

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY IN THE MEASUREMENT AND MEANING OF UNINTENDED PREGNANCY

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Unintended pregnancy is a major and persistent public health issue in the United States. Almost half of the 6.7 million pregnancies occurring each year are estimated to be unintended, and this figure has remained virtually unchanged in the past decade. A potential barrier to preventing unintended pregnancies and their associated adverse health outcomes is that women's pregnancy intentions are not straightforward to measure and interpret. Indeed, an unresolved paradox is that women frequently report feeling happy about pregnancies they also classify as unintended (*i.e.* they have incongruent intentions and feelings). Understanding whether such incongruence is a reflection of ambivalence or happiness at the idea of pregnancy despite strong desire to prevent conception is particularly important for addressing racial and ethnic disparities in unintended pregnancy, since Latinas are more likely to report incongruent intentions and feelings than non-Hispanic whites.

This study explores the underlying reasons why women profess happiness about pregnancies they would also classify as unintended and examines how these feelings relate to their motivations to avoid pregnancy. Between September 2013 and February 2014, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 27 women (8 white, 19 Latina) selected from a longitudinal study measuring prospective pregnancy intentions and feelings among 403 women in Austin, Texas. Women were selected for interview on the basis of wanting no more children and consistently professing either happiness (n=17) or unhappiness (n=10) at the prospect of pregnancy. Three researchers conducted Interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes with participants in their homes and audio recorded the conversations with participants' permission. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and an expert translator who was familiar with the subject matter translated those conducted in Spanish. Participants were offered \$30 as a token of gratitude for their time. Following each interview, the research team met for discussion. After the completion of all interviews, we analyzed the content of each interview to identify key themes.

Six key themes emerged from women's narratives: 1) the strength and sincerity of pregnancy intentions; 2) the financial implications of another child; 3) perceived emotional stress associated with another pregnancy; 4) belief in fate or God's plan should a pregnancy arise; 5) social norms and expectations dictating feelings about pregnancy; and 6) practical vs. emotional perspectives on another pregnancy. Women with incongruent intentions and feelings told us in their own words that it is indeed possible to feel happy at the prospect of a pregnancy while simultaneously trying earnestly to prevent conception. Although many of these women lacked the ability to obtain highly effective methods of contraception such as sterilization, intrauterine contraceptives, and contraceptive implants, their childbearing intentions and their desires to use such methods were clear. Moreover, the reasons women cited for wanting no more children were virtually identical between those who would feel positively and those who would feel negatively about another pregnancy. These reasons were predominantly related to the financial challenges another baby would bring. Happiness at the idea of an unintended pregnancy was explained as the result of deep and heartfelt feelings about children taking precedence over practical considerations, the perception that the psychosocial stress resulting from another child would be low, and the ability to rationalize an unintended pregnancy as the result of fate or God's plan. The major exception to the sincerity of professed happiness was that conveyed as a result of social pressure despite truly negative feelings, predominantly expressed by foreign-born Latina women.

The key message from our findings is that women who want no more children but profess happiness at

the prospect of a pregnancy should not *automatically* be considered ambivalent about avoiding pregnancy. This would not only misrepresent their childbearing intentions but also contradict their sincere desire to use a highly effective method of contraception. At the same time, it is possible that unintended pregnancies greeted with happiness may have different implications for maternal and child health outcomes compared to pregnancies that are greeted with unhappiness. Identifying which unintended pregnancies are most likely to result in adverse outcomes is a target for future research.