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Reconsidering Childfreedom: A Feminist Exploration of Discursive Identity Construction in Childfree LiveJournal Communities

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Abstract

This article employs participant definitional analysis, sensitized with feminist poststructuralism and critical ethnography, to understand three identity construction processes that members of childfree LiveJournal communities participate in: (a) naming childfreedom, (b) negotiating childfreedom, and (c) enacting childfreedom. I argue that childfree identities are contested and sometimes activist. Ultimately, I call for scholars to reconsider the definition of *childfree* to account for the complex and nuanced identities constructed by individuals who identify as such.

Keywords: childfree, childless, discourse, identity, online community, voluntarily childless

The present investigation into childfree identities began with a contradiction between the terminology used by scholars to label individuals who have made the choice never to have children and the self-labeling of individuals whom researchers seek to describe. Scholars have employed an array of labels to describe this group of people, including *voluntarily childless* (e.g., Gillespie, 2000; Houseknecht, 1987; Jeffries & Konnert, 2002), *childfree* (e.g., Baber & Dreyer, 1986; Campbell, 2003; Durham, 2008; Gillespie, 2003; Koropecykj-Cox, Romano, & Moras, 2007), and *childless by choice* (e.g., Paul, 2001; Reti, 1992; Veevers, 1980). A convincing argument has been made to adopt *childfree* over *voluntarily childless* and *childless by choice* to recognize the agency of the individual through the suffix-*free* rather than-*less* (Bartlett, 1996). However, in my personal and scholarly experience, individuals who have made the choice never to have children sometimes reject the label of *childfree* or *childless* for themselves, contradicting scholars' terminology and indicating that labels may hold great importance to individuals' identities.

As a communication scholar, I appreciate this contradiction and argue that further consideration must be given to language used when labeling and/or talking about people who make the choice to forgo having children. I undertook the present study to investigate an organized community of individuals who embrace the term *childfree* to name themselves. Through participant interviews and observation of online communities, I demonstrate that *childfree* is a complex discursive construction that is

neither denotative nor neutral; rather, it is a conscious, communicative articulation of identity that is contested among those who embrace the term. This identity is historically and culturally situated in resistance to pronatalism, resulting in stigma and stereotyping, which must be discursively managed by individuals who choose to communicate their choice to remain childless. Therefore, this topic is of pertinence to scholars who seek to understand how identity is constituted through discourse.

The present study explores the communicative construction of childfree identities through the discourses of childfree LiveJournal (<http://www.livejournal.com>) community members. Using a critical ethnographic framework and a feminist poststructural lens, I ultimately call for researchers to carefully consider how they define *childfree* in future research to account for the complex, contradictory, and nuanced identities constructed by individuals who identify as such, and to avoid reifying simplistic and heteronormative understandings of reproductive choice in research practice.

Review of Literature

Writers and scholars discussed voluntary childlessness throughout the 20th century. A 1915 manual for Bible classes cited voluntary childlessness as a cause of divorce, alongside alcoholism and nonownership of homes (Jennings, 1915, p. 68). A 1939 article in a journal called *Eugenics Review* warned of possible population decline due to economic factors, stating, "A positive population policy . . . will have to devise means of ensuring that voluntary parenthood does not become a synonym for voluntary childlessness for a large number of married couples, and of ensuring that the desire for children is not frustrated by economic circumstance" (Lafitte, 1939, p. 282). The eugenics movement fueled both scholarly and popular discourses of voluntary childlessness at this time. These discourses were often heterosexist, classist, and racist: admonishing "fit," wealthy, White women for not reproducing, and sanctioning women with "undesirable traits" for having too many children (Moore & Geist-Martin, 2013, p. 237). It was not until 1969 that the cultural belief that White women were choosing not to have children at higher rates than women of color—a belief feared by President Roosevelt (Van Vorst & Van Vorst, 1905) and eugenicists—was empirically tested. Kunz and Brinkerhoff (1969) found that childlessness among non-White couples was higher than childlessness among White couples, thereby refuting the concerns over death of the White race. Indeed, the choice never to have children is fraught with negative historical legacies in the United States.

Scholarly interest in voluntary childlessness shifted focus from eugenics to feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Moore & Geist-Martin, 2013). Academics began to reexamine existing cultural conceptions of women who chose never to have children, moving away from earlier conclusions "that the great bulk of voluntarily childless marriages are motivated by individualism, competitive consumption economically, and an infantile, self-indulgent, frequently neurotic attitude toward life" (Popenoe, 1936, p. 472). Veevers (1980) drew attention to the pervasiveness of the ideology of pronatalism, which normalizes the assumption that everyone should want to have children. This naming of taken-for-granted beliefs that guided previous research, coupled with second-wave feminist concerns for reproductive choice, began the contemporary exploration of voluntary childlessness in the United States. Discourses of childlessness also focused on environmentalism in the late 1960s with the rise of the zero population growth (ZPG) movement, concerned with promoting an equal birth and death rate to preserve the finite

resources of Earth's ecosystem (Notestein, 1970). ZPG helped legitimize the choice never to have children as an environmental imperative.

Multiple Words, Multiple Operational Definitions

The term *childfree* has been used interchangeably with *voluntarily childless* since the 1970s in both popular and scholarly discourse. The National Organization for Non-Parents, founded in 1972 to help connect people who chose childlessness, published literature and workshop material aimed at "childfree" couples (Thoen, 1979). Scholars in the 1970s also adopted the term *childfree* in research writing (e.g., Cooper, Cumber, & Hartner, 1978; Marciano, 1978). Since then, scholars who research childlessness have distinguished *involuntarily childless* (those who are childless due to infecundity) from *voluntarily childless* (those who are fecund and childless due to choice) but have continued to use the terms *voluntarily childless*, *childfree*, and *childless by choice* interchangeably to denote a person who has made a conscious decision not to have children.

Although these terms have been used interchangeably, operational definitions across studies have been problematic because of the (a) lack of separation between those who delay and those who forgo childbearing, (b) use of marriage to measure permanence of choice, and (c) use of fecundity to establish the possibility of choice. First, individuals' desire and intent to have children are often not considered, thereby grouping voluntarily childless individuals with individuals who delayed childbearing until they are physically unable to conceive (Abma & Martinez, 2006).

Second, some studies focus on married individuals or couples who have been together for a number of years to ensure commitment to childlessness (e.g., Park, 2002, 2005) or to compare results to past studies (Rovi, 1994). For many research studies, marriage is undoubtedly an important criterion for answering questions about married couples; however, given that only 53% of voluntarily childless people have been married (Abma & Martinez, 2006), marriage is an inappropriate criterion for voluntary childlessness (Houseknecht, 1987). The reliance on marriage ultimately privileges a heteronormative understanding of reproductive choice where only heterosexual couples are assumed to be able to make childbearing choices.

Third, in existing literature, choice has often been operationalized through fecundity or the physical ability to produce biological children (e.g., Abma & Martinez, 2006; Durham, 2008; Durham & Braithwaite, 2009; Park, 2002). However, Jeffries and Konnert's (2002) study revealed a discrepancy between self-identification of "childless by choice" and the researchers' classification of infertile heterosexual women as involuntarily childless. The researchers noted that women's "explanation for this apparent inconsistency was that at some point they evaluated their options— whether to keep trying to have children, to pursue fertility intervention, to pursue adoption, or to adopt a childless lifestyle" (Jeffries and Konnert, 2002, p. 100). Notably, Hayden (2010) found that 2 of 24 participants who defined themselves as "childless by choice" were stepmothers, contrasting with scholarly definitions that excluded individuals who became parents through marriage. The definitional trends in scholarship illustrate how participants' discursive constructions of choice and identity are much more complex than acknowledged by many scholars. Further, definitions that rely on participants' ability to biologically procreate privilege simplistic understandings of reproductive choice where only heterosexuality is considered normal, standard, and natural (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005).

The *National Health Statistics Report* (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012) indicates that among women aged 15 to 44 between 2006 and 2010, 43% were childless. Of those, 6% were classified as "voluntarily childless" women who expected to have no children but who are fecund. The proportion of voluntarily childless women has remained relatively constant: 6.2% in 2002, 6.6% in 1995, 6.2% in 1988, and 4.9% in 1982. Research further indicates that voluntarily childless women are more likely to be White, educated, employed full time, and nonreligious, and less likely to be married than the general population (Abma & Martinez, 2006). Unfortunately, rates and demographics about voluntarily childless men in the United States could not be located, nor could rates or demographics about individuals who self-identify as voluntarily childless, childless by choice, or childfree.

Stigma, Stereotypes, and Discourses of Voluntary Childlessness

Veevers (1980) theorized that voluntary childlessness is stigmatized because all societies are essentially pronatalist, meaning that people are expected to have and want to have children. Even in China, where boys are preferred over girls and legislation prohibits having more than one child, childlessness is denounced (Zhang & Liu, 2007). However, research illustrates how pronatalist pressure varies across certain populations (Letherby, 2003). In the West, poor Black women face the social attitude that they should not have children (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2011); mothers with disabilities must prove that they are "good enough mothers" (Thomas, 1997); and women who undergo in vitro fertilization are seen as selfish and unnatural (Shaw & Giles, 2009). Pronatalism, then, is a complex phenomenon based on intersections of identities.

Large-scale surveys indicate that people generally view voluntarily childless individuals more negatively than parents and involuntarily childless people (Ganong, Coleman, & Mapes, 1990) and more negatively than temporarily childless people (Koropecykj-Cox et al., 2007). Stereotypes surrounding voluntarily childless individuals continue to persist because "there is a general assumption, generally unquestioned . . . that women without children want them but have 'a problem'" (Campbell, 2003, p. 192). Women who choose childlessness have been viewed as desperate or selfish (Letherby, 2002), and mothers have rated voluntarily childless women as materialistic and nonconforming (Callan, 1983). Research has shown that voluntarily childless women are stereotyped more critically than are voluntarily childless men (Koropecykj-Cox et al., 2007); however, voluntarily childless men are viewed as less driven and less caring compared to involuntarily childless men and parents (Lampman & Dowling-Guyer, 1995), illustrating how experiences of voluntarily childless individuals are gendered. Furthermore, negative perceptions are more likely to come from men (Koropecykj-Cox & Pendell, 2007b) and people who are older, have children, and are less educated (Koropecykj-Cox & Pendell, 2007a). However, stereotypes about voluntarily childless individuals may be becoming less severe, with college students rating voluntarily childless couples as happier than parents (Koropecykj-Cox et al., 2007). Although sexual orientation has been overlooked in studies where definitions automatically exclude nonheterosexual individuals, one study surprisingly demonstrated that Australian students rated voluntarily childless lesbian women as more happy and mature than heterosexual women who chose to have children (Rowlands & Lee, 2006).

Just as stereotypes are gendered to be more severe toward voluntarily childless women, cultural discourses also tend to stigmatize women more than men (Park, 2002). Cultural

discourses surrounding “mother” and “women” are inextricably linked (Hird, 2003; Hird & Abshoff, 2000), and women’s individual identities are often undercut by pronatalist discourses (Meyers, 2001). Cultural discourses surrounding voluntarily childless women include derogation, compensation, and regret (Morell, 1994), as well as disbelief, disregard, and deviance (Gillespie, 2000). Discourses identified thus far reflect the pronatalist stigma toward voluntarily childless individuals, illustrating the power within these dominant discourses. However, as Letherby (2003) notes, “[R]esistance to power comes through new discourses” (p. 62). Hayden (2010) found that childless-by-choice women challenged dominant discourses of motherhood by confronting the charge of selfishness, reversing the dominant discourses of maternity, demanding choice, challenging the institution of motherhood, and putting themselves first. Similarly, to resist the pronatalist stigma, members of childfree online communities must work to produce counterdiscourses.

The present study builds on the research of stigma and discourse by considering online communities as space that makes counterdiscourses possible due to the Internet’s disruption of social boundaries (Markham & Baym, 2009). Online communities are often symbolic communities; in such symbolic communities, “members believe themselves to be part of a large, caring, and like-minded community whose members they scarcely know” in person (Gergen, 1991, p. 215). LiveJournal communities for childfree members provide a particularly relevant site for bracketing (Madison, 2005) the construction of childfree identities in our technologically saturated (Gergen, 1991) and multiphrenic (Markham & Baym, 2009) world.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Given the possibilities for identity construction in an online context, a feminist poststructural approach is ideal for making sense of how childfree LiveJournal community members construct identities and how these identity constructions reify and/or resist scholarly definitions. Poststructuralism is plural, referring to multiple theoretical positions (Weedon, 1997). Weedon (1997) argues that feminist poststructuralism seeks to understand and change power relations through theories of language, subjectivity, social processes, and institutions. The present analysis draws on Weedon’s (1997, 1999) conception that language constructs subjectivity or sense of self and Scott’s (1988) conception that feminists need theories of diversity and plurality rather than universality (p. 33). This perspective seeks to “disrupt that which is taken as stable/unquestioned truth” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 320) by identifying the power inscribed in discourse.

Discourse is defined as a form of social/ideological written or spoken practice that acts as a structuring principle in society (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Weedon, 1997); in other words, it is through discourse that we make sense of the social world and ourselves. Though dominant discourses reinscribe power through meanings and values attributed to binary categories such as *man-woman*, *straight-gay*, *parent-childless*, “discourse turns out, upon examination, to be filled with contradictory possibilities” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 318). Once new ways of knowing are uncovered, agency may be enacted through alternative discourses. It is therefore through new discourses that members of the childfree LiveJournal communities are able to construct their identities outside of existing stigma. Given the rich possibilities for investigating childfreedom from a feminist poststructural perspective, the following research question guides the present study: How do members of LiveJournal communities discursively construct childfree identities?

Methodology

To clarify the many ways scholars have operationalized *childfree*, I employed a participant definitional analysis (Manning, 2013) to understand the processes by which childfree individuals in one context—childfree LiveJournal communities—construct childfree identities. Participant definitional analysis allows grounded definitions to be created by participants rather than imposed by researchers (Manning, 2013). I complemented this analysis with a feminist poststructural lens which “can be applied to all discursive practices in order to analyze how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reproduce, where there are resistances” (Weedon, 1997, p. 132). In this analysis, I considered three of the most active childfree-related LiveJournal communities: *Childfree* (more than 6,500 members, 40,000 journal entries, and 820,000 comments, created on January 13, 2001), *Cf_hardcore* (more than 2,300 members, 21,000 journal entries, and 470,000 comments, created on December 30, 2003), and *Cf_schmooze* (more than 140 members, 140 journal entries, and 1,300 comments, created on October 4, 2010). Because of the rich archives and continuous activity in these communities, participant definitional analysis sensitized by feminist poststructuralism and critical ethnography provided a methodological and analytical framework for exploring the discursive construction of childfree identities in relation to existing power structures.

Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography complements a feminist poststructural approach because critical ethnographers critique many of the traditional assumptions of the ethnographic method. Traditional ethnography assumes that writers and readers are stable and rational, and participants “say what they mean and mean what they say” (Britzman, 2000, p. 28). The critical paradigm promotes the “ethically and politically sensitive study of the relationships among power, knowledge, and discourse that are produced in situations of historical and cultural struggle” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 10). Critical ethnographers feel morally obligated to advocate for social change, ensuring greater freedom and equality (Madison, 2005); in the present study, the moral obligation is toward more nuanced and complex representation of individuals who choose childlessness in academic research.

Positionality and reflexivity, or researchers turning back on themselves, are also key in critical research. In addition to establishing validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000), reflexivity allows the researcher to acknowledge his or her own power, privilege, and biases while critiquing power structures surrounding participants (Madison, 2005). As a childless-by-choice woman who has read childfree LiveJournal communities but feels ambivalent about the term to describe myself, I sought to research the identity construction around *childfree* in an online context to understand how community members construct identities that may resist and/or reify scholarly understandings of childlessness. Although this research, like all research, is partial in its understanding of the term, my goal was to shed light onto this seeming disconnect between meanings and uses of *childfree*. In this sense, I am both critical of and inspired by past research on this topic.

Thomas (1993) emphasized that not every component of research must be critical; rather, scholarship should have meaningful coherence, in which researchers “bring in the structural issues of power themselves” (Tracy, 2013, p. 245). In the present study, I engaged in critical ontology and topic selection, where some groups (i.e., childfree individuals)

are more disenfranchised than others (i.e., parents), as well as critical data analysis and interpretation (Thomas, 1993). I employed this form of ethnography to “challenge conventional ideologies of cultural administration and research by curiously exploring—and bearing moral witness to—the existence of alternate and resistant meanings” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 57–58). In sum, I used a feminist poststructural framework to allow for more open possibilities in childfree identity construction, participant definitional analysis to consider identity construction from community members’ perspectives, and critical ethnography to sensitize this definition against scholarly conceptualizations.

Data Generation and Representation

I engaged multiple methods of data generation—participant observation and interviews—to understand how community members discursively constructed identities and defined *childfree*. According to Markham and Baym (2009), considering the perspectives of the participants in addition to employing multiple data collection strategies that connect Internet and life worlds strengthens the quality of Internet inquiry. Data generation for this study formally began with an Excel spreadsheet that categorized the form and topic of all *Childfree* public posts over a nine-month period. In this process, I acted as a complete observer (Tracy, 2013), never participating but only observing the everyday mundane interactions of the community, a practice through which critical ethnographers seek to link with larger practices of domination (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I inductively coded and categorized the form and topic of all posts to gain a broad understanding of what members of *Childfree*, the largest and most active childfree community on LiveJournal, were talking about. I read a total of 445 public posts, with each post averaging 29 comments. First, I categorized the form of the 445 posts, with most falling into the categories of sharing Internet media (150 posts, 33.7%), narratives (139, 31.2%), rants (27, 6.1%), questions (21, 4.7%), reasons for being childfree (21, 4.7%), sharing offline media (17, 3.8%), and appeals to fellow community members (14, 3.1%). Second, I categorized the topics of the posts: complaints about parents (82, 18.4%), complaints about children (40, 9.0%), abortion (41, 9.2%), sterilization (16, 3.6%), contraception (12, 2.7%), reproductive rights generally, without specific reference to abortion, sterilization, or reproduction (9, 2.0%), childfree support (e.g., policies and practices that favor childfree people; 42, 9.4%), being childfree (e.g., introduction posts, reasons for being childfree, stories of pronatalist pressure; 92, 20.7%), parent privilege (e.g., policies and practices that favor parents/children; 17, 3.8%), and other (94, 21.1%).

To avoid the risk of detachment and separation in complete observation (Tracy, 2013), I gained Institutional Review Board approval and interviewed 24 members of three childfree LiveJournal communities: *Childfree*, *Cf_hardcore*, and *Cf_schmooze*. Although previous studies have excluded gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) and involuntarily sterile individuals from studies on voluntary childlessness, this study accepted anyone over the age of 18 who read at least one of the three childfree LiveJournal communities and answered yes to the question, “Do you identify as childfree?” I asked participants if they had children, including adoptive children; if they ever wanted to have children; and if their significant other had children. All participants indicated they had no children and did not want children; and three participants indicated that their significant other had children: one significant other gave up his child for adoption at birth and two had adult children.

I sought participants by making a public post on the *Childfree* community page. Members responded positively, resulting in invitations to solicit participants in other childfree LiveJournal communities. I designed interview questions to draw participants' multiphrenic identity micropractices and larger pronatalist discourses. I asked interview questions—such as “How do you personally define *childfree*?”; “Do you think there are any beliefs or values that go hand in hand with being childfree?”; and “Do you personally identify as childfree?”—to facilitate the construction of participant definitions. I asked participants to “[t]ell me the story of a time when you identified yourself as childfree to a nonchildfree person,” and to tell me about their participation in any offline childfree social groups. I also asked many questions about their experience with stigma and their participation in childfree LiveJournal communities, including how long they had been members, how often they read and posted, and if they had ever left any childfree LiveJournal communities.

In total, 21 of the 24 interviews took place via synchronous chat programs (e.g., Google Chat), and two video calls and one audio call took place via Skype. Participants determined the channel of communication. I saved chat transcripts in Word, and transcribed video and audio calls, yielding 392 double-spaced pages of interview data. Of these interviewees, 21 identified as female, 1 as “androgynous female,” and 2 as male. Ages ranged from 21 to 52 with an average age of 30. In all, 22 participants identified as Caucasian, 1 as African American, and 1 as Caucasian/Native American; 20 participants were American, 2 were Canadian, and 2 were from the United Kingdom.

To answer the research question “How do members of LiveJournal communities discursively construct childfree identities?” I drew from feminist poststructural literature and participants' words by using in vivo codes, or codes based on the participants' own words (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Olson, 2011), to create the categories in the results section. I constructed the final results categories from the data after multiple readings and drafts. The categories are not discrete or separate but rather flexible interpretations of the communicative processes that shape childfree identities. I then engaged in critical ethnographic analysis to make sense of how the participants' definitions aligned with and/or resisted cultural and scholarly discourses of reproduction. I conducted member reflections that “allow for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings, providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation and even collaboration” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). I dialogued with participants about the results of this research, with most agreeing with the results of the study.

To clarify the representation in the following analysis, the word *participants* is always used to describe interviewees. When I quote *Childfree* public posts in the analysis, the username of the original poster is never disclosed to protect the anonymity of the individual who did not know at the time of posting that his or her words would be used in research; instead, the original poster is simply referred to as “a member” of LiveJournal. For clarity, each excerpt pulled from *Childfree* is followed by “(*Childfree* public post).” Text-based idiosyncrasies, including emoticons and other symbols, are preserved in all interview and public post excerpts.

Constructing Childfree Identities Online

The following processes contribute to participants' discursive construction of childfree identities, because “identity is both temporary and precarious, without a firm grounding” (Weedon, 1999, p. 104). These processes lend insight into participants' definitions of

childfree. The feminist poststructural lens adopted in this analysis revealed a complex and evolving relationship among communication processes, where identities are constituted rather than fixed. The processes of (a) naming *childfreedom*, (b) negotiating *childfreedom*, and (c) enacting *childfreedom* are meant to offer possibilities of *childfreedom* rather than offering “the real” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 319) and to illustrate how *childfree* is contested across individuals who identify as such.

Naming Childfreedom

According to Harding (1992), naming is a critical act, for “members of marginalized groups must struggle to name their own experiences for themselves in order to claim the subjectivity, the possibility of historical agency” (p. 186). The name not only typifies experience, providing powerful new language to describe a component of identity, but also offers identification by positioning the self into a shared, communal identity. Naming *childfreedom* therefore allows community members to create counterdiscourses of reproductive choice.

Alex, a 26-year-old, self-described “androgynous female,” recalled the “light bulb moment” of discovering the term “to describe what my mindset was and that there were many people who were the same thing: *childfree*.” For Alex, “It was an almost liberating term to discover, giving name to something that was so important to me and would let me tell others in precise detail what I meant when I said I didn’t want children.” This particular experience, shared by many participants, highlights the importance of naming not only to align the self with *childfree* people but also to discursively contrast the self to other non*childfree* individuals.

However, participants and public posts also indicated that others did not always positively receive *childfree*. The following post illustrates the need for other identity labels beyond *childfree*:

Recently I’ve been sometimes swapping in the term “intentional nonparent” in place of “*childfree*,” and have been meeting with fairly good results. I like it because it shifts the focus entirely onto me and takes children out of the sentence altogether. I embrace non-parenthood; I don’t revile children. It seems to dissolve a little bit of their defensiveness when they feel less need to spring to the protection of children against me. (And I still use “*childfree*” among my *childfree* friends.) (*Childfree* public post)

This public post is particularly illustrative of the fluidity of the discursive construction of identity. As noted, using the term “intentional non-parent” shifts the focus away from children, thereby resisting dominant conceptions of identities as always in relation to children, and positioning identity in direct opposition to parents instead. Reti (1992) noted how naming is always an issue for childless-by-choice women, because “we live in the negative, in the absence, always on the defensive” (p. 1). This is an important problem that highlights the interplay between discourses of parenthood, where *childfree* people have few language choices by which to position themselves within dominant discourses of assumed parenthood. One member commented on the post about using *intentional non-parent*:

[I]n some cases it might still be too much of highlighting what you are *not* rather than what you *are*. . . . Sometimes I tell people I’m an aunt, because

if they want to position you in relation to children-having status, that does define my relationship to the children in my life.

(Comment on *Childfree* public post)

This comment illustrates how some childfree people are astutely aware of how they name themselves to others. Identifying herself as an aunt instead of *childfree* or *intentional non-parent* does avoid the problem of describing herself by what she is not; however, using *aunt* allows individuals to remain within the status quo of pronatalist discourse—as caretakers of children—which offers little resistance to the cultural conception that children must be central in women's lives (Hayden, 2011). These community discussions highlight the contested connotations of *childfree*, as well as the complex discursive choices childfree individuals must make when choosing to resist or align with pronatalist discourses of women as caretakers.

The participant interviews also alluded to childfreedom as an online phenomenon: 23 of 24 participants first encountered the word *childfree* online, and one first heard the term on television. Although each participant embraced the childfree identity to some degree, eight participants indicated that they never used the word *childfree* to label themselves offline, and many participants indicated they knew individuals, either online or offline, who consciously decided not to use the label to describe themselves, even though they made the choice never to have children. As Eric, 32, so eloquently noted, "To be childfree is a choice, just as it is to identify as such."

These discourses reveal how *childfree* is historically and contextually situated for these participants in the age of the Internet. This situatedness is not surprising, given that online communities allow individuals to come together in large numbers that would be cost- and time-prohibitive in face-to-face settings. Individuals who have made the choice never to have children may never meet a person who identifies as childfree in their offline life, thereby limiting opportunity for childfree identity coconstruction in offline contexts. Further, the Internet may further particularize the meaning of *childfree* by creating niche groups, including the LiveJournal communities, thereby adding to the contested meaning of the word. These contested meanings resist scholars' use of *childfree* as a denotative descriptor. Scholars' use of *childfree* for those who do not embrace it may erase integral identity aspects of individuals without children. The following sections describe how community members further construct identity, highlighting the contested meanings of *childfree*.

Negotiating Childfreedom

From a poststructural perspective, meanings inscribed in language are not inherent or fixed; meanings are continually constructed through discourse. In the present study, negotiation is defined as the process of communicatively constructing different facets of childfreedom *within* the context of the LiveJournal communities. Childfree individuals must negotiate their identity not only within pronatalist discourses but also within childfree discourses, because "[t]he subject is inscribed, not just from outside herself, but through actively taking up the values, norms and desires that make her into a recognizable, legitimate member of the social group" (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 318). Two highly interconnected facets contribute to the negotiation of childfree identities: (a) defining the self and other and (b) revealing ideological underpinnings.

Defining the Self and Other

Members of the childfree LiveJournal communities position themselves against one another and against parents as they negotiate what criteria are necessary for qualifying as childfree. When asked how they would personally define *childfree*, many participants stated that prior successful biological reproduction was an exclusionary factor. Kristi, 31, described how her definition aligns with *Cf_hardcore's*, whose membership requirements include "No birth PARENTS. No genetic (sperm/egg donor) PARENTS. No adoptive PARENTS. No 'future' PARENTS. NO. PARENTS." The power of biology for *Cf_hardcore* is illustrated through Kristi's personal experience with dating a man who has adult children:

The few times my SO [significant other] having children got others worked up I worried I'd be asked/told to leave. I was scared every time because I consider the members [to be] friends. . . . [The moderators] decided that since I didn't mother the children, in fact had never lived with them and indeed spent very little time with them at all, I was not a mother.

Unlike scholars who rely on biological ability as necessary for inclusion, many community members rely on biological reproduction as an exclusionary criterion. In no interviews or community posts did members suggest that an individual must be capable of biologically having children to be childfree. In fact, Lynn, 33, described how "I almost died of stage four endometriosis last year in May. I was rushed to the ER. . . . They took EVERYTHING out." Biological ability, then, was not articulated as important by members, and members therefore resisted heteronormative understandings of reproduction that are sometimes reinscribed in family scholarship.

Other participants took slightly more flexible and complex approaches to defining *childfree* in terms of biology and responsibility. Laura, 30, explained that "childfree means having no kids of your own (or if you have a biological kid, said kid has been adopted or you don't have anything to do with them) and no desire to have your own children, biological or otherwise." Many participants constructed definitions that relied on responsibility rather than biology, thereby resisting scholarly definitions that rely on fecundity or heterosexuality.

Another criterion that some participants found flexible was permanence of choice. Although scholars—and rules of childfree LiveJournal communities— unanimously consider permanence of choice an essential component of the conceptualization of *voluntarily childless* and *childfree*, two participants shared less rigid definitions of choice. Beth, 23, commented, "I think you can change your mind. . . . But someone who actively wants kids is different from a fence-sitter. I wouldn't call someone who DEFINITELY wants kids childfree, I'd say childless." Beth's flexibility on choice is particularly interesting because choice is seen by other participants and communities as the most agreed-upon criterion for being childfree. Although Beth did distinguish between "fence-sitters" and "someone who DEFINITELY wants kids," her definition recognized the complex and processual qualities of identity. Rose, 26, also stated that people can change: "People grow and evolve, no one is static. What is true for you today may not be true tomorrow." According to Rose, others may "believe that if you change your mind, then you were never childfree in the first place," but for Beth and Rose permanence of choice is primarily relevant in the current moment in time and therefore resists some scholars' use of marriage or relationship length as a method for ensuring permanence of choice.

In contrast to Beth's and Rose's acceptance of change, another participant described an online friend who embraced the term *childfree* for herself even though her choice to remain childless was not permanent. Laura, 30, detailed:

One of my Internet friends describes herself as childfree even though she plans on having kids eventually and it irks the shit out of me. I've been trying to make sense of it myself! She explains it as "I don't have kids now and I'm enjoying the freedom of not having kids, so I am childfree, but that's going to change when I decide to be a mommy and I will no longer be childfree." That word, I do not think it means what she thinks it means.

Laura's friend is an example of how discourse can enable and constrain identity construction. Her friend is able to acquire the positives of identifying as childfree, including freedom from responsibility, but eschews the negative connotations by qualifying her decision as temporary. Research has shown that permanence of choice is highly stigmatized (Ganong et al., 1990; Koropecj-Cox et al., 2007). By removing the permanence from the equation, Laura's friend reaps the benefits of simultaneously positioning herself within childfree and parenting discourses. Importantly, Laura did not accept her friend's definition of *childfree*, illustrating the fine line between individuals who definitely want children later in life and those who articulate they never want children in the present. Allowing participants to entirely self-identify, then, is too broad of a conceptualization for community members with even the most inclusive definitions of *childfree*.

Revealing Ideological Underpinnings

Ideological underpinnings are important to the negotiation of childfree identities and are closely tied to biological assumptions. The ideological underpinnings of the communities can be seen in the large number of public posts devoted to the topic of reproductive rights, including abortion, contraception, and voluntary sterilization. Of the 445 analyzed public posts from *Childfree*, 41 dealt specifically with the topic of abortion, and each framed abortion restrictions as highly negative. One public post in *Childfree* described a member's story of encountering abortion protesters on campus, revealing the pro-choice discourses constructed by members in opposition to abortion restriction:

So I was hopping to my university class and I notice this outdoor booth with large poster signs. I thought, "Oh, some sort of charity campaign? :D _walks closer to check out the signs_" And this was the first thing I saw on the sign: MEN ROBBED OF FATHERHOOD. Immediately, I knew what this was about. It was an anti-choice booth. Another large sign read: WOMEN DO REGRET ABORTIONS. Then there was this woman walking around with a sign around her neck that read: I REGRET MY ABORTION. My first thought to that was: I'm sorry that YOU regret a choice that YOU made. But does that mean if I had a kid and regretted it, I should prevent EVERY SINGLE WOMAN from having kids because THEY may regret it like _I_ did?! Ridiculous argument! I really wish I had the guts to go up and confront them. Instead all I did was laugh and walk off shaking because of how STUPID it was. (*Childfree* public post)

The post garnered 70 comments, most agreeing with the original poster's sentiment and sharing similar stories of encountering abortion protesters. Only one comment offered

an alternative viewpoint, stating, "I'm not saying men should get to stop abortions, but I don't begrudge them the pain they feel when they want the baby and it's aborted." The comment quickly turned into a thread, with another member stating, "There is way too much fail in your comment."

Reproductive rights are a particularly hot topic in *Childfree* and *Cf_hardcore*. Pregnancy may be especially salient to childfree women because of the pronatalist assumption "that motherhood is a (natural) condition, a state of bodily being rather than a deliberate activity" (Hartouni, 1997, p. 30). Though exact statistics are not available for individual communities, in the entirety of LiveJournal 61.6% of members self-identify as female (LiveJournal Statistics, 2011). To counteract expectations of passive pregnancy, most participants agreed that access to contraception and abortion are essential to childfreedom.

The belief in access to reproductive rights also ties back into the definition of *childfree*. When asked to explain her personal definition of *childfree*, Lynn, 33, defined it as being "100% pro-choice, pro-birth control, pro-active in using said birth control, never having kids." For many participants, *childfree* and *pro-life* were mutually exclusive categories, where an individual cannot be both. However, not all participants agreed that a person must be pro-choice to be childfree. Marianna, 30, explained, "If one opts to give an unwanted child up for adoption instead of aborting it, that's still a conscious and deliberate choice not to be in a parenting role." The ideological underpinnings expressed by each participant interplayed with discourses defining the self and other. Those who relied on biological definitions of *childfree* often connected being childfree with being pro-choice because they viewed restrictions to abortion and contraception to be a real threat to choosing childlessness. Although all participants identified themselves as pro-choice, the participants whose definitions of *childfree* relied on responsibility instead of biology more often conceded that a person could be simultaneously childfree and pro-life.

In addition to negotiating the importance of reproductive freedom, differences in definitions and ideologies have caused what one participant describes as the organizational splintering of online communities. This splintering can be easily seen through the range of childfree-related communities that currently exist on LiveJournal. Communities range from *Sanelychildfree*, a group "for everyone who is tired of associating themselves with the crazy childfree people on some communities," and *Cf_hardcore*, where "there will be kid-related and parent-related ranting." According to Jason, 32, the online medium facilitates the organizational splintering:

The Internet doesn't necessarily lead to great organization; it just leads to people that can become more fractionalized and get off into an area that is more along their own personal, uh, proclivities. Hence that's why the childfree community groups split. Obviously there's going to be people that see things their way. And it works the same as any sort of large organization, though: you're going to get splinter groups.

The organizational splintering that has occurred across the communities in the past decade is testament to the idea that childfreedom is not a fixed and monolithic entity; identities are discursive processes of negotiation that take place within organized contexts.

Organizational splintering continues to occur across childfree LiveJournal communities. Contention is observable when looking at current community principles. *Childfree's* community profile states, "Childfree means that you don't want children—

now or ever. If you have no kids but plan to have them in the future – through adoption or biologically – you are childless.” The definition on the profile page of *Cf_schmooze* is slightly more specific, stating, “You have never had kids, never want kids, have never fathered or given birth to a child and given it up for adoption, and have never adopted a child yourself.” To join, you must be childfree and you must be pro-choice, two requirements for *Cf_schmooze* and *Cf_hardcore*, but not requirements for *Childfree*. The profile page of *Cf_hardcore* elaborates on this definition, stating, “This community is pro-choice, and those who identify as pro-life are NOT welcome here. Part of being childfree is having control over your own reproductive choices, and in our view you simply cannot be childfree and anti-choice.” These community definitions construct varied ideological underpinnings, and explicitly communicating these differences allows communities to differentiate from one another and avoid future splintering by catering to specific qualities present in childfree identities. These definitions further illustrate how contested childfree identities are.

Enacting Childfreedom

In contrast to negotiating childfreedom, which is the process of distinguishing and delineating different childfree identities within childfree LiveJournal communities, enacting childfreedom is the process of discursively constructing childfree individuals as a cohesive whole invested in certain ideologies and activist practices. The processes are cyclical, where enacting childfreedom inspires the negotiation of childfreedom, and the negotiation of childfreedom informs how individuals enact childfree identities. The enactment of childfree identities can be loosely categorized into two processes: (a) enacting online, where members communicate with other childfree people to reinscribe the self, and (b) enacting offline, where childfree people reposition childfreedom to nonchildfree people.

Enacting Online: Reinscribing the Self

Enacting childfree identities online is an important process for members of the childfree LiveJournal communities because it allows members to discursively construct their own experiences and interpretations of being childfree with one another, thereby solidifying childfree cohesion. The primary way community members reinscribed the self was through the sharing of various online media in community posts. Sharing media accounted for 150 of the 445 analyzed posts, the greatest proportion of public posts in *Childfree*.

One of the most popular ways that participants enacted childfree identities online was by sharing links to other Internet media relevant to the ideological underpinnings of the communities. Members often shared serious news articles about reproductive rights, usually coupled with frustrated commentary about the current conservative swing in United States. One member quoted a news article from Yahoo! and then offered a personal commentary:

“ ‘We don’t consider it [birth control] to be health care, but a lifestyle choice’ said John Haas, president of the National Catholic Bioethics Center, a Philadelphia think tank whose work reflects church teachings. ‘We think there are other ways to avoid having children than by ingesting chemicals paid for by health insurance.’” . . . Gah, if only they could be made to live a day in the life of a woman who couldn’t take care of herself, barely scraped by and then was forced

to have a child that could possibly grow up living in misery. Wonder if they would change their ridiculous stance on it? (*Childfree* public post)

Sharing pro-life news stories allows members to discursively enact the ideological underpinnings shared by many members. Although ideological beliefs varied across interview participants and communities, this discursive enactment allowed members to align themselves with common causes, such as reproductive rights, abortion, sterilization, and contraception, which accounted for 78 of the 445 analyzed *Childfree* public posts. In this sense, *childfree* identities are constructed as advocates for reproductive rights. Members emphasized the importance of this topic by sharing news stories featuring a parent who injured or killed his or her child. Though community discourses often evoked anger and sadness, the stories of parents' horrific acts serve as an important reason for members of *childfree* LiveJournal communities to counteract the pronatalist pressure. In some instances, members likened themselves to these parents, stating they may have done something similar if they were ever forced to have and raise children. Jeanine, 32, described the importance of these stories:

Stuff like this we find pertinent to us. It's something we can physically point to and go "SEE?! Not EVERYBODY loves their children. Not EVERYBODY should be having children! Do you see now why you are being a jerk when you harass people about having children they don't want?"

Sharing stories of horrific parenting allowed members to discursively construct what they felt were honest representations of parenthood, thereby framing *childfreedom* as a positive alternative. News stories of parents who hurt their children also allow members of the *childfree* LiveJournal communities to disrupt the grand narrative of parenthood as the ultimate life achievement. Cassidy (2006) stated that "the decision to have children is fraught with tremendous moral weight" (p. 45) and those who do not wish to parent should not. Sharing pro-life and horrific parenting news stories solidified the shared identity of members, constructing a collective *childfree* identity that is political and invested in social change to lessen the stigma toward people who choose never to have children. Concretizing a cohesive *childfree* identity within online communities provides evidence that *childfree* is not a denotative descriptor; rather, community members inscribe many multiple and sometimes competing meanings to the word in their discourse. Scholars should consider these valenced meanings when considering how to name their participants.

Enacting Offline: Repositioning Childfreedom

Just like enacting online, enacting offline allows members of the *childfree* LiveJournal communities to solidify collective identity. News stories and popular articles discussing the *childfree* lifestyle have been popularized on the Internet in recent years, and with increased popularity comes more interest and awareness. Laura, 30, stated how the growing attention to *childfreedom* in the media illustrates how "we're not hateful freaks who clearly hate Jesus and America." However, the growing attention may also lead to more scrutiny and criticism, and a shared mission of members of the *childfree* communities becomes important.

I use the term *reproductive consciousness* to label what multiple participants characterized as the shared activist mission of *childfreedom*. The purpose of reproductive consciousness is twofold. First, participants indicated reproductive freedom, including access to abortion,

contraception, and sterilization, is a main prerogative of childfreedom. According to Maggie, 36, "The only goal is reproductive freedom. Everything else is up in the air." Second, some participants described how *all* people should be more conscious that having children is a choice, for too many people have children without considering the option to not. According to Jason, 32, childfree individuals also need to respect parents' reproductive freedom, in addition to advocating reproductive freedom for childfree people: "When you get down to it, I think it should also mean someone's reproductive status is really something that should be respected." Jason viewed mutual respect as a key to reproductive consciousness, and he further described the shift he has witnessed in assumptions about parenting:

A lot more people are finally starting to wake up from the insanity and starting to seriously question parenting. I am glad to see it. It's high time people started questioning parenthood. . . . A lot of people don't think before they have kids with disastrous results for them and the children.

By promoting reproductive consciousness for everyone, members of the childfree LiveJournal communities reposition childfreedom as a positive force in the welfare of children and society. This consciousness is particularly important because it links online discourse to offline discourse, where interaction online inspires activism offline.

The most basic and most important way members of childfree LiveJournal communities repositioned childfreedom by promoting reproductive consciousness was through the use of evangelizing narratives. When participants were asked if they had ever made others question parenting, either as an institution or for themselves, most said yes. For example, Ashley, 29, tried "to reach out to others on the fence (because some people don't even consider not having children to be any sort of possibility)." The evangelizing interactions provided an important way of enacting childfreedom offline by presenting childfreedom as a possible alternative to parenting. Laura, 30, described interactions she has had with young patrons at her business:

My husband and I own a comics/gaming store, thus we have a lot of friends in the 16–21 age bracket even though I'm 30 and he's 33. lots of them have absorbed both religious and sexist attitudes about women and kids. those guys get to ranting about their girlfriends, etc. and one of us will jump in with "wait. you're making a huge assumption that just because she wants to date you/become more serious, that she wants to have your babies. has she said that? do you want babies?" and they get that big-eyed look and that's when we talk about how kickass our lives are, and how we'd probably like them a hell of a lot less had we not been true to ourselves and gone with the societal expectation.

Laura's interactions were evangelical in the sense that she communicated her own viewpoint with the mission of changing others' culturally inscribed attitudes toward women and children by talking about her own experiences. This allowed her to "shake up the mind-set that's so prevalent" in her small Southern city. Laura viewed her role as an educator of young people at her business about the possibility of not wanting children—and that not all women automatically desire children.

These examples of evangelizing interactions illustrate how simply talking about not having children can serve as a form of activism that impacts other people's perceptions

and life choices. Evangelizing encounters are particularly poignant because they are the greatest success stories of childfreedom, repositioning childfreedom and childfree people in a more positive light while simultaneously challenging dominant understandings of gender and reproduction. These evangelizing interactions illustrate how discursive enactments can actually give others agency to resist pronatalist assumptions through legitimizing positive discourses of life without children.

Importantly, the political and activist aspects inscribed in these individuals' discourses about childfreedom have not, to my knowledge, been explored by scholars. Naming, negotiating, and enacting identity is an incredibly important process. Naming develops "a way to make speakable those needs, interests, and identities that are inchoate" (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007, p. 128), and I argue that naming is central to the process of identity construction for community members, including opening up the possibility for negotiating and enacting childfreedom online and offline. Naming may also be a form of social control exerted by others (Brown, 1995) and should be carefully considered by scholars who study individuals who have chosen never to have children.

Discussion

The present study builds on the line of research on the discourses surrounding voluntary childlessness (Gillespie, 2000; Hayden, 2010; Moore & Geist-Martin, 2013; Morell, 1994) to consider the discursive construction of identity by self-proclaimed childfree individuals. By centralizing communication in the process of identity construction, the present study formulates a coherent understanding of the roles that naming and community discourses play in challenging normative understandings of reproduction and how these discourses challenge many scholars' definitions of *childfree*.

Members' understandings of childfreedom are shaped by preexisting contradictory meanings of what it means to be childfree from within and beyond established childfree online communities. According to Weedon (1997), "Poststructural feminist theory suggests that experience has no inherent essential meaning. It may be given meaning in language through a range of discursive systems of meaning which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality" (p. 33). To say that members constitute a singular childfree identity would therefore be misleading; we must instead speak of multiple contested childfree identities that are continually constituted through discourse. These competing identities constitute what community members label broadly as *childfreedom*. A feminist poststructural lens paired with critical ethnography illuminates a new way of understanding childfreedom as not fixed but rather constituted through naming, negotiating, and enacting identity in multiple online and offline contexts. In the following sections I (a) discuss the importance of participants' self-definition in research, (b) offer a definition of *childfree* based on the participant definitional analysis in the present study and describe how each definitional component may sensitize researchers to the complexities behind the discursive constructions of these identities, and (c) suggest limitations and directions for future research.

Self-Definitions in Research

Following Hayden's (2010) rejection of scholarly imposed boundaries on childless-by-choice participants, I argue for the reconsideration of how scholars define and label childfree individuals. Although members of childfree LiveJournal communities may

have little knowledge of scholars' use of the term *childfree*, scholars also seem to be unaware of the large, active online communities dedicated to childfreedom. Scholars' inattention thus far to definitions of *childfree* used by childfree individuals has excluded the voices of many potential research participants who do not fit into boundaries imposed by scholars and has limited the understanding scholars have of the nuanced experiences of childfree individuals. As illustrated in the processes of identity construction, members of childfree LiveJournal communities resist scholars' conception of *childfree* as a denotative descriptor. Rather, identification with the label *childfree* is in itself a conscious choice that often implies pro-choice ideologies and activism pertaining to reproductive consciousness. This raises the questions: Can individuals who are not members of online communities identify as childfree? Can *childfree* have other meanings to other people offline? The simple answer is yes, of course, to both. However, this research demonstrates that naming is an incredibly powerful experience, and careful considerations should be given to labeling participants and understanding how labels reinscribe and/or resist power in research practice.

It is also critical to note that many people who have chosen never to have children do not label themselves at all; in conversation, many simply say "I just don't want children," as illustrated by the participants who had never heard the word *childfree* until they found the online community, those who used the word to describe themselves only when they were online, and/or those who knew of others who were aware of the word but chose not to embrace it. Responses to questions about self-identification reveal a deep distinction between those who self-identify as childfree—and accept the multitude of meanings connoted by the name—and those who do not self-identify at all. When choosing terms employed in research, scholars should therefore take into consideration how participants describe themselves during every phase of the research process, including soliciting participants, naming participants during data generation, and reporting research results.

Participant Definitional Analysis

From the participant definitional analysis (Manning, 2013), I offer the following definition: "*Childfree* is a contested identity that refers to individuals who have made the choice never to have children and identify as such." This definition is broad enough to avoid reifying simplistic and heteronormative conceptualizations through criteria such as marriage, heterosexuality, and fecundity yet narrow enough to emphasize the permanence of choice from the participants' perspective. This definition, sensitized by a critical ethnographic analysis of scholars' definitions, reveals the meanings inscribed in participants' self-definitions.

First, members' definitions emphasized that *childfree* is a highly "contested identity" among those who embrace the term. To members of the LiveJournal communities, naming themselves as childfree offers much more than a way of describing their choice to remain childless; naming allows members to construct their identity in relation to an online symbolic community (Gergen, 1991). For many members, the community serves to position childfreedom as ideological, political, and activist. This is not surprising, given that names "are rooted in actions and give rise to specific practices" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 396), as evidenced in the processes of naming, negotiating, and enacting childfreedom.

Second, members' definitions emphasized choice but defined it in many ways. Notably, members never mentioned biological ability as an inclusionary criterion. The

idea that choice exists only if biological reproduction is possible reinforces simplistic and heteronormative understandings of family described by Oswald and colleagues (2005). Scholars should acknowledge that reproductive technology and changing social policies have made it possible for single, infertile, and GLBT people to explore multiple methods of having children – albeit through potentially more financially and emotionally challenging methods – including artificial insemination, surrogacy, and adoption.

Third, members emphasized the importance of “never having children,” but the meaning of this point varied across participants. Some participants indicated that an individual could be childfree even if his or her partner had children. In the present study, three participants had a significant other with children. Similarly, Hayden (2010) noted that two of her 24 participants self-identified as childless by choice but also had stepchildren, indicating the importance of allowing participants to self-define what it means to “have children.”

Fourth, members’ emphasis of “self-identification with the term *childfree*” offers a more nuanced understanding of childfree identities not explored in previous research. This definition raises the question: How may we define *voluntarily childless* and *childless by choice*? I argue that *childfree* is an identity that may be conceptualized under the umbrella term of *voluntary childlessness* and/or *childless by choice*, though future research is needed to fully understand the implications of these identity labels.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

First, the present study is limited to the topic of identity construction by LiveJournal community members. Future research should investigate the discursive identity construction of *childfree* in online and offline spaces, as well as the discursive construction of *childless by choice*, *intentional nonparent*, and other labels individuals use to describe their choice never to have children. Ethnographers may research childfree Meetup groups (i.e., online groups in a given geographic area dedicated to regular in-person meetings hosted on <http://www.meetup.com>) or No Kidding! chapters in the United States or Canada (<http://www.nokidding.net>).

Second, although the online communities welcome members from across the globe, the interview sample mostly reflected the experiences of White Americans on LiveJournal. Future research may investigate voluntary childlessness across cultures and determine whether other cultures outside of Western, English-speaking countries have other ways of naming individuals who have no desire or intent to have children. Do identity labels equivalent to *childfree* exist in other cultures? Do other cultures have different discursive constructs to resist pronatalist discourses? A cross-cultural comparison would lend insight into the role of globalization and computer-mediated communication in identity construction.

In sum, the present study provides great heuristic value by offering a new way of looking at childfree identities as constituted through discourse. A few scholars have already included lesbian participants in studies of voluntarily childless women (Gillespie, 2000, 2003; Rowlands & Lee, 2006), and one has called for more research on voluntarily childless lesbian women (Kelley, 2009). I advocate for a cross disciplinary conversation about these identity labels in order to self-reflexively contemplate the implications our naming has on participants and the implications our definitions have on understanding historically and culturally situated lived experiences.

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