

2019

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“I Don’t”: A Look at Attitudes Towards Delaying Marriage in a Traditional Community

by

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Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Sociology

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February 19, 2019

Ypsilanti, MI

Abstract

This sociological research study was designed to explore the attitudes of women in their late twenties and thirties about marriage and how geography (physical and sociological) impacts decisions. This research looks at women in a politically and religiously conservative area in the central Midwest. The research is meant to be exploratory in nature in order to grasp an understanding of how not only educational and career aspirations affect attitudes toward marriage but also at how leisure activities and the sexual revolution play a major role in the desire to delay marriage. Interviews were conducted to expose women's attitudes, opinions, choices, and reasoning behind delaying marriage. This study attempts to broadly give perspective to choices being made about life and marriage that may be reflected in society as a whole. Overall results reveal geography, education, leisure desires, sexual freedom, history, and familial ties all played roles in delayed marriage.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

This study focuses on a rural Midwestern county with shoreline on the Great Lakes. This county has a land area of 1,009.10 square miles averaging around 36.3 individuals per square mile. In 2012, the United States Census Bureau estimated the population of this area to be under 50,000 with the majority of the population (over 60%) falling between the ages of 18 and 64. Of the total population, roughly 45% are women. An overwhelming majority of the population identifies themselves as White (over 90%), which is noticeably higher than its statewide percentage of 80.1%. In terms of education, the residents of this county boast a marginally higher percentage of high school graduates (90.4% versus 88.4%) and college graduates with a bachelor's degree (27.1% versus 25.3%) at age of 25 and over (United States Census Bureau, 2012). The region is also home to a community college, a private religious college, and a state university.

It seems as though the physical split of the county by manmade canals can be echoed in the lifestyle split of the residents of this county. This Midwestern county displays an interesting social juxtaposition of lifestyle choices. As essentially a lifelong resident of this county, I have a unique understanding of the culture of this area. From mere observances and my own life experience, I can honestly say that this is a unique area whose population is overlooked but deserves a second glance. Beyond the charm of the landscape, the dynamic changes in weather, the overwhelming amounts of lake effect snow, and the “polite and friendly” attitudes of the residents comes an odd social split that can be apparent in the young women of this area.

Focusing on the females of this area in the population 15 years and older, the United States Census Bureau (2012) estimates that currently 7,933 (48.4%) have never been married.

Those unmarried women have become the focus of this research and their backgrounds have played a role in their decision-making processes as adults. Because this area boasts an interesting population demographic, it is assumed that these women are a product of their up-bringing that has influenced their decision to wed.

The focus of this study is on the general attitudes of women toward marriage in the region. However, in order to place their decisions in context, we must consider the culture/religious landscape in which it is situated. As results from recent political elections show us, it is apparent that the politically conservative attitude of the area residents translates into some attitudes about education, careers, childbearing, and how they spend their leisure time. The area is home to 67 congregations with most falling under the umbrella of Christianity. Although there are other religious groups and those who declare no affiliation, a majority of residents claim some sort of Christian affiliation (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2012, May). Public data sets can be misleading and overlooked by an outsider researcher surveying the area, but being a resident for the better part of 25 years, I have a unique understanding that these Christian religious groups are significantly different in their observed practices, both within the church and outside of the church. There is a strong Protestant representation, Catholic representation, and some Methodists and Baptists, but one of the unique groups within the area is the Apostolic Lutheran.

Literature about the Apostolic is scarce, as they are very guarded in their practices and resist individuals wishing to convert as they believe that they are “the only chosen ones,” according to one former member of the church. A *Google* search for “Apostolic Lutheran Church” returns a top result for the entire religion’s main website, but beyond that, on the first page, five of the websites are relevant to the area. The area is saturated with members of this

church, and this deserves giving it a deeper look. The Apostolic faith itself is divided into the “Old” and “New” sects with varying restrictions and demands on their behavior and lifestyle.

From the church’s own website, Apostolic Lutherans boast 55 churches and about 9,000 members, a majority of which can be found in this region. (Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, 2017, February). Their influence is hard to ignore as the churches are in several local communities and the parking lots rival those of big box stores and are full of large multi-passenger vans to accommodate the large families. Although their faith does not dramatically differ from traditional Christian doctrine which teaches the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing in one overall being of God, it does have its nuances in practice. Where other Christian faiths rely on salvation by the Grace of God (Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, 2019, January) the Apostolic Lutheran Church emphasizes faith and personal experience along with Grace for eternal salvation.

Growing up alongside members of this church, specifically females, I noticed an interesting pattern at a very early age. To the best of my understanding, girls (of the “Old” sect) are encouraged, if not forced, to grow their hair out and are only allowed to cut it to maintain health of the hair. The hair is also required at all times to be worn tied up, often in buns, and locals deemed them “Bunrunners” or “Bunners” (considered derogatory) because of this practice. In my experience, girls (as well as the boys) are not encouraged to take any advanced classes in school nor were they allowed to participate in any organized sports, attend school dances, or partake in any extracurricular activities. Televisions are not allowed in homes (even though you would hear stories of some individuals hiding them in secret rooms in their basements). Modesty is important. They do not consume alcohol, although many of them smoke. Homosexuality is considered sinful and can even be grounds enough to shun one from the church, causing

individuals to hide sexual identity. Women on the whole do not attend college, and it was also rare for the Apostolic men to attend college. Men most often learn trades that can support their large families. Many local businesses are passed through generations of a single family; these businesses are typically related to some sort of trade that the men learn at a young age. Birth control along with premarital sex are outlawed. When I graduated from high school, of the five Apostolic classmates I had (all from the “Old” sect), they were all married within the first year and a half since graduation, many pregnant with their first child also. By the time a ten-year class reunion rolls around, it is not uncommon to hear of these Apostolic families to have anywhere between 4 and 8 children. Throughout their lifetimes, it is not unheard of to know women that have anywhere from 10 to 18 children. Women of this faith are “designed” to be mothers and housewives. Education, career, or any type of leisure or pursuits of pleasure does not appear to be a priority in their life.

The “New” sect of the Apostolic faith can be considered more liberated than the “Old” sect. It is not considered shameful to own a television. Both the young men and women are allowed to participate in team sports (many even receiving college scholarships to do so), college is not frowned upon, and it is not necessary for the women to grow their hair long. They are free to wear makeup and style their hair as they desire, but modesty in their clothing is still encouraged. Although premarital sex is frowned upon in the “New” sect, there are individuals that are willing to engage in sex acts. Some reference hearing of women engaging in anal intercourse before vaginal intercourse because they believe that “this protects purity,” according to one former member of the church that previously engaged in this consensual act. With the community having knowledge of this assumed common practice, locals have coined members of the “New” sect “Bangers,” which is also considered derogatory. Locals and former members of

the Apostolic community are also familiar with the phrase “Bunner/Banger Gone Bad” or “BGB,” which is a descriptor given to those of the faith who have either turned their back to it or have engaged in shameful/sinful behaviors. Many who are considered to be “BGB” marry outside the faith.

Having somewhat of an understanding about the Apostolic faith allows one to understand why there is value to the research that follows, although I do not claim to be an expert on this religion nor should everything stated be taken as fact, rather just perceptions based on experience/interactions with individuals. There is a strong Christian background in this area as well as a strong presence of the Apostolic faith (one of the most highly concentrated in the country). The ultimate goal of this research is to attempt to obtain an understanding as to why women of this area, including some women once affiliated with the Apostolic Lutheran Church and many that are not affiliated nor never have been, have delayed marriage. Marriage is still a highly valued institution nationally. The heavy presence of a Christian community in this area places strong emphasis on “traditional” gender roles, even though there has been progression of attitudes over the years. Although this research does not focus solely on members of the Apostolic faith, it is important to understand that their presence in this community is in part responsible for the continuation of traditional, patriarchal families and values. The women in this research were selected to show their contradiction or disassociation from such values. It is important to note that religion was not explicitly addressed in the survey items intentionally. Acknowledging the religion in the area is important to understand the demographics and culture of the region but was not intended to be the focus of the study. I feel as though explicitly focusing on the religion would have saturated the research and taken away from other points I

was trying to highlight. I also did not want to alienate anyone from the study based on their religion.

This research is entirely exploratory in nature and aims to better understand the major life decisions regarding marriage young women make based upon their life experience. There are obviously many factors that influence an individual's choice to marry early or to delay in pursuit of other things. The following ideas were addressed via face-to-face interview administered to 21 women to determine whether or not they have an impact on women's choice to delay marriage:

- Does education have an impact?
- Does employment have an impact?
- Do leisure activities have an impact?
- Does alcohol/drug use have an impact?
- Do children have an impact?
- Does sexual activity have an impact?

The women that participated in the research were identified using a snowball technique and word of mouth was imperative to finding them. With this Midwestern county offering a unique social demographic, with the heavy presence of conservative Christians that may be overlooked by researchers not recognizing the differences between faiths, I believe this research can expose a small portion of society that can help contribute to the answer of why women choose to delay marriage. This area offers avenues for women to attend college, is home to a wide variety of career options for women to be financially stable without the support of a man, offers a low cost of living, and is a geographic dream for outdoor adventurers with all seasons offering a variety of activities. This research will explore how these factors influence women's decision to delay

marriage and potentially encourage other researcher's to look at a population within our society that is often overlooked.

In my opinion, there is value in examining these rural, isolated, and often overlooked populations. Considering our most recent presidential election and the current political climate, it is obvious that grassroots operations and small towns can carry loud voices on a large/national/international platform. Many of these voices came out in large numbers and utilized resources like social media to make their voices heard in ways that weren't previously available to them based on geography. While the topic of marriage is just one avenue to explore, understanding the culture and lives of these populations can give us a more complete picture of our society. All members of our society have a story worth hearing.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This research is specific to a particular rural area, and because of that, there is incredibly limited direct sociological research available. The history of the region is rich due to the discovery of copper and the mining industry that followed. Even though the area is somewhat isolated from the rest of the country, it has still been impacted by major demographic, cultural, and sociological shifts over time. This literature review attempts to lay the foundation for explanation of some of the factors implicating the change in the attitudes of women in the area, which are consistent with women all over the United States. By taking a look at the origins of the region, the cultural demography, and how the greater society has evolved, we can gain some insight into how this small region has carved out its place and also made for an interesting topic of study.

Cultural and Religious Origins of the Region

In the 1840s mining was a reason to come to the area. Copper had been discovered in the decades prior, and investors and workers alike willing to take the risk in the wilderness to improve their financial situation were beginning to relocate to the area. Prior to the discovery of copper, “only a handful of voyageurs and trappers, several hundred Ojibwa and a few Methodist and Catholic missionaries called this place home” (Lankton, 2010, p. 7). Religious missionaries were almost as prevalent as the native populations and began to establish their churches as they sought to convert Native populations to Christianity.

There was little to be desired about the region; it was geographically isolated from much of the country, the terrain was difficult, the winters brutal, and the opportunity for social

activities and recreation were incredibly limited. With the rest of the country seemingly expanding and evolving, it was difficult to initially recruit and build the communities. Mining companies specifically recruited single men to come work in the beginning because of the lack of appeal in the area. The men who did come there in the early years of mining to work lived a difficult existence “without women, bunked in a boarding house, and ate a repetitive diet of bread, potatoes, and salt fish or salt pork” (Lankton, 2010, p. 41).

As the copper production increased, so did the appeal to come to the area. Mining companies realized that they were able to tap into the other populations immigrating to the U.S. by making mining communities more desirable. According to Lankton (2010), companies began to erect housing and hospitals, hired doctors, and brought in medicine. They almost began to do this out of habit, and over time, the lives of mine workers became almost exclusively controlled by the mines where the companies had impact from “cradle to grave” (Lankton, 2010, p. 50). This habit/practice was influential on the idea of paternalism that can still be seen in the area’s religious community. The “companies saw themselves as the primary institutions of life and work” (Lankton, 2010, p. 175) and felt that change threatened their control.

The area diversified ethnically as it grew in popularity amongst immigrants. This was not without conflict:

Ethnic hostilities and conflicts were conspicuous in the Copper Country’s mining towns. The capitalist system...contributed to conflicts between ‘old immigrants,’ those who hailed from northern and western Europe and who tended to dominate U.S. immigration patterns before 1890, and ‘new immigrants,’ who hailed from southern and eastern Europe and arrived between 1890 and 1920s” (Kaunonen and Goings, 2013, p. 46).

Some of the major nationalities represented in the region included Americans, Austrians, Cornish, Canadian, French, Irish, Italian, German, Scottish, and Scandinavians (including Norwegians, Swedes, and Finns). Thurner (1994) indicated that a migrant could potentially have a better life in this area than on the east coast, where many men were unable to sufficiently support a family on their hourly wage.

With the changing ethnicity of the region the landscape also changed; new churches popped up, lumber businesses emerged, and different value systems and attitudes were now present. The idea of progressivism, which was also gaining in popularity nationally, regarded that life could and should be better for all. With the mines controlling all aspects of an individual's life, tensions between employees and employers were on the rise: "As America moved towards the Progressive Era, the mining companies sensed their autonomy was eroding" (Lankton, 2010, p. 181). No single group was blamed more for this change in attitudes than the Finnish immigrants. On top that, Finns were also one of the few nationalities that were able to successfully farm in the region for several reasons. Thurner (1994) indicated that Finns were skilled in the handling of both dairy cows for sustenance and dynamite to clear the land. Where other nationalities may have been intimidated by the amount of work necessary, Finns embraced the challenge and would utilize children as a means to work the land. Mining industries began purging Finns from their payroll, would not hire and increasingly fired them, and would not rent housing to them either (Lankton, 2010).

The region quickly became populated with individuals of Finnish descent. "By 1913, Finns comprised the largest foreign-born ethnic group" (Lankton, 2010, p.189) in the region and their values were taking hold, including their religions. By 1917 they had established 22

churches that varied by denomination (Turner, 1994). Social activities would take place in temperance halls, echoing their conservative values.

With the Finnish population reigning as the dominant ethnic group, it seemed inevitable that diversity would emerge within this population. The local joke was that if you saw two or more Finns working together they were “probably going to start a cooperative, church, or union” (Kaunonen, 2009, p. 57). On the other hand, if they were walking away from one another, it was to disassociate themselves from the same things. Social problems amongst the Finns emerged as ideologies amongst the groups evolved. This could be considered the early indications that there would be great diversity within the general religiosity among future populations.

Men as Breadwinners

The origins of this region relied on the male breadwinner mentality with men dominating the mining industry and the associated industries. Women had limited options to work and if they did it was in domestic roles as maids or childcare providers. Over the last 60 years we have seen a major shift in gender roles throughout the country, and this area followed suit. The 1950s culture saw a strong representation of the “breadwinner” father and the stay-at-home mother. Because of the strong mining influence of the region, this held true. Marital status in this time was definitive of status – women and men of a certain age were expected to be married not just for child-rearing, but because it was the “normal” thing to do. We can still see this sentiment echoed in the area in which the research was conducted.

Historically, a woman’s identity was tied to her label as wife and mother as a result of gendered socialization. The process of gendered socialization encourages “women to highly value and identify with the role of wife and mother” (Williams, 2003, p. 470). The institution of

marriage was revered highly in the 1950s. There was an expectation that women were going to get married and have children at a young age and have “as many as possible” (Koropecykj-Cox, Pienta, & Brown, 2007, p. 300). We also see major implications about the role of women in terms of marriage. An interesting fact to keep in mind, as noted by Goldstein and Kenny (2001) is that “in the United States, more than 90 percent of every female birth cohort on record since the mid-1800s has eventually married” (p. 507). Implying that marriage is an expectation of society would be an understatement considering it has been the way of the world (or at least the United States) from as early as the 1850s or so. According to Mundy (2012) marriage was essentially the best arrangement these women could obtain.

In the 1950s, there was great emphasis and importance placed on the value of creating your own nuclear family. This family was the source of “personal fulfillment, encouraging universal marriage, child-bearing, and homemaking roles for women” (Koropecykj-Cox et al., 2007, p. 300). Those who did not succumb to the pressure to this expectation of marriage or who were involved in homosexual relationships were labeled as deviants or dangerous to society. There were also implications for women who did not marry, did not have children, or had children late in comparison to their peers. Having children was also deemed a “normal” behavior, and the choice to remain childless was considered taboo. A woman who does not marry or have children is not adhering to society’s expectations and was often subject to discrimination and social pressures to conform. Infertile women were pitied and childless women were looked at suspiciously (Koropecykj-Cox et al., 2007). The perceived and socially acceptable role of women was incredibly limited to their identity within the household. Their status was based upon their husband and their children rather than any other contribution they may make to society. Williams (2003) noted that the “roles of wife and mother were once the

primary adult roles available to women in the United States. Women today have wider range of opportunities for the fulfillment of socially accepted goals---opportunities that may include but are no longer limited to having a happy and harmonious marriage” (p. 471). Giddens (2000) goes on to argue that surveys have shown that men and women are not interested in reverting back to the more traditional lifestyles of the breadwinner/housewife and prefer the more democratic/egalitarian lifestyle of contemporary times.

Evolving Attitudes and Behaviors in Marriage, the Workforce, and University

Beyond the 1950s began the shift in gender roles and marriage identity. According to Giddens (2000), the traditional family was, in many ways, an “economic unit” (p. 72). Women relied heavily on the traditional breadwinner structure to support their families. It was so accepted/normal for women to work within the home that the Bureau of Labor kept no statistics on women with children under the age of one working outside the home (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). The region studied was no different and heavily influenced by the male-dominated industry and associated industries. But as shifts have occurred in society, so has this idea of the economic unit, even locally. Williams (2003) describes this by stating that “demographic and cultural changes in the United States have, in fact, significantly altered women’s status and roles both within and outside the family” (p. 470-471). There are two major cultural shifts we can easily recognize---women’s enrollment in college and completion of degrees and their expanded presence in the workforce. Although we have seen changes in societal implications and attitudes, changes in gender roles, economic changes, women attending college at record rates, and a majority of women in the workforce, “the prevalence of marriage has remained high” (Goldstein & Kenny, 2001, p. 507) .

A shift in female labor participation rates emerged also impacting marriage and birth rates. According to Williams (2003), “rates of labor force participation among married women with young children almost doubled between 1970 and 1990 (from 30% to 59%). Shifts in women’s employment patterns were accompanied by delays in the timing of marriage and childbirth and declines in marriage stability” (p. 471). Through various economic cycles, we have seen the requirement for households, especially two-parent households, to have dual incomes. One of the primary reasons for this is the decline of men’s wages. With this decline in wages there is a suggestion that women need to work in order to contribute to the household expenses (Cohen & Bianchi, 1999).

Another point is that working women both married and unmarried still carry the brunt of the responsibility in the home, also known as “the Second Shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Women were often burdened with the responsibility of the demands of both work and the home, and husbands felt the responsibility of the domestics continued to be women’s domain. In their work, Hochschild and Machung (1989) interviewed many women and found that the majority of the household duties, especially childrearing, fell on women. Although some men did share in the workload at home, the majority did not and some even outright refused to participate in household responsibilities. Feminists of the 1960s and 1970s looked at the family and noted that the home is a place of women’s work, violence, and oppression (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2004). There is a level of responsibility felt that seemed to echo throughout the interviews with the women. It was their obligation to take care of the children. Hochschild & Machung (1989) also point out that women are typically responsible for the daily duties. While men often contribute to things like fixing the car or mowing the lawn, they are less inclined to be cooking dinner, which needs to be done on a daily basis. Overall, women still end up doing two-thirds of

the daily work, even when men in the household do contribute. Women are often multi-tasking, where men take tasks one at a time. Women accomplish more in the home on a regular basis and definitely feel the pressure. In many ways, this “second shift” can lead to strain on relationships.

As the number of women working increased, their capacity to leave unhealthy or toxic relationships increased. Williams (2003) indicates that they are no longer victims to the economic barriers they may have previously faced. Women want their own money and also want possession of autonomous resources. By not having to rely on the finances of a husband to succeed or pursue their passions in life, women are more inclined to delay marriage, leave strained marriages, and be more selective when choosing a partner. If women felt the lack of support in the home, especially with the pressure of the “second shift,” they were no longer obligated to stay in the home. Also, when women come from wealthier families they are also afforded this luxury of delaying the process of starting a family and marrying (Aassve, 2003).

With women delaying childbirth because of careers the average age for first time mothers increased. Matthews and Hamilton (2009) note that “the average age of first-time mothers increased by 3.6 years, from 21.4 years in 1970 to 25.0 years in 2006” (p. 1). To go along with that, the number of first births to women over the age of 35 increased dramatically, by approximately 8 times. This is a trend not just in the United States, but rather in most of the industrialized world (Matthews & Hamilton, 2009). Women also were older when they would first get married and many would cohabitate instead of getting married (Fincham & Cui, 2011). It’s not alarming to see that individuals are delaying marriage considering the divorce rate is high. Childhood experiences greatly impact an individual’s perception of marriage. If an individual grows up in a household where there is marital strain and problems, this will greatly influence their perspective of marriage and what types of behavior exists in a marriage. Children

that are the product of divorce seem to err on the side of caution. According to Fincham and Cui (2011), pulling from Census data, “the median age for men is now 21, and for women it is close to 25” (p. 125) for first marriage.

Women that complete college degrees are almost more “marketable” in the marriage context. Diprete and Buchmann (2006) in their research believe their findings “indicate that the returns to higher education for women and men extend beyond returns in the labor market and include a higher probability of marriage, a higher standard of living, and insurance against poverty. Women’s returns to higher education appear to have risen faster than those for men” (p. 18). Because of these higher returns, there is a higher incentive for women to complete college and might be a component as to why women are now completing college at higher rates than men. Both partners can now have a positive economic impact within the marriage (Fincham & Cui, 2011).

Women have proven themselves to be able to valuable co-earners in their households. Roughly two-thirds of American marriages have a female partner that is either a breadwinner or co-earner. Mundy (2012) indicates that, “gains have been highest for more educated wives, which means breadwinning women are no longer just the wives of poor men” (p. 39). With obvious financial implications for themselves and their families, women have continuously entered the workforce and contributed to the financial stability of their families.

Mundy (2012) believes that “women’s earnings will bring about a new liberation for women but also for men” (p. 15). What it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man seems to be ever evolving, and with the new generation of empowered young women attaining higher degrees; having greater earning potential; and asserting a confidence in themselves, their sexuality, and their overall ability to be productive members of society, we will continue to see

an evolution in what it means to be a woman. We will continue to see shifts in our cultural expectations. We may see more women choosing to remain single their entire lives and women completely opting out of motherhood or marriage---things that ultimately used to make you a woman of value. Women are realizing that there is some inherent risk when having children as “motherhood limits their chances on the labor market” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 124).

Leisure

Another component taken into consideration is how these young professionals are spending their free time. By committing their lives to be wives and mothers it can significantly alter the way in which they spend their leisure time. Stepp (2007) indicates that, “one national study found that among eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds, only slightly more than a third were in committed relationships. Of the rest, more said they were not looking than looking” (p. 5). Considering young women now have more disposable income than they had in years past due to obtaining better paying jobs utilizing their college degrees, “delaying adulthood” and a certain level of responsibility is a recurring theme. There are reservations that young women have that adhering to societal expectations of being a wife and a mother. There are also concerns that it will be difficult to incorporate family and leisure together. These concerns include financial obligations, logistical limits, and the integration of children (Orrange, 2007). The hope is to maybe find some kind of balance between incorporating and integrating future children into activities that the individual currently enjoys or implementing other strategies to manage family life while preserving the integrity of their individualized activities. By delaying marriage and parenthood, these women are able to be more self-indulgent in their leisure pursuits. At the same

time, it allows opportunity to explore employment opportunities, leisure opportunities, or educational opportunities that may be more difficult if they were in a marriage or had children.

A clear division between work and leisure is “characteristic” of modern society, according to Giddens (1964). “Play” or leisure is different for adults than it is for children particularly because of the level of responsibility adults also carry. Children are working to understand reality and make their own connections to the norms and ideals of behavior, but adults are stepping out from their reality through play. Leisure provides adults the ability to satisfy feelings of achievement and realization that may not be actualized in other realms such as career, educational achievement, or a successful relationship (Giddens, 1964). It seems to go along with the mantra “work hard, play hard,” where adults sacrifice happiness in their career in order to afford feelings of accomplishment in their leisure activities.

Young adults are faced with a plethora of opportunity and are engaged in a constant struggle to assert who they are to society. The notion of emerging adulthood captures the essence of this struggle. Manning, Giordano, Longmore, and Hovec (2011) define emerging adulthood as “a ‘winding path’ into adulthood. This period is a mix of adolescent and adult commitment and responsibilities that are infused with experimentation” (p. 319). Being able to confidently commit to a life partner may be difficult if the individual is still struggling with their identity and what their place in the world is. Because this can be a tumultuous and unpredictable time in anyone’s life, more and more young women are opting to delay marriage and other responsibilities that are deemed traditional passages into adulthood.

The Pill, Abortion, Sexuality, and Childbearing

The idea of women and sex has evolved over time, and this can be heavily attributed to birth control but also the eventual ability of women to obtain birth control at their discretion. In 1965 the Supreme Court declared that it was unconstitutional for the government to prohibit married couples from using birth control. It was not until 1972 that birth control could be legally obtained by all Americans. According to Stevenson and Wolfers (2007), oral contraceptives, or the pill, “was far more effective than other forms of birth control; and unlike other forms of contraception, the pill allowed contraceptive decisions to be made privately by a woman, rather than jointly with her partner” (p. 41). There was an independence to the pill that hadn’t been experienced before---a control over their reproductive process that before had to be a mutual decision, or one made solely by the man for his wife. The pill was reliable, when used correctly, but also easy to use. Women finally had a simple solution to their own reproduction that could allow them to alter the course of their lives, including pursuing education or careers. The control over reproductive autonomy finally fell upon women, even though they already were responsible for childbearing and child-rearing, and it would change the path of sexual relationships for decades to come. Eventually, this access came to unmarried women along with young women without their parental consent (Goldin and Katz, 2000).

Along with access to the pill, the early 1970s saw greater access to legal abortions eventually leading to the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. *Roe v. Wade* ruled that “states were forbidden from outlawing or regulating any aspect of abortion performed during the first trimester of pregnancy, could only enact abortion regulations reasonably related to maternal health in the second and third trimesters, and could enact abortion laws protecting the life of the fetus only in the third trimester” (McBride, 2006). Women were no longer forced into shotgun

marriages because of pregnancy, made to continue the pregnancy of an unwanted child, or required to become single mothers. The probability of keeping an unplanned/unwanted pregnancy declined. In the event of contraceptive failure, women now had a legal option to safely terminate unplanned pregnancy (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007)

Children are no longer restricted to married couples either. Where in the past women were sent to live with relatives or shunned by their families if they had children out of wedlock, we now see many children born to single parents or unmarried parents. Children, in a sense, have become rarer. Women are foregoing or postponing pregnancy because of things like the pill. Simply put, children can be a financial burden.

Women find themselves in more sexually expressive and assertive roles than ever before. Mundy (2012) believes that women will “use their economic resources to find men who are good at sex but also---equally important---good at washing dishes. Sexually, women will feel more free than ever to say no; to determine the kind of sex they are having and how often they want to have it” (p. 17). Women could now make themselves “more attractive” through higher economic power (Goldin and Katz, 2002). This sexual liberation allows women to realize that sex can be something not only for pleasure but also something they are not obligated to engage in, should they not choose to do so. Stepp (2007) reports that the “proportion of young women ages eighteen to twenty-two who reported having intercourse---seventy-five percent---equaled that of young men. Seventy percent of both sexes had had sex before their nineteenth birthdays” (p. 8). As we see the mentality of sexuality evolve, we also have seen the comfort level of women in engaging in sexual activity equal that of men---it is much more of a culturally accepted norm than in the traditional 1950s breadwinner culture.

The nature of the family has evolved and there are new types of relationships. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2004) note that there are biological parents, surrogates, adoptive parents, sperm-donors, cohabitation relationships, same-sex partners, post-divorce families, egg donors, and sperm donors, among others. Families are no longer defined by the rigid boundaries of the nuclear family because of these evolved relationships. The increase and access to individual choice has greatly compromised the idea of the traditional family.

Women are more likely to engage in “hooking up” rather than seeking long-term relationships. There are arguments that women who engage in this behavior limit their ability to attract a suitable mate (Stepp, 2007). At the same time, many argue that this sexual liberation is strengthening women and encourages their development. It allows them to make better choices regarding significant others. Feminists have challenged many of the traditionally held ideas regarding women and sex. They assert that women should be able to engage in sex whether they are married or single. Women are also able to be the aggressors in relationships. Bogle (2008) indicates that “some of these changes in the ‘rules’ for how men and women should behave have likely contributed to the hookup script emerging on the college campus. In other words, gender politics affect sexual politics” (p. 22).

This is not to say that this sexual freedom comes without risk. Schmidt (2008) argues that controlling fertility through contraceptives, such as the pill, come with a cost. When looking at fertility timing, she believes that there are three major costs: lost earnings, preventing unplanned pregnancy, and if women are unable to have children they forgo the perceived benefits of motherhood. Women must properly assess their desires to become mothers but also ensure that they do not prevent themselves from doing so by improperly timing pregnancy. The pill allows women to prevent pregnancy and be protected against unplanned pregnancy while

engaging in sexual behavior. Women on the pill are able to minimize the risk of having a child but run the risk of “aging out” of their fertile period. Women do have access to fertility treatments as they age, but the pursuit of the perfect partner or a traditional marriage may come at a time when they are no longer at their biological peak for childbearing.

The scientific and technological intervention into childbearing forces individuals to “take a more active and risk-infused orientation to their relationships and involvements” (Giddens, 1999, p. 4). Tradition and nature are no longer in charge of dictating when a woman can and cannot have a child. It is also important to note that distribution of choice due to technological and medical advances is not distributed equally among women of all social stratifications. Those who live in poverty do not have the economic means to utilize reproductive technologies in the same manner that women of a higher social class have more readily available access.

Cohabitation Before Marriage

The current contexts for romantic relationship in many instances relies on an idea of intimacy that was not as important in previous years. Previously, marriage was the most highly valued form of expression for a romantic relationship but more and more couples have been cohabitating prior to marriage, with a wide approval rating by young adults (Santore, 2008). According to research (Cherlin, 2004), there are indicators that the connection between cohabitation and marriage is weakening. Partners that cohabitate for 3 years were about 60% likely to get married in the 1960s, and this dropped to about 33% in the 1990s.

It is obvious that cohabitation is also being recognized as a legitimate substitute to marriage. Intimate partners that cohabitate are now afforded some benefits and rights that were previously only granted to married couples. My own employer now allows potential for benefits

for partners that are not married that can prove a consistent relationship for a set amount of time. Cohabitation is more prevalent before marriage and also after divorce. It has become less stigmatized and far more acceptable. Marriage is no longer viewed as a rite of passage but more of a declaration of stability within a relationship. Marriage doesn't define a couple but rather can sometimes be considered a public statement of commitment and this perceived stability. (Giddens, 2000). With society embracing individuals maintaining the single lifestyle longer, women delaying and foregoing childbirth, and cohabitation numbers on the steady increase, it is important to look into communities that embrace conservative values to understand their point of view and potentially explain why they have held on to some of these seemingly archaic beliefs. Modernization of society results in more individualization for each person and less constraints (Beck, 1992).

Theoretical Perspectives

Herbert Blumer is credited as being the father of "symbolic interactionism." It focuses on concepts like society, social interaction, objects, the actor, their actions, and interconnections among the actor, his/her actions, and society. Symbolic interactionism works off of a few major principles: "Human beings act towards things based on the basis of the meanings they have for them, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, social interaction that one has with fellows, and these meanings are handled in, modified through, an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the thing he encounters" (Jeon, 2004, p. 251). In his own words, Blumer places major responsibility on the individual response. "Individuals respond to the meaning or signification of one another's actions. The gesture of the object is subject to interpretation which provides the basis for one's own response" (p. 518). From this perspective,

individual action is very much driven by the meanings given to things they interact with which is driven by social interaction/socialization. Based on this perspective, the women of this study respond to marriage based on the ways they were socialized. Blumer's ideas about human action are particularly important to this study as the intent is to show that the traditional setting of this area has significantly impacted the way the women respond to different ideas of "adulthood" but more specifically how they respond to traditional gender-roles and marriage.

Attitude is a major component of behavior, and Blumer (1955) indicates it is a state of preparation for action. Our attitude toward something will determine how we act on it and our attitude is based on the meaning we have assigned to an object. The attitude that we have will determine the kind of action we have toward an object or situation. For instance, the women in this study will behave or act towards marriage based on their attitude which is influenced by the meaning they have associated with marriage. It is fair to assume that women that come from a single-parent household would be less likely to feel compelled into marriage as they did not see that behavior modeled.

Our current culture is one of a risk society. Risk does not only imply a negative context. A positive way to look at risk society is that risk implies the expansion of choice and responsibility (Giddens, 1999). In modern society, individuals struggle with conflicting identities due to the overlapping of their social networks and the expectations of those networks (Beck, 1992). One of the consequences of individualization is that decisiveness is a demand. As individual choice expands so does the need for active contribution and adaptability: "They need initiative, tenacity, flexibility, and tolerance of frustration" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 4). Each choice made by individuals directly or indirectly effects/impacts social connections and the demands imposed on our social networks increases (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As we

will learn more about from the women in this study, they are constantly teetering between individual choice and the implications those choices have for themselves and those around them.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2004) also assert that the family structure has changed as a result of individualization: “What individualization of the family essentially means is that the perceived family is the family structure, and that consequently both the perception and the structure vary individually between members both within and between ‘families’” (p. 508). Our interpretation of what it means to be single, what it means to be a family, or conversely, what it doesn’t mean to be a family are much more placed on the individual rather than what traditional norms once upheld. This evolving definition of what it means to be a family greatly impacts how the women in this study define what family is to them. These women now have much more ownership over what a family is to them based on the individualization of society. As we will see in the results section, the women react to marriage based on their experiences.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

This study was designed to be exploratory in nature to better understand the decision to delay marriage in a small segment of the population. It was designed around the symbolic interactionist perspective---that people behave toward things based on the meanings those things have. Meanings are derived from social interaction. Choices made by individuals are the result of the social interactions in which they participate and their life experiences. Recognizing that individuals are a product of the family, community, and overall society in which they are participating is important to this research. Doing this same study in a different segment of the population may result in entirely different results. Specifically, this research was intended to address the following:

- What impacts women's attitudes towards delaying marriage in traditional communities?
 - Does education have an impact?
 - Does employment have an impact?
 - Do leisure activities have an impact?
 - Does alcohol/drug use have an impact?
 - Do children have an impact?
 - Does sexual activity have an impact?

The county studied was chosen due to accessibility and background knowledge. Having a solid background and understanding of the dynamics of this community allowed me to fully engage myself in the qualitative research and possibly understand comments and references made by those interviewed better than another researcher. Although I do not profess to be an

expert in this region, I do feel I possess greater insight due to circumstances. I spent most of my life in the area; I grew up in the region and did not live outside of the area until I attended graduate school in Southeastern Michigan. Even while I was living outside of the area, I frequently visited and currently reside in the area.

The focus of this qualitative research fell upon young women that both grew up in the area of have spent their adult life in the area between the ages of 26 and 34. The total number of women interviewed was 21. The sample was obtained basically by word of mouth. With it being such a small community, when word got out that I was conducting such research people were overwhelmingly willing to volunteer their time to sit down and be interviewed. It could be considered a combination of convenience and snowball sampling since people suggested friends of theirs to participate, but many of those interviewed I either knew as acquaintances or socially. I did not want it to turn into just a sampling of friends of mine with the understanding that I knew their backgrounds and life experiences. Although having such information is valuable, I didn't want the research to be so limited, even though many of my friends have distinct and dynamic differences amongst themselves. Word of mouth was a large advocate of mine and made the research much easier to gather a sample.

Once a few subjects had volunteered their time I would ask if they had anyone they think would be valuable to the research or interesting to converse with. Modern technology has made communicating with many individuals easily, as sending text messages or Facebook messages to interview subjects I didn't know helped determine their willingness to participate and availability to schedule a time to interview. Since the interviews were framed around major core questions, but open-ended, it was important to allow as little or as much time to have a complete interview.

It was important to make sure that all interested participants passed a prescreening interview, so that they were to fit the criteria set in this research:

1. All participants must be over the age of 25 but under the age of 40.
2. All participants must female.
3. All participants must be current residents of the local county selected.
4. All participants must have a current marital status of “single” and have never been married.

Once the participant was determined to have the necessary criteria in order to participate, they were then given an informed consent form to both sign and maintain a copy for their own records (see Appendix A). Participants were informed that they were allowed to divulge as much or as little information as they felt comfortable doing. If they chose not to answer certain questions, they were not penalized in any way. At any time a participant was given the opportunity to withdraw participation. If participation was withdrawn, individuals were informed that their answers would not be used in the study. There were no anticipated or perceived risks from participation.

Once individuals had consented to participate interviews were scheduled at their earliest convenience. Since these interviews were taking time out of participants’ lives it was important to cater to their schedules and try to keep them concise yet thorough. Interviews typically took place at local restaurants, coffee shops, parks, and bars (with limited alcohol consumption in hopes that interviews would not be skewed by varying levels of intoxication) and all locations were determined by those being interviewed to ensure that they were comfortable and at ease during the interviews. All participants agreed to being recorded and either my iPhone or iPad

was used as the recording device, depending upon where we were and the clarity of sound either would provide me.

Each interview was given an identifying number rather than a name in order to ensure confidentiality. The only person that has had access to the recordings is me as the researcher. Both the iPhone and iPad are password protected so any individual trying to access the material for purposes other than research would be unable to, but on top of that, they would not likely be able to identify individuals within the recordings unless they were an expert voice analyst. Recordings were also saved on a flash drive that was kept safely locked in my house and were inaccessible to others. Great care was taken to ensure that all participants' identities would be protected and they were all informed that no distinct identifying individual characteristics would be presented in the research findings that follow. All participants were also informed that if they ever had any issues or concerns about confidentiality or safety that they could contact the researcher, the advisors for the research, and Eastern Michigan University's Graduate School. Great care was taken to make sure all individuals knew what their participation and answers were aiming to explore but also their rights and options as participants. They were also notified that the use of human subjects had been approved via Eastern Michigan's approval process (Appendix B).

After all of the data had been collected all recordings were transcribed into a word document verbatim for easier access but also to look for patterns within the answers. Recurring behaviors and answers were then placed into a spreadsheet to place a visual emphasis on the patterns that were emerging. Responses were coded and placed into groups of like answers to find common themes. The questions used (Appendix C) were meant only to be a guide and not necessarily dictate the interview as a whole. Because responses among participants varied and

interviews are prone to veer off the guided course it was important to make sure all important information be gathered. All participants did answer all of the questions presented. There were no individuals that opted out of any question and often they included additional information that could be considered valuable to the findings. Several of the individuals expounded upon questions in similar ways and that was integrated into future interviews but did not prevent the set questions from being asked.

By utilizing grounded theory, I was able to generate a purposeful sample of participants. A main strategy of grounded theory is the constant comparative method. This allowed me to evolve my ideas as the interviews transpired. Although I had preconceived notions about how participants may or may not respond, I allowed the data to really generate deeper ideas and analysis of the data based on their responses. Throughout the process it was important to note that this data may not be applicable in other parts of the country. The ideas that were being generated really are specific to this region of the country. Coding the data was also an important task in adhering to grounded theory. The coding of what data was valuable was subjective yet guided by symbolic interactionism and the relevance for understanding the meaning of marriage along with its contribution to greater understanding of the research question. There was data that may have been eliminated from analysis as it was deemed not relevant or unimportant based on the evolving understanding of the issues at hand. Outside analysts may have considered omitted data to be relevant to the study, which could change the results presented. I think it is important to reiterate that my proximity to the data is why I felt comfortable assessing in the manner I did.

This research was conducted over a 5-month period starting in June of 2012 and lasting through early October 2012. It is possible that attitudes of participants may have changed but this research is reflective of that time frame only and not necessarily accurate for their current

attitudes. Future research would aim to look at the long term progression of attitudes among these women. Ideally, the same women would be willing to participate in an additional interview to follow up on their attitudes more than five years later. Since I have maintained a relationship with many of the women that participated, I am aware of how dramatically many of their lives have changed considering all of the things looked at---marriage, children, education, careers. Future studies could also focus on how their values/goals/ideas continue to evolve past this 5-year mark or even in the future seeing if their children would be interested in participation.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

The data that resulted from the interviews will be presented in a few ways; both direct quotes from the individuals that were interviewed as well as actual numbers from the data. The data will follow the interview guidelines laid out in the methods section and attempt to create a coherent and accurate interpretation of the data retrieved. The results are ordered by question used in the interview.

1 .Background/Demographic and Attitudes Regarding Marriage

In terms of age, the mean is 28, median of 28, and mode of 27. The first significant questions presented to interviewees were rather straight forward. First, participants were asked if they had any desire to marry. Out of the 21 interviewed 17 had expressed interest in being married at some point in their lives, and 4 were on the fence. Not a single participant flat out expressed any disinterest in marriage. Overwhelmingly, all expressed positive feelings about marriage even though some were unsure if they wanted to get married. Respondent 6, a 28-year-old participant said:

Of course I want to get married. There is going to come a point in my life where I'm going to wake up and be old. The last thing I want is to be old and alone sitting in my house with a bunch of cats running around.

The fear of becoming a "cat lady" proved a strong one as a few people made reference to this old stereotype. Respondent 20, a 27-year-old blatantly stated:

I refuse to be a cat lady, of course I'm getting married. I'm allergic to cats. I may not even have a boyfriend right now but you bet your ass I'm getting married.

The fear of becoming the stereotypical old spinster resonated with another 28-year-old interviewed as well, Respondent 14:

My parents have been married for over thirty years. I can't imagine my life going by without someone to share it with. Even though they have had their rough times, it's hard to imagine not having someone to go through the rough times with, you know? I want to be able to have the kind of relationship with my husband my mom has with my dad.

Positive influences modeling healthy marriages impacted some of the women's beliefs about marriage. While for others, the product of single mothers or divorced parents expressed some hesitancy about marriage, but they ultimately saw value in it. Respondent 21, who in her 30s, made comment about how her parents were married, divorced, and now both remarried and how that affected her attitude:

Do I want to get married? I'm not sure...probably, but now? It's hard to answer yes or no because of all the things I want to do for myself. I'm young and have a lot I want to discover. I have aspirations to do other things than just be a mother housewife. I saw my parents go through a bitter divorce, remarry other people, and still deal with some of the bullshit they dealt with when they were with each other. It's hard to say, 'yes, I want to get married' when I have seen so much disaster in marriage. I'm not against marriage, but I don't think I'm ready for it anytime soon. There is a lot I hope to accomplish while I'm still young enough to do it.

Another respondent expressed hesitancy about marriage because of a similar experience but ultimately had hopes of being married one day herself. Respondent 1, a 28-year-old said:

I want to be married, but I have had seen a ton of shit in my life that I don't want to repeat. My mom and dad were never married. My mom has now been with the same guy

for most of my life but they haven't married even though they had my younger brother and I don't think they ever will. My dad married and had a couple more kids. I have holidays split between families and half-families. It sucks that for the rest of my life I will have to split my time. My mom has given me probably the worst example of a relationship and I see myself repeating her mistakes in my life. I want to get married but I have a feeling I'm just going to end up like my mom. I see her insecurities in myself and it sucks. I absolutely hate that.

Even though a few of the respondents had less than desirable home lives there were still positive feelings about marriage within them. Societal stereotypes along with past experience both play a significant role in shaping the participants attitudes about marriage even this early on in the interview process.

After finding out whether or not there was interest to marry, the next step was to determine if there was a hope that the participant was currently married. There was more variation in response to this question. Of the 21, interviewed only four wished that they were married right now, eight expressed some desire to be married now but weren't bothered by the fact that they were not yet married, and nine held no desire to be currently married and expressed no issues with the fact that they were not yet married, some actually expressing relief or excitement that they were not yet married.

2. Education/Employment Experiences and Linkages to Attitudes about Marriage

The minimum education level achieved by all women in this study was a high school diploma with seven of them completing some college credits, three with an associate's degree, eight receiving a variety of bachelor's degrees, and three completing master's degrees. In terms

of education, a majority of these women (14) have received college degrees and all have some experience in higher education. Not all of them have fully satisfied their educational desires either; seven have aspirations for further education (for completion of degrees, advanced degrees, or different degrees than they already possess). Overwhelmingly, even the women that did not complete college were still interested in pursuing higher education and those that had completed a degree program were glad that they had followed through with their degree because of the perceived and realistic, current and future employment advantages and opportunities.

All 21 women in the survey were able to provide a wide variety of employment experiences. To protect the identities of the women, since the sample is pulled from a small geographic region, identifying careers will not be listed. The women did cover a broad range of employment though including jobs in the service industry, the medical field, educators, and some in management roles. All of the women were able to claim “full-time status” in their roles and were working a minimum of 35 hours a week, with most working 40 or more hours per week.

In terms of future plans and aspirations, the women were kind of all over the place. Some (five) of the women (especially those that were teachers and in the medical field) were content with their current employment status and had no current or anticipated future desire for further employment. Respondent 15, a 28-year-old educator explained:

I chose my major in college for a reason; it had a direct career path. I knew what I was doing when I started college and had a very definitive path. It took me a couple of tries to end up in the right school system, but I knew I wanted to be a teacher from a young age. I was able to work and get my Master’s at the same time. I love my coworkers, where I live, and the freedom of having the summers off. I am able to work part-time in the summer at a job I held when I was a teenager. My career has

allowed me the freedom to enjoy the best time of year up here without the restrictions of being in the classroom from June to August.

Some women (six) were not sure what their employment future would hold and weren't sure if they had attained their ultimate level of employment. Respondent 18, a 30-year-old woman shared:

I thought I knew what I wanted to do; I have been working in my field since I graduated from college. If I choose to stay in my field I know that I will have a comfortable life; I'm never going to be rich, but I won't struggle...but I don't know if that's enough for me.

This specific woman also went on to explain that her friends have always classified her as the "free spirit" of the group and she agreed with their classification:

I have always been the one that kind of roams around...I'm a citizen of the world more than any specific town. I'm not ready to settle anywhere and set up roots just yet. The only reason I have roots in the first place is because of my job---who knows if this is where I want to be---I sure don't.

But the largest group of women (10) had expressed that they were not where they ultimately wanted to be regarding employment and had aspirations for either different careers or promotions with their current employer. A majority of the women working in the food service/customer service industry had strong desires to move into different careers, and of those women, all expressed that working in the service industry was simply to pay the bills until a different job opportunity came along. Respondent 6 lamented:

I went to college. People come up to me all the time and ask, 'why are you still a waitress if you have a college degree?' People don't realize that jobs just don't

magically come to you when you graduate. I have a child. I have bills. No one was waiting for me when I graduated to hand me a perfect career and a high salary. I feel like other people have more shame for the job that I do than I do. I'm not too proud to work to pay my bills. I have student loans that are going to haunt me for probably the rest of my adult life...private loans. You can't get rid of those; even if I filed for bankruptcy I would still have to pay those back. I don't have a choice but to work, even if it is at a dead end job. I get so sick of explaining myself to people. I know what I'm doing, even if they don't. I do have a college degree. Eventually something's got to give.

After establishing the level of education and employment attained by all of the women, I wanted to explore if/how the desire for future education or an advancement of career has affected their attitudes about marriage. Essentially, the women were asked if their desire for higher education or an advance in their career took priority over marriage. Surprisingly only three of the women interviewed said that their desire for education or career advancement did not interfere or take priority over their desire for marriage. Respondent 6 also said:

My boyfriend and I aren't married, obviously, but that really hasn't stopped us from doing what we want to do. I finished school, he works, I work, and I'm also looking to find a different job, but for the time being what we have works for us. He wants me to be at home with our son more than he wants me behind a desk for 40 hours a week.

Working as a server right now allows him to work during the daytime, me to work at nighttime, and for our son to normally be with one of his parents rather than going to grandma's house... I can go back to school anytime if I want to---I have a bachelor's degree and have thought about graduate school and he works enough where money isn't

an issue. What we have works for us and we don't need a piece of paper to know that we are committed to each other right now, but I do want to get married and I know we will. Work or school won't stop us from getting engaged or married, we'll just do it when we're ready. Finding a better job or going back to school won't stop me, I'm just waiting for him to buy a ring.

Respondent 10, a 27-year-old woman went on to say:

I really don't think about it (marriage) like that---it will happen when it happens. I'm single right now - it's hard to think about being married interfering with anything I want to do.

Respondent 9, also a 27-year-old said:

I'm just waiting for my boyfriend to propose...he has even told me to start planning the wedding but hasn't asked. I am not going to plan a wedding until I have a ring and he just doesn't understand that. I don't even want a diamond! I just want a ring! I am going to continue doing what I do---I'm working two jobs and will probably go on for a Master's. We will be married in the time that I do that. He just needs to ask already.

Overwhelmingly, most of the women (five declaring somewhat and 13 with a definitive yes) had expressed that their personal professional or educational development did take priority over marriage in one way or another. Respondent 18 explained:

I love my job. I have been teaching for the last four years---2 years spent [internationally], a year spent [out of state], and now I am back in [Midwestern state] and couldn't be happier. I love traveling and being a teacher because of the opportunities I have had to see the world---I was in my late 20s and living [internationally]...how many people can say that, right? I absolutely love my job and can't imagine a guy being able to

keep up with my lifestyle right now. I want to be in a committed relationship---I've tried the long distance thing but it hasn't worked. I have dated different people over the years but no one has been able to keep up with me, you know? I am not willing to slow down so someone else can keep up. My job allows me the freedom to work anywhere and I still want to explore those options before I throw it all away for some guy.

Respondent 7, a 30-year-old woman shared:

You know how I am---I have never let a guy dictate anything in my life. Sure I get caught up sometimes in relationships, but who doesn't? I do what I want when I want and everyone knows that's not going to change because of a guy---I don't care how good the sex is.

The capacity to make their own money and be successful on their own almost took place of looking for a husband in a way---earning college degrees has afforded some of these women the opportunity to be making a significant amount of money. These women are buying their own homes, cars, and starting a life for themselves without the assistance of a husband. Respondent 5, a 27-year-old woman elaborated:

I went to school and worked really hard. I bought my first house when I was 26. My parents helped a little bit, or a lot, but regardless, I did it on my own. I have been successful in my job to the point where I don't feel I need a husband to carry the weight. I can do it on my own and I have been; having a husband would only be a bonus. Maybe then I wouldn't have to have roommates stealing my shit all the time!

In comparison with traditional attitudes about marriage being displayed by other members of this community, specifically the Apostolic Lutherans, these women seem to exemplify an attitude that is more consistent with the greater portion of American society. When

looking at the women in this study, their differences from “traditional” members of the community are obvious in terms of values (marriage, education, independence, equality, etc.), and how they are contributing to a shift in the overall culture both locally and nationally. We have all seen the national average age of marriage continually rise, and all of the women interviewed seem to be contributing to that rising age. With the youngest woman in the survey being 26, she is clearly a harsh contrast from a portion of the population in the specified county that still marries out of high school and does not necessarily value higher education or career advancement. When asked how being from this area affects her decision, Respondent 4, a 28-year-old had this to say:

I grew up in this area and the dating pool is so small. It’s so hard to find anyone to even consider being married to at this point because everyone knows everyone. If you do meet someone chances are it’s your ex’s friend, or cousin, or uncle, or whatever. It’s virtually impossible to branch out so you either accept being single and do what’s best for you or you hope that you find the right person in high school. It’s beyond frustrating – there is no dating pool.

When asked if there was pressure to find someone in high school, she then stated:

I wasn’t looking in high school. Maybe I should have! I’m not sure what to think at this point. All I know is that I didn’t find someone yet and I just have to do what is best for me right now without worrying about being married.

The community does seem to display some influence; realistically there is a relatively small dating pool. There aren’t a plethora of opportunities to meet different people like you would find in a major city and that is reflected in a lot of the women’s answers. There is a level of frustration with the lack of opportunities to meet people, according to the respondents. This lack

of available men seems to make an impact on why women focus on their career or education – possibly in the hope that it will allow them an opportunity to move away for a career or introduce them into a different sect of society which they had not previously associated.

3. Leisure Activities

To put it very simply, leisure activities are regarded very highly by this group of women. Signs all over the county tout that the major city in this county is a playground for all seasons and that was strongly reflected in the answers given by the women. For this portion of the interview the women were asked what they enjoyed in their spare time, how much of their spare time is dedicated to fun and leisure activities, and were asked if their free-time activities had any impacts on their desire to marry---positive or negative. It is important to keep in mind that for the last few years one of the other cities in this county has been nationally ranked in the top five for the snowiest cities in the country; even though all seasons are represented, winter is definitely a dominant force in the area. In any given year it is possible for winter to last from September to May even though typically it lasts from late October/early November until the end of March/early April.

To start off, the women were asked what they enjoyed doing in their spare time and there were some obvious and expected answers: socialize, hang out with friends, travel, and partake in the outdoor activities of the season. Enjoying the seasons was a common theme. The women had responses such as skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing in the winter; hiking and biking in the spring; boating, wakeboarding, waterskiing, swimming, camping, biking, and generally being outside or near the numerous beaches or water in the very short summer season; and watching football, hunting, color cruises, 4-wheeling, riding side-by-sides,

and mudding in the fall. The women in this area truly seem to have a love for spending time outdoors when they can.

When the women were asked about how much of their time was dedicated to leisure activities the results were varied; working in different types of industries the women were restricted to the confines of work schedules in order to embrace leisure activities. The recurring theme though was that all women spent as much time as possible “enjoying life.”

As previously mentioned, the winters in this area can be extreme; many of the women expressed the feeling of being trapped in the house or restricted in what they can do during these blizzards or extreme freezes. Because of those perceived restrictions, all of the women shared the feeling of wanting to spend as much time as possible out of the house when realistic.

Respondent 8, a 28-year-old woman described this feeling as such:

I hate winter. I don't know why I still live here sometimes. It seems like you are stuck in the house for months at a time...you start to go a little crazy. Sometimes I feel like summer is the only reason I put up with these crazy winters; I can sit out on the water all day, drink a beer, work on my tan, and just relax. It's almost like a vacation from reality.

Respondent 2, a 27-year-old shared a familiar sentiment:

I've lived up here my whole life and I often wonder how different things would be in my life if I had left, but I can't leave! I love it up here. I feel like I work really hard and dealing with winter is a job itself; summer is a reward to act like I'm 21 again, not that I'm that far away from it!

Being from the area myself I can speak from experience that the weather is a big dictator on how women of this area are able to enjoy themselves. There are times when one can simply not leave the house; snow days for the area schools are typically more excessive than the rest of the state,

businesses shut down a handful of times throughout the winter, roads get shut down as snow plows are unable to traverse and clear them, and a couple of feet of snow falling in a 24 hour period is not a foreign concept. Personally, I could sympathize with the women and why they felt like they embraced free time and used it to the best of their ability because we are so restricted in what we can do. The value of leisure time cannot be over-exaggerated because it is so limited. The attitude of these women clearly demonstrates that they wish to embrace their leisure time, and although it may not interfere directly with their attitudes toward marriage, it does play a role in deciding a spouse. Respondent 8, a 28-year-old portrayed that attitude as such:

When I get a chance to get out of the house I want to have a partner that enjoys doing the same things as me. Being cooped up in the house all winter you really have to be with someone that is able to put up with you and all your bullshit. I feel like some of my past relationships have fallen apart because we couldn't stand being around each other for so long. You really need to find a partner that likes spending time with you trapped in the house all winter, but can also be along for the ride when you get out.

Women from this area genuinely treasure the time spent out of the house and many shared similar sentiments about the value of common interests. The importance of leisure time cannot be understated. The attitude of "you make your own fun" resonates among these women because of the lack of attractions you would find readily available in a larger more populated area do not exist here. All of these women are single, employed, and living in an area where making \$30,000 a year makes you middle class. They have disposable income to use but do not necessarily have the outlets you would find in a major city. That being the case, these women do gravitate towards outdoor activities over theater, concerts, or major sporting events. Although these attractions do

exist, it is on a much smaller scale. Instead of professional athletic events, college, or high school sports are a big draw. Instead of seeing nationally recognized musical artists or bands, local musicians playing in a bar or restaurant draw a crowd. Shopping is done in major chain stores like the one Walmart centrally located or done online. The disposable income these women have contributes to their ability to embrace leisure time and allows them to enjoy it on a greater scale. The monetary aspect and affordability contributes to the importance; now that these women have the financial capacity to enjoy activities, they do so more often than they may have been previously afforded.

The women in this study were asked directly if their hobbies or activities had any effect--positive or negative---on their possibility of getting married. All of the women had a similar answer, not surprisingly. To put it simply, these women hoped that they would be able to find a partner that would be able to share in the activities that they enjoyed. Finding a similar interest with a potential spouse was viewed as one of the easiest ways to initiate a relationship in the first place. If common interests are not shared it makes it hard to get a relationship off the ground so to speak. These women did not believe that time spent enjoying hobbies would not hinder a relationship but potentially help one grow and flourish into something more than just a casual dating experience. If anything, these women appeared to believe that their enjoyment of their free time would make them more desirable to the opposite sex. Respondent 2 explained it this way:

I work hard and I play hard---I want someone who is willing to embrace this same attitude because I don't plan on being with someone who isn't going to contribute. I want to be with someone who wants to spend money on things that will make our life more enjoyable. "Boys and their toys" is what you hear all the time---I want to be with

someone who will let me ride their toys with them or at least not be made when I tag along on the rides. I want to share the same interests with someone so when we do get a spare moment we are able to enjoy it with our friends and each other.

Although most of the women shared a similar attitude, Respondent 1 shared why she thought too many similar interests would be a problem:

As much as I want to be with someone who enjoys spending their spare time the same ways I do, I don't want someone who is going to be attached at the hip all the time. I need my space. I like my girl time. [I like to] Be able to get dressed up and go out with the girls, go out to the club, drink and talk about periods, or babies, or things that I know a guy just doesn't want to hear about. I don't think it is a turn off to have a life outside of your partner---if anything I think it helps make the relationship stronger. You don't always need to be on top of each other to love each other. I want someone who values their space as much as I do---if we can have fun together all the better, but I still need my alone time! I love my time away from work and I love having a good time going out with my friends or whatever. Love it. I won't settle for someone who isn't willing to deal with me doing my own thing.

Alcohol use in this area is common, if not the norm. Many social outings revolve around the consumption of alcohol and when you ask these women about their leisure time and their hobbies, whatever the response is, it is safe to assume alcohol is at the center of that event.

According to the Center for Disease Control (2012), "one in six U.S. adults binge drinks about four times a month, consuming about eight drinks per binge. Binge drinking is more common among young adults aged 18-34." The women in this study definitely reflect the findings of the CDC. Local legend has it that a small, local grocery store held a Guinness World Record for

selling the most alcohol in a single night, and that Playboy magazine no longer considers the state university for its annual ranking of top party school because it is “not fair to rank professionals among amateurs.” Whether or not either of those statements or community legend are true, the importance and presence of alcohol in leisure/social settings cannot be minimized. Every woman in this study said that she drinks, with all of them admitting to binge drinking from time to time, if not every occasion when they do drink. Respondent 1 explained:

Well, if you're asking what my hobbies are I'm not going to church on Sunday (laughs).
I'm going to the bar, they don't give enough wine at communion.

This woman, like the other women, was often participating in social outings at local bars or breweries. Socializing typically centered around sporting events or outdoor activities, and alcohol. A lot of people in this area aren't watching football games without alcohol and they aren't riding snowmobiles in the winter or 4-wheelers in the fall without coolers strapped to the back or flasks in their pocket. The acceptance of alcohol in social and leisure settings is visible.

Along with alcohol, some of the women in the study admitted to occasionally smoking marijuana and some using prescription pills in the past. Respondent 6 explained:

I had a prescription for Adderall since I was a kid. By the time I was in college it was just routine to take them, but it got to the point where I knew people that were taking them for fun. I was in college during a time where there was a market for people to take it to stay up and study; I was a poor college student and I knew that something I had...and didn't feel that I necessarily needed to be “normal.”

Respondent 7 confessed:

I was a huge pothead. I smoked all the time. I don't think I could make it through the entire day without smoking and if I did it was because I probably didn't have any. I

dated a guy at the time who was as big a pothead as I was. All we did was smoke, hang out, have sex, smoke more, go to work, smoke some more. Smoking was a way to escape, but it got to the point where it was all that we did. Obviously, I wasn't in the healthiest of relationships, but at the time it worked. For where I was in my life, I don't think I would trade it. It was a learning experience. I don't want to be labeled as the "stoner" anymore; that's who I was for a long time. Weed took a lot of my life away from me. At the time I thought I was just having fun, but I really feel like it was a phase I had to go through. It may have been longer than my family would have liked, but I have come a long way since then.

When asked if this woman thought that her pot use had any effect on her current marital status she offered this:

If I wanted to be married at the time I was using I probably could have – barefoot, on some backwoods farm. I was just in a different mindset. Having to plan a wedding is not something stoners do. I could have easily watched Eddie Murphy standup on repeat and laugh, but planning a wedding wasn't even on the radar. If I was married at that point in my life I am sure I would be divorced by now. I grew up. My priorities have changed.

The women who used marijuana or other illegal substances were very forthcoming about their past use. It seemed as though the old adage "it's just a phase" or "you'll grow out of it" was how they felt about their drug use. Although it was previously mentioned that alcohol appeared to be the norm, there was a sense of normality or commonality of exposure to drug use and abuse.

Although none of the women currently identified themselves as regular or even occasional drug users, they did acknowledge that it was present in the area and they are often exposed to it. If they chose to engage in those kind of behaviors, it would not be difficult to do so.

The women in this research lead very active lives. Many have traveled out of the country on several occasions, as well as within the United States. Many participate in annual outings with friends, such as “girls’ trips,” music festivals, professional sporting events, participation in athletic teams or with gym memberships, organized annual rides (such as mud rides, color-tour rides, antique snowmobile rides), and for many, just going out with friends on the weekends. A lot of the women in this study, based on the outside knowledge in my research, know one another on a social level; some are close friends, some just acquaintances, and others would “know the name if they heard it.” With it being a small area, people tend to have a lot of overlap with social groups. When asked if leisure activities take priority over marriage, the answers were pretty similar. The women did not feel as though their busy social lives took a priority over marriage, but rather, they weren’t going to stop living their lives as they were accustomed because they were not currently married. Respondent 2 had strong feelings about a regular festival she attended:

I guess I have never really thought about my social life taking priority over marriage. My hope is that I will find someone with similar interests that won’t hinder me from the things I enjoy doing. I am not going to stop going to Hodag every year. Hodag is a country music festival that a handful of women mentioned as an annual activity. It takes place in northern Wisconsin and is, to my best understanding, a no holds barred binge drinking marathon. Those who attend are typically consuming alcohol from sunup to sundown. It is almost like a “rite of passage” for some, anointing first-timers as “Hodag Virgins” and highly publicizing that fact. It is a place where singles from around the northern Midwest, meet, drink, hook-up, party, and potentially never see that individual ever again, at least until the next summer. Continuing with her previous statements, she went on to say:

I don't plan on meeting Mr. Right when I am blackout wasted at Hodag...but wouldn't that be a story to tell. I have met people there and continued a relationship of sorts after the festival is over. One relationship even lasted until the next summer, but it was long distance and I knew it wasn't going to work. It was fun, though.

No woman really thought that her extracurricular, leisure, or just general fun was taking priority over marriage. Several alluded to the fact that it may not be helping their chances of marriage though. Respondent 3, a 27-year-old grumbled,

Sitting in the bar every weekend certainly isn't exposing me to husband material. If I wanted to find someone who would do shots of Doctors with me for the rest of my life I would be fine; actually I would have plenty of candidates. I could have my own version of the Bachelorette right here in [a local town]. Instead of giving out roses I could give out Bud heavies and hope that he at least graduated from high school.

Although the women in this study did not believe that their leisure pursuits were a priority over marriage, they did seem to make verbal correlations between their choice of activities and the lack of available men or the quality of available men. Quantity and quality, based on the statements of those interviewed, both seem to be scarce in this area. An outsider may consider the possibility that the women are limiting exposure to quality men based on their choice of activities. There is a great potential that sitting in a bar on a Saturday afternoon versus sitting in a library at the same time will yield different caliber men. The women acknowledged their actions may impact the demographic they are exposed to, but seemed in no hurry to change their lifestyle to potentially be exposed to a different dating pool.

4. Current Martial Status/Family

Although identifying as a “single” woman was a requirement for participation in this study, several of the women were in long-term committed relationships. The women were able to come up with a plethora of reasons as to why they weren’t married ranging from “I don’t want to be married right now” to “I am waiting for a ring from my boyfriend” to “I have no idea.”

Respondent 7 happily explained:

I am single and loving it. I have been in some really great relationships with different men over my lifetime and have suffered some serious heartbreak. A lot of that had to do with me putting too much on the relationship rather than focusing on myself as a part of that relationship. I have grown over the years and definitely become more focused on myself. I value myself more than I did when I was in those relationships...I began to put too much pressure on making the person I was with be the right one, even though I knew that they weren’t. I would focus on what I could do to make them want me more, or make the relationship better, rather than what I could do to make myself better and make myself happier. I am at a point in my life where I really am happy with who I am and what I am and where I am. It’s taken me a long time, but I don’t put that kind of pressure on myself anymore to be with someone or be married.

Respondent 17, a 26-year-old woman expressed the same level of self-satisfaction:

I think I’m single because I want to be. I have no desire to be with anyone right now.

She didn’t feel the need to go any further than that. For two other women, it was just as simple--they didn’t want to be married right now so they weren’t.

A majority of the women kind of fell in the middle on this questions---they weren't really sure why they weren't married at this time. Some seemed somewhat bothered by that fact and others just kind of rolled with it. Respondent 1 had expectations to be married years ago:

I really thought when I was younger that my life would turn out differently than it has. We are kind of forced this idea of how things are supposed to go in your life---you graduate high school, go to college, fall in love, get married, have babies, have a house with the white picket fence. I thought I would have that by now. I'm not even close to that. I'm not even sure I'm an adult yet. I really thought I would be married with babies. I see my friends with babies and I practically rip the kids out of their arms when I see them. My friends call me the baby hog. Every time there is a baby around I stake claim on it.

After talking at length about how she wanted a baby, this woman eventually said:

I guess I just have a lot of growing up to do.

Respondent 8 had a similar stance:

My parents were never married, but I was never going to be like my parents. I was convinced for a long time that my high school sweetheart and I were going to get married. He even bought me a ring, but we were really toxic together, and I still don't think I'm completely over him. If given the chance to be with him now, I would, and it's how many years later? Part of me thinks that I will never get over him. I don't know if I'll ever be truly happy with anyone else, even the father of my kid.

Although, not all the women who weren't sure why they were single were upset about previous relationships or where they were in their life, for some it was a simple "I don't know why I'm single." Respondent 19, a 28-year-old was proud of her status:

I have a great job that I love, and I work really hard. I have a great apartment and great friends and a pretty fucking great life overall. I don't know why I'm not married because someone's missing out. I'm awesome.

Some women who were definitely unhappy about their current "single" marital status and were not shy about their feelings. These women were the most emotionally charged of the respondents. Respondent 1 complained:

I was off and on with my ex for years with the expectation that every time we got back together we were on the same page. We never were. I wanted more, he pulled away. I pulled away, he pushed to be closer. We could never get on the same page and I really can say we both screwed it up in the end. I wanted to be married to him and we just couldn't make it work. I'm not married right now because we were horrible to each other – it would only be worse if we were married. I'm happy I'm not married to him. I know why I'm not married – because we were assholes to each other.

Respondent 6 puts the blame on her current boyfriend regarding her single status:

I have been begging for a ring for the last year. We have a kid together, we know we want to be with each other, so I don't understand why he just doesn't get me a ring. We bought a house together and I can raise his kid but he can't buy a ring? I keep asking him when he's going to propose. I think he is sick of me asking him. I'm at the point where I don't even care if it's a ring from Walmart. He knows I'll say yes. I don't know why we keep dragging it out if we both know it's not going to happen. I'm not married because he's not proposing. He's stuck with me for life either way, he may as well just get it over with. I'm about ready to buy my own damn ring.

Of all the respondents in this study, all of them valued marriage as a necessary step in their adult life. Fourteen of the women flat out said “yes” it is a necessary step, and the other seven believe it is “somewhat” necessary. Along with that, 17 expressed a desire to marry and four have “somewhat” of a desire to marry, but not as strong as the other 17. There was not a single woman in the study who declared that marriage was not a necessary step in their adult life nor was there a single woman who stated that they 100% did not have a desire to marry at any point in their adult life. Respondent 2 explained her view on marriage relative to her parent’s situation:

My parents got married shortly after they graduated from college. They have been together, and happy, for over 30 years. I don’t know if you see a lot of that anymore---I feel lucky to have them as positive role models about how a relationship should be. I want to be married at some point---not right this second---but at some point. I can’t imagine being my grandparents’ age and being alone. It would be nice to have someone to share my life with---my whole life with. I don’t want to live my life without someone to share it with. My parents have really been great parents. I hope to have what they have some day.

Along the same lines, Respondent 16, a 27-year-old woman, cited her parent’s relationship as an example:

They had some big fights that I remember as a kid. Stuff that I probably shouldn’t have seen, but at the same time, I am happy I did. It helps to see the good and the bad in people’s lives to really appreciate things. As an adult, I can look at where they are now and how they had to work at their relationship, but they are happy. I want to know

someone is going to stand by my side even when things get hard. My parents did that for each other. Sometimes I don't feel like an adult---sometimes I feel like I need an adult---but I want to have kids and I want to have someone who is there to co-parent with me and raise kids to know right from wrong, you know? It just seems like that's how things are "supposed" to go.

Respondent 18 blamed society's expectations for her stance on valuing marriage as a necessary part of her adult life:

I think the world expects me to get married more than I expect myself to---being a single woman is only going to get me so far in terms of certain things. I've seen it at work; the women who are married are treated differently. The women who have children are treated differently. I am sick of going to friends' weddings and always having people ask me, "So when are you getting married?" I'm not even dating anyone right now---why would I be thinking about getting married. I feel like getting married is something that will validate me in the eyes of others rather than validate me for me. Does that make sense?

One of the recurring themes in these women's responses is outside influence. There was often reference to extended family members, old friends, or acquaintances that would consistently ask if they were seeing someone or, if they were in a relationship, when they would be getting married. These women all expressed encountering people who have made comment about their age, their marital status, and the time-frame in which they should be having children.

With outside pressure an inevitable force, the question shifted to blatantly asking the women if they wish they were already married at this point. Four of the women were a definite "yes" that they wish they were already married, eight "somewhat" wish they were already

married, and the remaining nine stated that they did not wish they were already married. The “yes” responses came from women in stable, long-term relationships that saw it as the next progression in the relationship. Going back to Respondent 6, who blamed her boyfriend for her unmarried status, she said:

I have been with my boyfriend for a long time, it’s just that time that we take things to the next level. We know we’re going to be together. Like I said before, he knows I don’t care what the ring looks like. I already have the wedding planned---he’s even helped me do some of the planning. We know who is standing, where it’s going to be, and all the other details. I don’t understand what the hold-up is and I know he is sick of me asking.

Respondent 20 is in a long-term relationship and stated:

I think the only reason I want to be married right now is because I feel like I already am – we live together, we spend most of our spare time together, and he drives me nuts most of the time. Everyone is constantly asking, ‘so when are you two getting married?’ to the point where I am sick of hearing it. I think I just want to be married so the constant questioning of when I will be married will stop. My family is the worst. Every time we go out of town my mom thinks I am coming back with a ring. It’s almost like I’m disappointing them. My boyfriend and I are perfectly happy the way we are – it’s everyone else that has a problem that we’re not married yet.

The “somewhat” responses seemed to come mostly from women who did not classify themselves in a serious or a long-term relationship. They seemed to cite direct or indirect pressure for friends or family. Respondent 12, a 27-year-old said:

I would like to be married---maybe not right this second---but I feel like it’s all around me. I can’t avoid it. I go on Facebook and someone else I know is either getting married

or having a baby. I see those memes all over the internet with sayings like “everyone’s getting pregnant and I’m over here thinking what box of wine should I buy?” And then I think about what box of wine I should buy because that’s where I’m at in my life. I don’t have someone that I can call my boyfriend even, but there is a guy that I have been hanging out with for a while that I could potentially date. I guess I just feel like I am at an age where I need to start growing up and doing the things normal people do – grow up, get married, have a baby, stop going to the bar all the time.

Respondent 11, a 31-year-old echoed a similar sentiment:

I see a lot of people I know that I feel are growing up while I am kind of stuck. I have been to so many weddings in the last few years I’m beginning to think if I ever get married I am going to have to have a guest list of 500 because I have been to so many over the years. I have a collection of horrible bridesmaid dresses that need to just go to Goodwill. They hang in my closet like this evil reminder of my single status. If anything, I would like to be married so I could force my friends into buying a shitty overpriced dress they’ll never wear again to show how much they love me. You know what I mean? I have worn some pretty hideous dresses and endured some pretty hideous behavior from bride friends. It’s my turn to be awful for a few months.

The largest group of women, however, said that they did not wish they were already married.

Respondent 20 explained:

I have friends from college, high school, whatever, who got married really young. I look at them and see that they don’t have it easy. A lot of them have struggled financially, or just got married too fast, too young. I have had a friend of mine tell me that she regrets getting married so young---hearing things like that make me feel better for taking my

time. I don't know if there is a right time to get married, but I think I may have avoided doing it when I wasn't mature enough on my own. I think I have myself pretty well figured out; I think maybe that's where they went wrong---they didn't know who they were as individuals and are having an even harder time navigating things as a couple.

Respondent 21 explained her perspective:

I don't understand the need by some women to get married. I have seen my mom go through one divorce, almost two. She raised me on her own for a long time before she married my step-dad. I have two kids of my own---I don't get any help from their dads and I don't see how adding a marriage into this whole equation would make anything better. There might be a rare man out there willing to take on two kids that aren't his and all the baggage that comes with me. I really can't focus on what I don't have in my life and try to focus on what I do have. My kids are healthy, happy, and just great kids. I can't imagine putting a man before my kids. I don't know if I'll ever get married. It would be nice to have some help, but I don't think it's realistic. I'm not 25 and carefree. I'm 34 with 2 kids and 2 jobs and a lot on my plate. I've dated plenty of assholes, you know who one of 'em is, and let's just say I'm better off single.

With that sentiment, I moved on to ask the women what were some of the reasons they believed they weren't currently married. There was a large variety of answers---kids, partying, work/career conflicts, lack of available men, lack of quality men, and lack of desire to be married. The question was met with sarcasm on the part of some---the fact that some of these women weren't currently in a relationship definitely was the largest determining factor. Some of the other justifications for not currently being married were that they had no time to date, they

were too focused on themselves, too selfish to be with someone, or just not interested in settling down at this time.

The women were then questioned if they thought that being unmarried allowed them to do things that they would otherwise be unable to do. The women did not equate a certain amount of freedom to being unmarried, but rather to not being a relationship entirely, or not having financial reliance on a significant other. Respondent 13, a 26-year-old rationalized:

There is a lot of freedom in the single life. I have been single for a long time---I almost feel like my friends that do have boyfriends or husbands are still living with their parents in a way. They have to tell someone where they are going, when they'll be back, who they'll be with...I can go where I want, when I want, and not have to answer to anyone. My friends might give me shit once in a while for making bad decisions after too many shots, but I'm not going to get lectured. I have no one to please and no one to disappoint either, other than myself. I kind of prefer it this way. If I was in a relationship I just think things would be very different and I'm not ready to make those kinds of sacrifices. Call me selfish, whatever.

Respondent 18 had this explanation:

I have been able to travel and meet new people and see parts of the world. I have made some giant leaps of faith and had many amazing experiences because of it. I have dated guys who just don't understand how I can go places I have never been before by myself. I don't have that kind of fear of someone holding me back. I am able to live because I don't have someone questioning my every move.

The level of freedom these women feel is deep. Many have traveled throughout the country and internationally. Several have taken jobs in different parts of the country at different times in their

lives, and others have praised the fact that they can just “do as they please.” All of the women interviewed have expressed some level of personal growth due to their single status. Even the women who wish they were married at this time were able to share some level of personal exploration/growth due to their single/unmarried status. Respondent 10 indicated:

I would have never finished college if I was still with my ex. He was a year older and graduated. Had we stayed together, I would be a stay-at-home mom by now with a couple of kids. One of the great things that came from our breakup was me refocusing on school and finishing my degree. Sure, I may not be using it right this second, but I hope to in the future. The job market here is tough---but at least I have a degree.

Considering that all of the women in this research were of childbearing age, it was inevitable to ask their perspective on children. Of the women interviewed, six women did currently have children (for a total of nine children). The women were asked if they felt or believed it was necessary to be married to have children, or if it was rather an ideal situation to be married. This question was one of the two that was unanimously answered by the women---it was not necessary to be married to have children. Six of the women are already mothers and did not feel they were inadequate as mothers due to their marital status. In fact, some of the mothers believed they were better off not married. Respondent 21, a single mother, said:

I don't think anyone ever sets out to be a single mother. I really didn't think it would happen to me. But if I would have been married to the father, we would be divorced by now, or we would have killed each other. We don't even speak now. But I wouldn't trade my children for the world. In a perfect world he would have been the right man, we would have been married, and I wouldn't have to work two jobs to support my kids. But shit happens.

Another mother, Respondent 6, who is currently in a relationship with the child's father, expressed some relief that she was not married:

Honestly, financially, our lives are much easier because we aren't married. We were both surprised when I got pregnant---he definitely wasn't planned. We struggle now to make ends meet and I think if we weren't able to get the kind of help we can get because we are financially independent we would be in a different place. We don't fight over money right now, and we both do the best we can to separately contribute to the household. In many ways I am glad we had our son first – he kind of forced us to grow up when maybe we weren't ready for it. But I think we're doing a good job.

Sharing a similar sentiment was another unmarried mother, Respondent 17:

I got pregnant from what I thought was a drunk one-night stand. What I thought was some guy I was never going to see again turned into my fiancée. I have never been the type to conform to others' expectations of how I am supposed to be---you've seen my tattoos. I don't give a fuck what people think. My morning coffee mug has the "C-word" on it---do you really think I care that I'm not married and have a kid?

Along with the single/unmarried mothers, the women without children did not feel they had to be married to have children, although there was still statements that this was the "desired" status. Respondent 9 was impacted by her family:

My family does put pressure on me to have children. My mom doesn't even care at this point if I am married or not, she just wants grandbabies. Knowing that she was a single mom, I think she is probably more accepting than others about having a kid on your own. I would like to be married before I have children just because I feel like that would force the father to be in the kids' lives but I don't think it's a requirement. I just

don't want to have to struggle like my mom did; I'm kind of surprised sometimes that she is so pushy about me having kids knowing what she went through.

Respondent 3 echoed that response:

I think we all kind of grow up with the idea of the perfect husband, perfect house, perfect children, and how we are supposed to be. It would be nice to be able to have stability and a mature relationship. Of course I want all of those things but if things don't happen that way I'm not going to be devastated, you know? I kind of just want to be with someone where I feel it's a healthy and stable relationship and wants to have the kid. I would hate to end up on Maury, because at times it feels like that's how I'm going to end up. You can only make fun of people for so long before you turn into them---desperation makes you do crazy things.

Although some of the women were able to make light of the situation, they do not feel as though it is as stigmatized as it was to be a single mother, but rather, how things seem to be going in current society. The tone of these women was that there was more of an acceptance of single mothers, children born out of wedlock, and women's right to choose. There was almost a laissez-faire attitude toward having children---it will happen when it happens, regardless of circumstance, married or not.

There is kind of an odd dichotomy between the thoughts of these women. Although they do not feel it is necessary to be married to have children, many of them still feel like their desire to have children contributes to their desire to marry. The women were directly asked if their desire for children necessitates a desire for marriage. Respondent 13 replied:

I don't think wanting kids makes me have to get married---but I think it is ideal. I feel like things would be a lot easier if I'm not the only one waking up in the middle

of the night to change diapers or make a bottle. One of my fears is to be that single mother that has to go back to work within a couple weeks of the baby being born because you can't afford to take more time off. Having a husband would just make the whole transition easier.

The fact that it might be "easier" with a spouse was the general consensus among the women. They expressed a great desire for shared responsibility, whether it be financial, emotional, or physical. By having a spouse the women felt it would allow them to maintain sanity or at least a sense of normalcy. Respondent 16 said:

My friend has a child and her husband is wonderful. A lot of times people think once your friends get married they fall off the face of the earth and when they have kids it only gets worse. Her husband encourages her to have girls nights and come out with us still. It is nice to see that it is possible to get support and help and even go out and have drinks with your friends once in a while even though you are a mother. She does the same for him by allowing him to have guys nights---it's not like it's completely one sided---but you do see more fathers getting the chance to go out than moms. It's nice to know that there are men out there who are willing to share the responsibility.

Again, there was the echoing of "desirable" life conditions than realistic or necessary. The women, as a whole, believe that being married and having a child is the ideal, but not required, nor do they need to be married to have fulfilling lives with children (at least this is their perception with most of them not being mothers at this time).

The women were asked if they valued "traditional lifestyles" as typically were the pattern in this area but they were also asked if they felt pressure to maintain a traditional lifestyle in their own lives. There is a strong Christian background along with a majority of the population

favoring affiliations with conservative politicians/political views. That influence is felt with the women constantly referring to the “ideal” way of life rather than what is realistic. There seems to be a recognition that a certain way of life is preferred, while another, although potentially more realistic or attainable, is not favored as highly or embraced by the conservative mainstream as warmly. Several of the women, especially the single mothers, felt as though they were still stigmatized for their current marital status, rather than applauded for being strong role models for their children. Seventeen of the women said that they “somewhat” value traditional lifestyles, and four said that they “do not” value traditional lifestyles, or feel it to be a necessary way to live. All of the women but one said that they felt pressure in some way to maintain a traditional lifestyle in their own life. The outside influence is strong; many women reference family members, friends, and social circles as major sources of pressure to maintain a traditional lifestyle. Respondent 20 lamented:

It’s impossible not to feel pressure from other people---it’s everywhere. I recently started a new job where most of the women are older and married. Once they heard I had a long term relationship the questions immediately became, “So why aren’t you married? Do you want to get married? Why hasn’t he ask you yet? Is he going to ask you? Do you want him to ask you? I can’t believe you’re not married. He should probably ask soon.” These are people who barely know me and are already making judgment calls on the way I live my life. What if my boyfriend was some dead-beat who did nothing with his life and I was wasting my life with him? It wouldn’t matter---what matters is we have been together for a while and society thinks I need to be married by now. What about what I want out of life. No one ever stops to think that maybe I’m not ready. Maybe I don’t want to be married.

In a similar tone, Respondent 16 was visibly annoyed by the reactions she has received went on to explain:

I was recently at a baby shower and could not believe how quickly the conversation turned to my relationship. There were a lot of women there that I used to work with that knew I had a serious boyfriend of a few years. After they had asked the standard “How are things?” everything immediately shifted to “When are you getting married?” like somehow the only way my relationship had value to it is if there was some legal implication to it. I was really kind of bothered and told my boyfriend about it when I got home. I feel like we are happier than a lot of married people we know. Maybe I haven’t hit these life milestones that most people hit---maybe I never will. But I’m happy in my relationship and don’t feel the lack of a ring and a piece of paper make it any less worthwhile than a marriage. It’s really frustrating to run into people from my past and constantly have to explain my situation. I feel like I have a speech prepared at this point. It’s pretty sad that people can’t look past the fact that I’m not married to see that I’m in a really great spot in my life. Just because a lot of my friends are getting married and having babies doesn’t mean I feel below them because I’m not.

Respondent 15 stood her ground on her choices and did not seem to allow outside influence to place pressure on her:

I have never been the type to do what people expected of me and I’m not about to start now. I think it’s really sad when I see my friends lamenting over the fact that they are single or not married or begging their boyfriends for rings. I have so much going on in my life that comparing myself to others isn’t going to help me get where I want to be. The more focus you place on others, the less focus you have on yourself and your own

goals. I am not here to live anyone's life but my own. What good is it going to do me to look at others and constantly compare myself? I will never be happy if I get stuck doing that. I take my life one day at a time, and definitely try to not take it too seriously.

5 & 6. Sexual Behavior & Benefits of Marriage

The women in this study were very forthcoming about everything, and their sexual experiences and activity were no exception. All of the women that participated have been or are currently sexually active. Considering that they have all engaged in consensual sexual practices at some point in their adult life, it is assumed that these women have an accepting attitude of premarital sex. They were asked if society's more accepting attitude of premarital sex had any impact on their decision to marry. There were a mix of responses---three of the women stated, yes, this acceptance did impact their decision to marry; 14 said somewhat/might have an impact on their decision; and four said no, society's more accepting attitude did not have an impact on their decision to marry. They were also asked how they felt about cohabitation. Many women, when explaining their reasons behind their decision to delay marriage in terms of sexual practices, referenced living with a significant other either currently or in the past.

Of the women that stated that society's more accepting attitude of premarital sex had an impact on their decision to marry, the reasoning behind that answer was similar. The women felt less pressure to be married in order to embrace their sexual desires/appetites. Respondent 14 said:

I don't feel the kind of judgment that people from other generations may have felt. I have been living with my boyfriend for over a year. When I told my parents that I was moving in with him they were more concerned about us being able to afford rent than their

friends having something to say about their “hussy” of a daughter or whatever they called it back in the day. I think that if my parents wanted to live together when they were first dating it would have been more of an issue. It was just assumed that they would get married, then live together...having accepting parents is reflective of having a more accepting generation about couples living together. I am pretty sure my parents know we sleep together---they helped us buy my bed. I just think it is more common for people to live together nowadays than it was when they were growing up...I think most of my friends have lived with a boyfriend at some point in their relationship. It’s a lot cheaper to break a lease than it is to get a divorce. I just think it makes more sense to make sure you can live with each other before you get married. To me it got to a point where I knew I was going to be either staying at his place or he was going to be staying at mine. There is no point to rent two shitty apartments when we are only going to spend time at one anyway---this way I can get a decent place to live and live with my boyfriend. It’s a win-win.

The majority of the women (14) said that society’s more accepting attitude toward cohabitation somewhat/might have an impact on their decision to delay marriage. It almost seemed that when they were presented with this question, the notion that society embracing a more sexually liberal culture was something they never considered relevant to their current lifestyle or the choices they are making in their current relationship status. It was almost as if I could see them processing the idea in front of me and articulating responses to a new idea.

Respondent 13 confessed:

You know, I never really thought about it like that to be honest. I always just assumed I am single, don’t have a boyfriend, haven’t had one in a long time, and that is why I’m not

married. I guess the fact that people are more accepting of couples living together might have some effect on me. I can tell you that I don't think I would marry someone without living with them first. I think it is completely insane to marry someone that you have never spent the night with, never smelled their horrible morning breath, or whether or not they do the dishes. I had an ex who was a total slob and it drove me insane. Imagine spending all this money on a huge wedding, and two weeks into it, the guy is an absolute slob. I would freak. I feel like this is stuff you can get out of the way before you are married to make sure you are on the same page about stuff.

Respondent 2 shared a similar attitude:

I have lived with boyfriends in the past and felt like it was a necessary step in the relationship prior to marriage. We learned about each other's quirks and bad habits early on---I had one who had the most God awful smelling shoes ever, to the point where I would have to spray them with Febreze on a daily basis. I think when you live apart you can still kind of idealize them in a way---you don't smell the bathroom after they come out, you don't see the pile of dirty dishes in the sink, you don't see the pile of laundry---you get what I'm saying? I want my relationships to be transparent, and being on your best behavior because you have "company" over isn't transparent to me. My idea of intimacy runs deeper than sex---it's also about being able to fart in front of my boyfriend---you know how many girls don't do that!? It's insane. I fart all the time. I couldn't be married to someone I had to tip-toe around.

She then further explained how society may have an impact on her decision:

I don't feel like I was judged for living with exes or that I have been labeled poorly because I have lived with multiple boyfriends. I think it is just how our generation kind

of figures things out---we take chances but are also cautious about getting in too deep because a lot of us come from broken homes.

The final group of women (four) said that society's more accepting attitude toward premarital sex did not have any impact on their decision to marry. Respondent 8 said:

I'm not married yet because I'm not married yet. I'm not ready. If I was ready and had the right partner, I would probably be there. It has nothing to do with anyone but myself. I am so focused on doing what is best for me right now that I am really not concerned about what other people think or what other people value.

On a similar notion, the women were then presented with the idea of cohabitation over marriage. Did the women believe that there were advantages or disadvantages to cohabitation over marriage? Do they, or would they prefer a lifestyle of cohabitation over marriage? Is cohabitation more desirable than marriage overall? Respondent 7 was very forthcoming in her interpretation of cohabitation:

Rent is cheap. Bills are cheap. The only shitty thing is if you get into a fight you don't have your own place to go to anymore---you actually have to deal with problems rather than run home, drink box wine, and watch Lifetime. On the flipside, I lived with female roommates for years. Living with a significant other is a whole different experience. I never have to worry about him stealing my clothes or makeup. It's kind of a nice change of pace.

Most women disclosed that they had lived in some kind of roommate situation in the past---whether that be in college or after college as a money saving option. Respondent 6 shared:

I have lived with a lot of different people over the year, close friends, extended

family members, strangers, friends of friends, you name it. There is a certain sense of security I experience living with my boyfriend. I don't ever feel like I am confined to my room or need to behave in a certain way in fear of pissing someone off for being too loud or too messy. Although, he drives me nuts because he is a slob and I am not. It is such a learning curve living with a boyfriend. Our lives are very much intertwined, more so than when I lived with roommates. I had a lot of roommates that became dear friends and we shared a lot of our lives with each other but the sheer level of intimacy when living with a boyfriend is so different than anything else...I don't think it would be any different if we were married, but I am glad that I opted to live with him before. There are things that take some getting used to, you know? His habits, his snoring, all of these things that could be deal-breakers if I was naïve coming into a future marriage. There is a lot less on the line if we just break a lease and one of us moves out. I'm too broke to get a divorce.

It is easy to say after talking with the women that all of them believe that there is a level of benefit received in cohabitation, but that doesn't come without a downside as well. For many of them, pressures of family members impacted their decision to move in or not to move in with a significant other. Several expressed a level of concern that they were "disappointing" their family by not adhering to traditional standards of women and men living separately prior to marriage. Respondent 12 explained:

I come from a big family where there is just a certain level of expectation---even I thought I would be married by now and I could just tell that living with a boyfriend would have really disappointed my family because they would tell me over and over again that I shouldn't be living with a boyfriend---what would the neighbors think?

It's messed up that my decisions about where I sleep at night is really having an impact on my geriatric neighbors but I guess who I sleep with and where I sleep is really causing them to lose sleep. Rather than disappoint my neighbors who I never speak to I should put my life on hold, because that makes a lot of sense.

The impact cohabitation had on the family and the community was a recurring theme as many families seem to still cling to traditional values and, in my opinion, archaic views about lifestyle choice. Although that level of "disappointment" may have been a voice in the back of many of these minds, it didn't necessarily deter them from choosing for themselves to cohabit with an intimate partner. There was a level of acceptance among the women that they knew they were making choices that their family may not agree with, but they felt was the best choice for them at the time.

When it comes to cohabitation being a preference over marriage, the recurring attitude was that it was a step towards marriage, rather than a preferred choice over marriage. It goes along with the fact that 19 of the 21 women strongly agreed that there were benefits to marriage. The other 2 women somewhat agreed that there were benefits to marriage. Respondent 6 explained:

I've done things out of order. I got pregnant when my boyfriend and I weren't even technically together let alone living together but we make it work (laughs) somehow we made it work. He knows that I want to be married---I have already started planning the wedding so if he said he didn't know that's what I wanted I don't know what he thinks I want. In a perfect world we would have been married when we got pregnant but we weren't, we were just drunk and slept together. We keep pushing off the wedding and I will probably get pregnant a few more times at this rate. We want more kids and I'm not

going to put that off just because I don't have a ring. He knows what ring I want. Not having it isn't going to stop me from getting pregnant.

The women that were interviewed fully embraced their ability to make their own decisions but echoes of previously held values and morals were found in their perceived desire to marry at some point in their life, regardless of whether or not they were currently cohabitating with an intimate partner.

The women were asked, "What kind of pressures (if any) do traditional communities and Christian Conservative values have on your decision to marry/is there any conscious impact of your community surroundings on your decision to delay marriage?" Aside from the obvious tax breaks and potential opportunity for other benefits (medical, dental, etc.) there were other benefits the women considered when touting positivity of marriage values. It remains consistent that the women felt there was judgment on a community level and it was an expectation that at some point they would get married, regardless of where they were in terms of their current relationship (if they were in one), their educational status, their employment status, their financial status, whether or not they had children, and several other factors (although these were the most common factors discussed). Although the community these women live in does not dictate their lifestyle choices, it will always play a factor; whether they choose to succumb to the expectations, ignore those expectations, or defy them, they are still influenced by those expectations. These women and their life decisions will forever be influenced in the area in which they learned their values, morals, and social status. Respondent 1 joked:

I hear the church bells outside of my window every Sunday---they interrupt my hangover sleep more than they make me to go to church, you know...at least I know what time it is.

The Christian influence is undeniable; on my 5 mile drive home from work, I pass seven visible churches. The traditional values of this area persist and effect the way these women perceive themselves and their decisions.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

When we look back at the religious and political composition of this area, we can see its persisting impact in decision-making. Even though women have adapted a more liberal view of life, marriage is still valued. Overall, it appears that there are several factors that influence young women's decision to delay marriage. With a variety of different background and family compositions, the women of this study have offered several reasons that justify their decisions. Although this is not an exhaustive list of reasons why women have chosen to delay potential relationships and marriage, it does provide insight that even though the studied county is a rural and conservative area, many of the women have similar attitudes to women in various metropolitan areas and throughout the country. Women have embraced a more liberal attitude and have shown that their identity does not rely on their marital status or the status of a spouse.

There has been an emergence of commonalities among the women interviewed. The women want to pursue higher education, they want to pursue career opportunities, they don't want to end up like their divorced parents, or they simply don't feel the need to make a commitment as permanent as marriage. Many of the women in this study did not feel they had to be married to have children, and this was proven by the fact that some of them were already mothers and content with their decision to have children prior to marriage. As mentioned previously, this geographic area offers avenues for women to attend college, is home to a wide variety of career options for women to be financially stable without the support of a man, and the area offers a low cost of living, which may contribute to the reasons why they feel they can have families without a marriage. Just because these women are in a rural area, they are not completely limited in their choices. Women in this area are asserting themselves and embracing

feminist ideas, without explicitly declaring themselves to be feminists. They are no longer limited by the conservative attitudes of the area or the ideals that their religion may be encouraging them to uphold. The biggest takeaway is that these women have a choice to live their lives in the ways that they deem fit, regardless of the expectations placed on them being from a conservative area. Even those women that may have once been affiliated with churches that preached the most conservative and traditional lifestyles are embracing a new “normal” for themselves and their future.

Educational and employment opportunities are more robust for women in this area than they were in the past. With a majority of the participants completing at least some college credits, they felt that they were on a path for greater opportunities. They held a variety of different full-time positions and were not limited in their ambitions. Many felt they were able to pursue higher education or more prestigious careers without marriage hindering their ability to do so. With most of the women expressing aspirations to greater education/employment, they also indicated that these aspirations were a priority over marriage. Personal goals were more highly regarded than marriage.

Leisure time is also something that was highly valued by these women. Living in a seasonal playground these women had indicated plenty of opportunities to enjoy life as a single woman. All of these women benefitted from having disposable income. Finding a partner with similar interests was deemed important and also recognized as one of the best ways to find a potential/future partner. Alcohol consumption was frequent and common among the participants although they did not see this as a priority over marriage. Although the women were upfront about their active and regular pursuits for leisure and recreation, they did not feel it was

interfering with their marriage potential, rather the quantity and quality of available mates in the area was a greater factor.

The women in this study also acknowledged that there is sexual freedom afforded to them and less of a stigma placed on single or unwed mothers. Six of the women in this study were already mothers and several had mentioned cohabitating with a significant other at some point in their past and it being their current living situation. Although the women were residing in a politically conservative area, they still had a liberal attitude toward premarital sex and fought against the negative stigma of being a single mother. These women do not believe they need to be married to be mothers or express themselves sexually. They also felt that there were advantages to cohabitation over marriage and even though some see it as a journey to marriage, for others, marriage isn't always the end game. The traditional attitude of marriage then children still persists, but the women in this study certainly demonstrated that you can do things "out of order" or in a way that suits your needs and not succumb to the community pressure of the way things "should be."

There are certainly several limitations to this study. The interview pool was small and isn't meant to be a summation of the attitudes of all women in this area. More specifically, there are many women within this age range that have followed the more "traditional" path in life and have married and had children since the original interviews were held. In order to gain greater perspective on this issue, it would be valuable to research those women that have followed a traditional path and gather insight regarding their views on the decisions they have made and on women that have deviated from traditional expectations. In all reality, a longitudinal study of these women would be valuable. I consider this research a snapshot of their life, but it would be important to see if their attitudes and beliefs evolve as more of them do travel down the path to

motherhood, marriage, possibly give up on their careers or their education, or other choices they may make. Although progressive in their late 20s and early 30s, will these women maintain these attitudes as more of these women have children?

Again, it is important to note that most of the women of this study expressed a desire to marry someday. Although these women are following alternative paths and contributing to the rising mean age of a woman's first marriage, they are still strongly compelled to eventually marry. It's not that women don't want to marry; it's that they want to embrace opportunity beyond being a mother and housewife. The notion of traditional values still resonant with these women, but their approach to that lifestyle doesn't mirror that of their parents or grandparents. This could be considered the natural progression or evolution of traditional values. They all still desire a single partner to share their life with but don't feel the need to embrace the "stay-at-home" lifestyle of the women of previous generations. As mentioned previously, following-up with these women in the future could offer greater insight to the evolution of their ideas and if this new "normal" will persist into the future. Will their ideals change should more of them embrace a traditional lifestyle? Will more of them embrace a traditional lifestyle?

There is also a realization that most families cannot function on a single income. When we think of traditional families, we think of a mother at home raising the children and the husband out making the money to support the family---the traditional "breadwinner." In order to survive, many families rely on two incomes. Women have found themselves working full-time jobs, and some even working several jobs in order to survive. Working women now can afford a certain financial freedom that women in previous generations did not have access to. Women are making their own money and able to spend their disposable dollars as they deem fit.

The women in this study, in my opinion, in many ways, are no different than women in urban areas. They have dreams, aspirations, and desires to do things in their life with or without a legally committed partner. They have achieved great successes and great failures. Their choice to delay marriage has not prevented them from having children, finding joy, or pursuing leisure interests. At the end of the day, the traditional belief in the value of marriage still resonates and is strong within these women. For many, when one enters into marriage and has children they are considered a “true” adult, but I think the women in this study would disagree. Some of them are mothers, they are all employed and making an honest living for themselves while contributing to society. They have achieved levels of education that previous generations of women could only have dreams about. The fact that they are living in a traditional area and succeeding goes to show that the overall attitudes in the area may be changing. In the future, opening the discussion to the wider public about conceptions of young women that are unmarried could provide a deeper glimpse into how these women are perceived. As America becomes more progressive and willing to accept less traditional paths in life, it seems as though this isolated county may just be following along.

If the origins of the area have taught us anything it is that people are willing to evolve, even slowly. I think back to the days of the miners and see the historical landmarks all over the landscape. The county itself has changed from a mining community to a diverse area with several cultural and ethnic groups now finding a home. The small universities have asserted themselves and even been competitive on a national/international scale. The hospitals continue to grow and serve a larger population. The political climate has evolved where we see people participating in the Women’s March and other mainstream events once only seen in major cities. The community holds a lot of promise and the women in this study have proven that they are not

limited by the historically conservative values and beliefs area. Rather, they may be the driving force of change and acceptance in the region. These women are proving that they are able to be successful even though they may be defying the traditionally accepted lifestyle. They are successful in their careers, as mothers, as girlfriends, as single women, as students, as graduates, and as contributors to their community. The landscape of the region may be similar to that of their mining ancestors of the past, but it is also slowly opening up to the wider world, and people are more willing to accept more “controversial” ideas.

This region is very distinct for many reasons, but there are several other small communities that have stories to tell. Women across the country have valuable stories to tell and still face adversity and judgment simply because they are women. I hope the women in this study can help other women realize that their value need not be defined through a relationship nor must their worth come from having children. The success of these women speaks volumes to the fact that each woman has the right to determine what course is best for her in life, and they should feel empowered to act in their best interest.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Project Title: “I Don’t” A Look at Attitudes Towards Delaying Marriage in a Traditional Community

Investigator: Abbi S. Halkola Eastern Michigan University

Co-Investigator: Robert M. Orrange (Thesis Chair) & Donna Selman

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the attitudes individuals possess about delaying marriage in traditional communities that seem to value traditional lifestyles. The trend across the country seems to be delaying marriages and this research hopes to look at how mainstream attitudes are reaching rural, traditional areas.

Procedure: This research will be conducted through face to face interviews. The researcher will ask you questions pertaining to your attitudes towards marriage, sexuality, and your leisure activities that may reflect your decisions to delay marriage. The researcher will answer any questions you may have about the interview, and witness your signature to this consent form. You must be at least 25 years old, single, and never have been married to take part in this study. The interviews will be recorded unless you would prefer to not be recorded. The interviews will typically be about half an hour long but may run shorter or longer depending upon your own participation. You will be asked to complete an interview about your individual choices about delaying marriage, your work, education, desire for family or children, and what you like to do in

your free time. Upon completing the interview you will be given a duplicate copy of this informed consent, which includes follow-up contact information, if needed.

Confidentiality: Only the researcher and co-investigators will have access to the audio recordings and results. The results will be stored separately from the consent form, which includes your name and any other identifying information. At no time will your name be associated with your responses from the interview.

All related materials will be kept in locked file cabinets in the researcher's office and electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer.

Expected Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to you by participating in this interview. All results will be kept completely confidential. You have the right to decline to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You also have the right to end the interview at any time.

Expected Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you by participating in this study but you may be participating in a study that can benefit future research and understanding of behavior.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw from the study there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you.

Use of Research Results: Results will be presented in such a manner to describe characteristics (age range, sex, etc) of those interviewed only. No names will be revealed but other identifying information (age range, sex, employment status, etc) may be presented. Due to the nature of this research, and the population being researched, the material will be handled delicately. It is important to protect the identity of those participating in the study but also provide accurate results. Caution will be taken to prevent easy identification of all participants. Results may be presented at research meetings and conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of a master's thesis being conducted by the principal investigator.

Future Questions: If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study now or in the future, you can contact the principal investigator, **Abbi S. Halkola** at **(906)370-6642** or via e-mail **abbi@upkids.com**.

This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee for use from June 2, 2012 to June 2, 2013. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the Director of the Graduate School (734.487.0042, human.subjects@emich.edu) or Dr. Robert M. Orrange, thesis advisor (734.487.0012, rorange@emich.edu).

Counseling Resources –

Copper Island Behavioral Health: (906)482-9440 – Drug and Alcohol rehab/counseling and mental health. Provides referrals to local therapists and appropriate agencies based upon individual cases.

Barbara Kettle Gundlach Shelter: (906)337-5623 – Free and confidential individual counseling providing both shelter and crisis consultation including but not limited to victims of domestic violence. Referral services also available to appropriate agencies.

Salmi Christian Counseling: (906)482-2231 salmichristiancounseling.com – Private individual counseling service with a strong Christian emphasis dealing with addiction, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, among other things. Services provided by Kathryn M. Salmi licensed by the State of Michigan as a professional counselor.

Dial Help, Inc: (906)482-HELP or (800)562-7622 dialhelp.org – A non-profit human services agency providing crisis intervention and individual counseling services.

Copper Country Mental Health Services: (906)482-9404 – Assessment and treatment for adults, crisis intervention, and emergency services through Dial Help.

Consent to Participate: I have read or had read to me all of the above information about this research study, including the research procedures, possible risks, side effects, and the likelihood of any benefit to me. The content and meaning of this information has been explained and I understand. All my questions, at this time, have been answered. I hereby consent and do voluntarily offer to follow the study requirements and take part in the study.

PRINT NAME: _____

Signatures: _____

Participant (your signature) Date: _____

Investigator or Specified Designee Date: _____

Appendix B: Approval for Human Subjects Research

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Education First

June 2, 2012

Abbi Halkola
Department of SAC

Dear Abbi:

The College of Arts and Sciences Human Subjects Review Committee (CAS HSRC) of Eastern Michigan University has reviewed and approved your proposal (#1122) titled, "“I Don't” A Look at Attitudes Towards Delaying Marriage in a Traditional Community." The CAS HSRC has determined that the rights and welfare of the individual subjects involved in this research are carefully guarded. Additionally, the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate, and the individuals participating in your study are not at risk.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the HSRC of any change in the protocol that might alter your research in any manner that differs from that upon which this approval is based. Approval of this project applies for one year from the date of this letter. If your data collection continues beyond the one-year period, you must apply for a renewal. Please specify in your consent form that approval is from 6/2/2012 to 6/1/2013.

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, I wish you success in conducting your research.

Sincerely,



Alissa Huth-Bocks, Ph.D.
CAS Human Subjects Review Committee Chair

Note: If project continues beyond the length of **one** year, please submit a continuation request form by 6/1/2013.

cc: Robert Orrange, Ph.D.

University Human Subjects Review Committee · Eastern Michigan University · 200 Boone Hall
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Phone: 734.487.0042 Fax: 734.487.0050
E-mail: human.subjects@emich.edu
www.ord.emich.edu

Appendix C: Research Questions

Interview Questions:

1. Basic information:
 - a. Name.
 - b. Age.
 - c. Sex.
 - d. Sexual orientation.
 - e. Marital status.
2. Education/Employment:
 - a. Highest level of education completed.
 - b. Future aspirations for education.
 - c. Current status of employment.
 - d. Future aspirations for employment.
 - e. Do your desires for higher education/advancement in career take priority over marriage?
3. Leisure activities:
 - a. What do you like to do in your spare time?
 - b. How much of your life is dedicated to leisure activities?
 - c. How important is your leisure time to you?
 - d. Do you think that your (assumed) affinity towards leisure time hinders possibility of marriage/family?
 - e. Alcohol use/drug use:
 - i. Bing drinking/drug use/abuse.

- f. Do leisure activities (travel/socializing/athletics) take priority over marriage?
4. Current marital status (must be single to participate)/Family:
- a. Why do you think that you are currently unmarried?
 - b. Do you value marriage as a necessary step in your adult life?
 - c. Is there a desire to marry?
 - d. Do you wish you were already married?
 - e. What are some things that you think prevent you from being currently married?
 - f. Do you think being unmarried allows you to do things that you otherwise would be unable to do?
 - g. Do you have any children?
 - i. Do you believe it is necessary to be married to have children or is it ideal rather than necessary?
 - ii. Does the desire for children necessitate a desire for marriage?
 - iii. Do you value “traditional lifestyles” as typically were the pattern in this area (Houghton County)?
 - iv. Do you feel pressure to maintain a traditional lifestyle in your own life?
5. Sexual Behavior:
- a. Are you sexually active?
 - b. Attitudes about premarital sex/casual sex
 - i. Does society’s more accepting attitude of premarital sex have any impact in your decision to marry?

- c. Cohabitation versus marriage
 - i. Are there benefits to cohabitation without marriage?
 - ii. Are there disadvantages to cohabitation without marriage?
 - iii. Is maintaining a lifestyle of cohabitation preferred over marriage?

6. Benefits of marriage:

- a. Are there any perceived benefits of marriage to you?
- b. What kind of pressures (if any) do traditional communities and Christian Conservative values have on your decision to marry/is there any conscious impact of your community surroundings on your decision to delay marriage?