviewed were asked whether they would like to have children in future. This excluded large proportions of women who had previously or never been in a union. In contrast, the 'ideal' childlessness measure was created using a question that all women in all years were asked regardless of their union status.

¹ The cell for 1995 is shaded because it is not strictly comparable with the subsequent surveys. This is because in 1995, 'Never had sex' was considered a valid response, so it is impossible to say whether the women who had never had sex would have responded to the question declaring either an intention to have children or a desire for 'no more' children. In contrast, from 2000-2015, even women who had never had sex were able to declare a future childbearing intention.

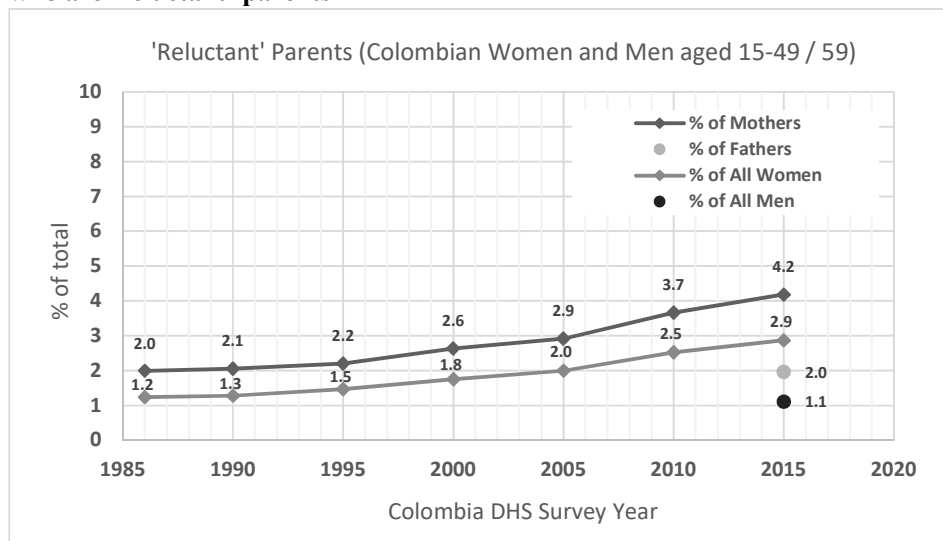
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Ch. 4) Appendix D: 'Reluctant' Parents

Although thought to be very rare, there is a certain number of women and men who are already parents, but who express a childfree fertility 'ideal' (i.e. an ideal of 'zero' children) in surveys. Miettinen et al. (2015: 36), for example, call these individuals 'reluctant parents', and specify that, in the European context, "[t]heir proportion is very low, less than one percent" and they therefore do not go on to analyse this as an outcome.

Although also rare in the Colombian context, this phenomenon can be traced over time, as the inverse of involuntary childlessness, and, at least for women, does not appear to be as rare as in Europe. Depending on whether you count them as a proportion of all women or as a proportion of mothers only, the figures differ slightly. In the 1986 DHS, about 1% of all women and 2% of all mothers could be classed as 'reluctant' parents based on the definition above. However, Figure 4D.1 shows that this proportion has grown with every subsequent DHS, and by 2015, about 3% of all women, or 4% of mothers, were 'reluctant' parents, given that they had children but expressed an ideal of 'zero' children. For men, we can only examine one time point: 2015, when about 1% of all men, or 2% of fathers, could be counted as 'reluctant' fathers. Therefore, women are more likely to be (or perhaps to feel that they can express that they are) reluctant mothers than men are reluctant fathers.

Figure 4D.1: Proportion of all parents (and of all women and men aged 15-49 or 59) who are 'reluctant' parents



Source: Own calculations using women's (1986-2015) and men's (2015) individual DHS microdata.

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Although this phenomenon is rare for both women and men in most contexts, including Colombia, it appears to be more common amongst women than men and to have increased over time for women. This may appear to be a counter-intuitive finding if we interpret it at face value, given that both fertility overall and the ‘unwanted’ fertility rate decreased between 1986 and 2015 (from a TFR of 3.2 to 2.0 and a ‘Wanted’ TFR of 2.1 to 1.6, meaning that the gap between the ‘actual’ and ‘wanted’ aggregate fertility rates has narrowed from 1.1 child in 1986 to 0.4 in 2015⁹⁴). Contraceptive use has also increased amongst currently ‘married’ and sexually active ‘unmarried’ women in this period from a starting point of about 65% in both groups in 1986 to just over 80% of both groups in 2015⁹⁵. However, the more straightforward explanation of this increase is that as social norms encourage smaller families, achieved through the use of effective and widely-available forms of modern contraception, and as overall fertility ideals move away from expressed preferences for large families (of 3 or more children), and towards smaller families including those with no children or only 1 child (as I showed in the main chapter), the social context might be encouraging more women to question having children at all, including being able to express regret over having become mothers. Despite being statistically rare, or at least socially stigmatised enough to deter all but a small proportion of women and men from admitting that they regret parenthood in social/demographic surveys, this issue is receiving increasing attention in academic research. For example, Orna Donath’s (2015a, 2015b) work in an Israeli context has begun to question both the idea that no parents regret parenthood, and that even if they do, they will never discuss this fact with others.

⁹⁴ Source: DHS StatCompiler (<https://statcompiler.com/en/>), accessed 11/Apr/19.

⁹⁵ The source for these figures is again the DHS StatCompiler. I should note that ‘married’ here includes both cohabiting and legally married women.

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Ch. 4) Appendix E: Additional Tables for Logistic Regression of Ideal Childlessness

Table 4E.1: Characteristics of Mothers, Involuntarily Childless and Voluntarily ('Ideally') Childless, DHS 2015

Participant Characteristics	All Women, Aged 15-49 (N=36,300)							
	Mothers	Invol.	Vol.	Stats. Signif.	Mothers	Invol.	Vol.	Total N
	Col. %				N			
INDIVIDUAL								
Age: 15-24	15.5	73.5	63.6	p< 2.2e-16	3864	7599	666	12129
25-34	34.4	19.3	22.3		8566	1998	234	10798
35-49	50.1	7.2	14.1		12480	745	148	13373
Partnership Status: Never	9.1	79.6	82.8	p< 2.2e-16	2278	8236	867	11381
Current Union	69.8	16.5	11.0		17397	1702	115	19214
Former Union	21.0	3.9	6.3		5236	404	66	5706
Education: Primary or Less	23.3	4.2	4.2	p< 2.2e-16	5803	439	44	6286
Secondary	46.5	48.3	42.3		11593	5000	444	17037
Higher	30.2	47.4	53.5		7514	4903	561	12978
Currently Working: No	37.4	56.5	54.9	p< 2.2e-16	9326	5842	575	15743
Yes	62.6	43.5	45.1		15584	4500	473	20557
Occupat. Group: Agriculture/Manual	14.4	7.8	6.1	p< 2.2e-16	3590	803	64	4457
Services	34.5	21.3	15.6		8593	2201	164	10958
Sales	24.0	17.6	15.9		5979	1820	166	7965
Clerical	7.8	9.4	10.1		1951	973	105	3029
Professional/Technical/Managerial	12.0	14.6	23.1		2985	1510	242	4737
Never worked	7.3	29.3	29.3		1812	3034	307	5153
Wlth. Index: Poorest	19.3	13.5	6.3	p< 2.2e-16	4809	1400	66	6275
Poorer	21.5	17.9	12.8		5365	1856	134	7355
Middle	21.5	20.8	19.6		5357	2155	205	7717
Richer	19.5	22.6	27.6		4854	2333	289	7476
Richest	18.2	25.1	33.7		4524	2598	353	7475
Ethnicity: Non-minority	85.2	86.6	89.5	p= 0.005	21227	8954	938	31119
Afro-Colombian	9.0	8.2	7.4		2241	849	77	3167
Indigenous*	5.8	5.2	3.1		1442	539	32	2013
CONTEXTUAL								
Residence: Urban	77.6	83.1	89.9	p< 2.2e-16	19320	8595	942	28857
Rural	22.4	16.9	10.1		5590	1747	106	7443
Region: Bogotá	17.2	17.0	24.9	p = 9.799e-10	4278	1756	260	6294
Atlantic	21.6	21.5	8.1		5385	2228	85	7698
Central	24.2	25.0	35.9		6022	2582	376	8980
Eastern	17.1	17.5	11.2		4261	1809	118	6188
Orinoquia/Amazonia	2.6	2.2	1.9		640	231	20	891
Pacific	17.4	16.8	17.9		4322	1736	188	6246
ATTITUDINAL								
Approves of Gay Rights:								
Disagrees	36.4	26.8	15.8	p< 2.2e-16	9062	2774	166	12002
Agrees	63.6	73.2	84.2		15848	7568	882	24298
Gay Adoption OK: No	77.7	60.9	44.0	p< 2.2e-16	19363	6296	461	26120
Yes	22.3	39.1	56.0		5547	4046	587	10180
Women take care of house:								
Agrees/Neither	41.8	30.5	19.8	p< 2.2e-16	10418	3153	207	13778
Disagrees	58.2	69.5	80.2		14492	7188	840	22520
Childcare for women:								
Agrees/Neither	31.2	25.1	11.9	p< 2.2e-16	7781	2601	125	10507
Disagrees	68.8	74.9	88.1		17130	7741	923	25794

*"Indigenous" group includes some Rom/Gypsy individuals, as these two groups were collapsed.

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Table 4E.2: Characteristics of Fathers, Involuntarily Childless and Voluntarily ('Ideally') Childless, DHS 2015

Participant Characteristics	All Men, Aged 15-59 (N=33,778)							
	Fathers	Invol.	Vol.	Stats.	Fathers	Invol.	Vol.	Total
	Col. %			Signif.	N			N
INDIVIDUAL								
Age: 15-24	6.2	61.9	41.9		1196	8578	301	10075
25-34	25.9	24.1	31.8	p< 2.2e-16	4971	3342	229	8542
35-44	28.5	8.4	12.2		5470	1161	88	6719
45-59	39.4	5.7	14.1		7555	786	101	8442
Partnership Status: Never	4.1	80.3	75.0	p< 2.2e-16	778	11142	539	12459
Current Union	81.4	13.9	16.4		15628	1924	118	17670
Former Union	14.5	5.8	8.6		2787	801	62	3650
Education: Primary or Less	31.3	13.2	15.3	p< 2.2e-16	6007	1832	110	7949
Secondary	43.7	54.4	46.0		8384	7547	330	16261
Higher	25.0	32.4	38.6		4801	4489	277	9567
Currently Working: No	2.0	18.6	22.8	p< 2.2e-16	386	2577	164	3127
Yes	98.0	81.4	77.2		18806	11290	554	30650
Occupat. Group:				p< 2.2e-16				
Agriculture/ Manual	43.3	32.7	29.5		8308	4538	212	13058
Services	24.4	24.9	23.4		4690	3453	168	8311
Sales	13.2	12.8	10.0		2528	1780	72	4380
Clerical	5.4	5.6	5.1		1042	781	37	1860
Professional/Technical/ Managerial	13.6	11.4	19.6		2602	1582	141	4325
Never worked	0.1	12.5	12.4	23	1734	89	1846	
Wlth. Index: Poorest	21.1	18.9	9.0	p= 6.04e-07	4040	2618	64	6722
Poorer	19.9	20.3	15.5		3819	2820	111	6750
Middle	19.5	19.1	16.8		3751	2653	121	6525
Richer	20.1	21.3	25.9		3858	2949	186	6993
Richest	19.4	20.4	32.8		3725	2828	236	6789
CONTEXTUAL								
Residence: Urban	75.7	76.7	86.2	p= 5.989e-05	14527	10639	619	25785
Rural	24.3	23.3	13.8		4666	3229	99	7994
Region: Bogotá	17.7	15.6	19.1	p= 5.28e-09	3406	2164	137	5707
Atlantic	21.6	21.4	6.2		4148	2968	44	7160
Central	23.8	25.8	37.6		4574	3572	270	8416
Eastern	17.4	17.7	12.0		3336	2448	86	5870
Orinoquia/ Amazonia	2.5	2.4	1.5		475	337	11	823
Pacific	16.9	17.2	23.7		3253	2378	170	5801
ATTITUDINAL								
Approves of Gay Rights:				p< 2.2e-16				
Disagrees	47.3	37.4	27.0		9076	5184	194	14454
Agrees	52.7	62.6	73.0	10117	8684	524	19325	
Gay Adoption OK: No	83.5	68.0	53.4	p< 2.2e-16	16025	9432	383	25840
Yes	16.5	32.0	46.6		3167	4436	335	7938
Women take care of house:				p< 2.2e-16				
Agrees/Neither	48.9	42.6	27.2		9386	5913	195	15494
Disagrees	51.1	57.4	72.8	9806	7955	523	18284	
Childcare for women:				p= 0.00017				
Agrees/Neither	24.8	25.9	15.6		4752	3588	112	8452
Disagrees	75.2	74.1	84.4	14440	10280	606	25326	

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Table 4E.3: Numbers (weighted) of Women and Men over age 25 who are Parents, Involuntarily or Voluntarily ('Ideally') Childless, DHS 2015

Participant Characteristics	All Women, Aged 25-49 (N=24,170)					All Men, Aged 25-59 (N=23,703)				
	Moth-ers	Invol.	Vol.	Total N	Stats Signif	Fath-ers	Invol.	Vol.	Total N	Stats Signif
	N					N				
INDIVIDUAL										
Age: 15-24	8566	1998	234	10798	p<2.2	4971	3342	229	8542	p<2.2
35-49 / 35-44	12480	745	148	13373	e-16	5470	1161	88	6719	e-16
45-59	--	--	--	--	--	7555	786	101	8442	
Partnership Status: Never	19441	1131	142	20714	p<2.2	17424	2006	160	19590	p<2.2
Ever in Union	1605	1612	239	3456	e-16	572	3284	257	4113	e-16
Education: Primary or Less	5284	177	23	5484	p<2.2	5817	1114	74	7005	p<2.2
Secondary	9114	574	71	9759	e-16	7625	1908	155	9688	e-16
Higher	6649	1993	287	8929		4555	2268	188	7011	
Currently Working: No	7045	642	89	7776	p=5.5	362	220	57	639	p=
Yes	14002	2101	292	16395	e-09	17635	5069	360	23064	3.8e-07
Occupat. Group: Agriculture/Manual	3048	235	23	3306		7730	1796	137	9663	
Services	7286	608	46	7940	p<2.2	4309	1205	97	5611	p<2.2
Sales	5040	422	59	5521	e-16	2431	698	45	3174	e-16
Clerical	1675	391	58	2124		980	465	23	1468	
Prof./Technical/Managerial	2817	1002	181	4000		2531	1101	109	3741	
Never worked	1182	85	15	1282		16	24	7	47	
With. Index: Poorest/Poorer	7904	552	52	8508	p<2.2	7161	1938	87	9186	p=
Middle/Richer	8839	1254	172	10265	e-16	7209	2202	191	9602	0.0004
Richest	4303	937	158	5398		3627	1149	139	4915	
Ethnicity: Non-minority	17998	2393	337	20728	p=	--	--	--	--	--
Minority	3049	350	44	3443	0.186	--	--	--	--	--
CONTEXTUAL										
Residence: Urban	16698	2463	347	19508	p=	13746	4159	383	18288	p=
Rural	4349	280	34	4663	2.7e-14	4250	1130	34	5414	5.649e-07
Region: Bogotá	3785	548	96	4429		3253	861	74	4188	
Atlantic	4394	533	29	4956		3811	1037	23	4871	
Central	5087	755	150	5992	p=	4332	1443	156	5931	p=
Eastern, Orinoquia, Amazonia	4115	470	45	4630	0.002	3589	1012	48	4649	6.61e-06
Pacific	3665	436	62	4163		3011	936	117	4064	
ATTITUDINAL										
Approves of Gay Rights: Disagrees	7778	869	81	8728	p=	8558	2056	123	10737	p=
Agrees	13268	1874	300	15442	0.006	9439	3233	294	12966	1.5e-09
Gay Adoption OK: No	16696	1958	191	18845	p=	15109	3868	231	19208	p<
Yes	4351	785	191	5327	2.2e-13	2888	1421	186	4495	2.2e-16
Women take care of house: Agrees/Neither	8456	659	67	9182	p<2.2	8636	2072	113	10821	p=
Disagrees	12590	2084	314	14988	e-16	9361	3217	304	12882	6.e-14
Childcare for women: Agrees/Neither	6077	460	45	6582	p<2.2	4350	1234	60	5644	p=
Disagrees	14969	2283	337	17589	e-16	13647	4055	357	18059	0.009

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Ch. 7) Appendix A: Anti-Adolescent Pregnancy Campaigns

In 2015, the *ICBF*, a government department, and *Profamilia*, the non-profit third sector organisation, launched a joint campaign against teenage pregnancy, under the banner: *#I Care for My Future (#YoCuidoMiFuturo)*, which could also be translated as *#I Take Care of / Look After My Future* (see Figure 7A.1).

Figure 7A.1: Posters from the #YoCuidoMiFuturo campaign by the ICBF & Profamilia, highlighting a teenage girl, boy, and couple



Posters read: *#I Care for/about My Future – Instead of a pregnancy, my dreams.*

Source: <https://www.fucsia.co/belleza-y-salud/articulo/yo-cuido-mi-futuro-la-campana-del-icbf-profamilia-para-prevenir-el-embarazo-adolescente/68362> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

This phrasing plays on several ideas. First, the idea of ‘taking care of’ or ‘looking after’ oneself (*cuidarse*) is used colloquially (and often by my interviewees) to describe using contraceptives, or some other method to avoid pregnancy. In this way, the campaign could be read as promoting ‘taking care of oneself’ (by using contraception) and explicitly linking this to a brighter future. Secondly, a mother or father *cares for* a baby, and by contrasting caring for one’s own future with caring for a baby, this hashtag also plays on caregiving roles, and finally, though perhaps not intentionally, this phrasing in effect implies that having a baby as a teenager is reflective of a lack of *self-care*. The supplementary text (‘Instead of a pregnancy, my dreams’) again explicitly contrasts teenage pregnancies with achieving other ‘dreams’. All models, male and female, are posed wearing a rucksack on their front, as if to re-emphasise the contrast between pregnancy and schooling. Education is literally taking the place of a pregnant belly or a baby carrier. These young people will fulfil their dreams and achieve a better future through school, not early parenthood. These posters promote

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normative ‘childlessness’ amongst younger boys/men and girls/women, as part of “[a] campaign that seeks to produce awareness about preventing adolescent pregnancies, and to strengthen decision-making, life plans [literally, *projects*] and discussions with parents and educators.”⁹⁶ Here, becoming pregnant complicates (or precludes) other envisioned future achievements: education (in all Figure 7A.1 posters); and free time for music (in the first poster) or sports (in the second poster). This focus on the relationship between the present and future is important, and exemplifies what Adams et al. call *abduction*, or a concept which underscores that “what is at stake in anticipation is not only the many futures that can be brought into being later by virtue of what we do now, but also the abduction of the present for the sake of particularly constituted futures” (2009: 255). This type of iterative logic is clear in the poster campaign: imagined futures are made possible by an adolescent focus on education and other enriching activities, and the spectre of a future without these benefits (marked instead by teenage parenthood) is itself used to get teens to focus on these enriching activities *in the present* rather than either seeking out teenage parenthood, or simply making a mistake that results in an early, unplanned pregnancy. In fact, the forward placement of the rucksacks is not only symbolic in the posters, but was part of the broader campaign, and is meant to encourage teenagers to wear their school bags on their front, as “a symbol of commitment to planning their future and achieving their dreams.”⁹⁷ This is just one in a series of anti-teenage pregnancy campaigns emphasising ‘choices’ in the present that affect the future.

A preceding campaign, *I Decide for Myself (Por mi, Yo decido)*, launched in 2013, played on similar themes as part of an earlier government strategy to prevent teenage pregnancy (this time, from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection [*Ministerio de Salud y Proteccion Social*] and the High Office for the Equality of Women [*Alta Consejería para la Equidad de la Mujer*]). For example, the poster in Figure 7A.2 collects disparate images of: a graduation cap and books (education); an airplane, a suitcase, and a parasol (travel, new experiences, holidays); a guitar, roller skates, and

⁹⁶ Original Spanish: “Campaña que busca generar conciencia sobre la prevención del embarazo en adolescentes, y reforzar la toma de decisiones, el proyecto de vida y el diálogo con los padres y educadores.” (See: <http://profamilia.org.co/campanas/campanas-institucionales/yocuidomifuturo/> [Accessed: 6/Dec/ 2018]).

⁹⁷ Original Spanish: “La invitación a niños y jóvenes es a usar el morral adelante como *símbolo de compromiso con la planeación del futuro y el cumplimiento de los sueños*.” From: ‘Cada día nacen en Colombia 408 hijos de padres adolescentes’, *El Tiempo*, 11/Nov/2015, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-16427611> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

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a football (sports, music, leisure time and hobbies generally); and a condom. The implication here is that the condom will allow the targeted audience to experience a different vision of a full life: instead of early parenthood, teenagers today (as members of what the poster names ‘Generation More... More Sensible/Aware’) should seek out non-parental avenues to self-development and ‘modern’ forms of self-fulfilment, as in the SDT schema. By postponing parenthood, adolescents may envision a different future, in which they focus on themselves for an indeterminate amount of time (presumably until at least their 20s), before making a responsible, and informed decision to parent. Early parenthood is framed as life-limiting: premature adult responsibilities are foisted on adolescents (who are still personally developing), when those adolescents do not practice ‘responsible’ sexual activity for themselves, and therefore risk becoming pregnant through a lack of self-care.

Figure 7A.2: I Decide for Myself



Source: <http://www.urnadecristal.gov.co/gestion-gobierno/por-m-yo-decido-una-campa-a-prevenir-embarazo-adolescente> [Accessed: 20/Oct/19].

This campaign was accompanied by video spots, with TV ads for boys and girls still available online.⁹⁸ The boys’ ad shows a teenager in what looks like a working- to middle-class area of a Colombian town, leaving home in the morning with his (still relatively young-looking), but professionally-dressed father. He speaks to camera and says:

⁹⁸ Available from: <https://www.fucsia.co/actualidad/personajes/articulo/cifras-embarazo-maternidad-adolescentes-colombia/62699#.Vky5Ab9LqpA> [Last accessed: 20/Oct/19].

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Things were different before. I realised that he [the dad(?)] had two, three girlfriends, because that's just what being a man was like. And without being careful... Boom! My mum, pregnant... And that's when he started to have to think like a man, like a dad. To mature early. Nowadays, we understand better. Being a man is, first of all, thinking about what you want in life. Studying something cool, looking ahead, working hard. And being a dad? Let's talk about that later. I decide for myself. Generation more. More aware.⁹⁹

The girls' ad takes a similarly intergenerational tone, contrasting life for adolescents today with their mothers' experiences of being younger, and their more limited sights in life. The ad starts with images of a teenage girl sitting in her room, playing guitar, then with her mum in the living room of a nice house or apartment, looking at a family photo album. Then, she narrates:

Fulfilling yourself as a woman... The first time I heard that, I went to my mum. Even though she thought differently to my grandmother, when she was young, being fulfilled as a woman meant being a mother. And from our first doll, we're given that idea, but each generation changes things, and now, it's our turn. We know that being fulfilled as a woman goes beyond being a mother. We understand better. I know that I have the right to study what I want, to grow, to live... And being a mum? Let's talk about that later. I decide for myself. Generation more. More aware.¹⁰⁰

As the ad plays, the girl is in her room, looking at dolls from her childhood, then doing her homework to indicate that she has other goals and priorities; goals which are framed as 'more sensible' than prioritising motherhood. Boys and girls are encouraged to break with 'traditional' gender roles and pursue a different path, one which promotes self-fulfilment through studying, working hard, travelling, and experiencing more than just parenthood; this is contrasted with the imagined limitations placed on young parents with respect to all these activities. Young parenthood means giving up on other dreams in a way that is represented as backward, of a different time, not 'modern' and forward-looking, like the boy and girl in the ads.

⁹⁹ Original Spanish: "Antes era diferente. Me dio cuenta que tenía dos, tres novias, porque eso era ser varón... ¿Y sin cuidarse? Tin! Mi mama, embarazada... Y así le tocó ponerse a pensar en serio como hombre, como papa. A madurar biche. Ahora nosotros la tenemos más clara. Ser hombre es pensar primero en lo que uno quiere en la vida. Estudiar algo bacano, echar pa'lante, camellar... ¿Y ser papa? Después lo charlamos. Por mí, yo decido. Generación más. Más conscientes."

¹⁰⁰ Original Spanish: "*Realizarse como mujer...* A la primera que se la oí, fue a mi mama. Con todo lo que pensaba diferente que mi abuelita, en su época, realizarse era ser mama. Y desde la primera muñeca, nos van haciendo la idea, pero cada generación trae cambios, y ahora, es nuestro turno. Sabemos que realizarse como mujer va más allá de ser mama. Lo tenemos más claro. Yo sé que tengo derecho a estudiar lo que quiero, crecer, vivir... ¿Y ser mama? Después lo hablamos. Por mí, YO decido. Generación más. Más conscientes."