WOMEN WITHOUT CHILDREN: IDENTITY, CHOICE, RESPONSIBILITY

Candace Korasick

Dr. Barbara J. Bank, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Research about childless women tends to reinforce two widely-held assumptions. The first is that being childless is a central component informing non-mothers' identities. The second is that choice is the best concept for understanding how women experience having no children. Guided by the principles of social constructionism and utilizing the Twenty-Statements Test and semi-structured interviews, this research calls both of those assumptions into question. This research also proposes recruitment of naïve subjects in identity research to reduce the likelihood of certain identities arising simply because they are the focus of said research. It also advocates expanding appeals higher loyalties as it is presented in accounts literature to include more than significant others.

I found that women who are not mothers rarely think of themselves as childless unless prompted to do so. Rather than having situation-free childless identities, these identities are bound by context. Furthermore, some of my respondents had no childless identity to speak of because they were either never called upon to account for their childlessness or they ignored such attempts. Choice was utilized by nearly all of the women in my sample. Respondents who would clearly have been defined as involuntarily childless by other researchers presented themselves as women with reproductive choices who exercised control over their capacities to become mothers as well as control over how others perceive them.