

**Probationary Faculty Development Grant
Spring 2020 Final Report Poster
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An Examination of Voluntarily Childfree Women in the United States

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This research project was an exploratory study of voluntarily childfree women in the United States; it had a broad aim to examine the social psychological factors, such as trust, certainty, and emotional, physical and social wellbeing, involved in women's voluntarily childfree decision. The purpose of this study was to investigate why women choose voluntary childlessness, when they came to make this decision, and how this decision affects their lives. By examining the lived experiences and life choices of women who choose not to have children, this study sought to underscore the social outcomes of voluntary childlessness as well as to develop an understanding of marginalized people and nontraditional life course paths.

There's nothing wrong with being selfish. (Laudy, 47)

I'm not selfish in a bad way. I mean, I need to do things to take care of myself so that I can take care of my family and friends, my responsibilities, my job, you know what I mean? I mean, when I'm healthy and happy, I can help my family and friends be healthy and happy. (Adelaide, 31)

I honestly think bringing up a kid in this world is selfish. (Storm, 22)

My mother says it is selfish for me not to have a kid. But it's not selfish. I feel like I am aware. I'm woke. I am conscious of who I am, you know...It's really selfish for people to have a child just because they want that emotional comfort. (Shelby, 21)

METHODS

With CSUS IRB approval, this research used a qualitative methodological approach and research design by way of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with voluntarily childfree women. The project examined the thoughts, feelings, behaviors, experiences, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, norms, and values among childless women that influenced their decision to remain childfree. As of spring 2020, this study included 46 conducted interviews with childfree women in the United States, which ranged between two and five hours. Participant recruitment was through a nonprobability snowball sampling design, and this was a no-cost, convenience sample.

PROJECT RESULTS

The grant allowed me to collect data, analyze data, and write a book chapter manuscript draft for the book entitled, *Childfree across the Disciplines: Academic and Activist Perspectives on Not Choosing Children*. My chapter that is currently under review with Rutgers University Press is titled, "Selfish is Not a Four-Letter Word: Self-Care and Other-Care among Childfree Women." This chapter addresses the notion and perception of childfree women as selfish—a central theme that emerged inductively from the interview data. In the chapter, I detail how childfree women handled the stereotype of selfishness predominantly associated with childfreedom by self and others. Data in this chapter developed the understanding of reconciliation strategies for pejorative beliefs about voluntary childlessness. In particular, I highlighted how childfree women negotiated, developed, and safeguarded positive senses of self in the face of negative attitudes toward voluntary childlessness. The women's narratives emphasized decision-making processes that they believed would lead to emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Despite the widely accepted negative meaning tied to the term "selfish," as the participants reflected on their lives, it became apparent that the desire for favorable wellbeing necessitated "self-care" and "other-care," rather than bearing or rearing children.