



**Probationary Faculty Development Grant
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Final Project Written Report

a) Project Title

An Examination of Voluntarily Childfree Women in the United States

b) Project Objectives

For the grant period, the major objectives for this research project included collecting data (i.e., interviews), transcribing interviews, analyzing data, writing results, presenting at conferences, and submitting drafts of manuscripts to scholarly peer-reviewed venues for feedback as well as eventual publication. Although I submitted papers to two conferences during the spring of 2020 (i.e., the Pacific Sociological Association Annual Conference Meeting and the American Sociological Association Annual Conference Meeting), both of these conferences were canceled because of COVID-19. Therefore, during the grant period, I worked on all the other major objectives of this project. Central research outcomes intended to broaden the scholarly knowledge about a marginalized, stigmatized, and negatively stereotyped group of people as well as to promote social diversity, equitable practices, and an inclusionary community. Below, I

discuss the project description, the project results, and manuscript draft under review from this project's collected data and data analysis.

c) 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. Addressing topics such as life histories, socialization, demographics, social networks, as well as goals and plans, this study aimed to gain insight into the lives of a noticeably underrepresented and understudied group of people in the United States. This project paid close attention to childless women's negative (and positive) experiences, past and present risks and traumas, negotiations of the childfree decision, and coping mechanisms for other people's unfavorable treatment. Research implications include advancing our social psychological understanding of childbearing in the United States, developing theories about non-normative behaviors, and promoting the inclusion of people who are stigmatized because of their unconventional reproductive choices.

With CSUS IRB exempt status approval, this research used a qualitative methodological approach and research design by way of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with voluntarily

childfree women. This 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 August 2020, this project 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. The final sample size still depends on when I reach data saturation; I will know this and end interviewing completely after I have analyzed all the data and am no longer seeing any new key codes, concepts, and themes. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has slowed this process. Going forward, I plan to complete data analysis, give conference presentations (which were all canceled due to COVID-19 during spring 2020), and write academic papers to submit for publication (in addition to the book chapter I wrote with this grant, which is discussed below).

d) Project Results.

At the beginning of this grant, I and colleagues were awaiting a book publisher to accept our book proposal for the book entitled, *Childfree across the Disciplines: Academic and Activist Perspectives on Not Choosing Children*. After a few offers from publishers, we decided to accept a contract with Rutgers University Press. Thereafter, I used this study's collected data to complete the book chapter manuscript draft entitled, "Selfish is Not a Four-Letter Word: Self-Care and Other-Care among Childfree Women." This manuscript is currently under review with Rutgers University Press. In addition, the authors of the book chapters, such as myself, have signed contributor agreements. We are currently awaiting final word on manuscript revisions, feedback, acceptance, and hopefully book publication dates.

My chapter specifically addressed the notion and perception of childfree women as selfish. This was a central theme that emerged inductively from the interview data. In this chapter, I detailed how the 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. Broadly speaking, the women's resistance to unwanted responsibility, dependence, uncertainty, and turmoil marked how the childfree women accounted for the benefits of voluntary childlessness that offset perceived consequences of going without children. The final project poster (in PDF format) will highlight some of the results of this project and chapter.