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The Irony of Choice

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The Irony of Choice

Abstract

We are having the inevitable late night conversation. You talk about your eventual wedding, your marriage to the person you love, the timeline you've created for yourself, and your plans for what our future children will do together. I clarify that I don't want to have children, but you can't seem to understand that decision. You question how happy, satisfied, or fulfilled my life will be without children, the maternal instincts I'm supposed to be feeling, and my desire to have something to care for and love. You're convinced that I will recognize how empty my life will be sans kids and that I will change my mind about motherhood.

I'm confused: why do you trust my judgment about everything else, but my decision to (or not to) give birth and raise children is questionable? [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, birth control, children, parenthood, career track, mommy track, motherhood, reproductive rights

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Law and Gender | Sociology | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE IRONY OF CHOICE

September 9, 2013

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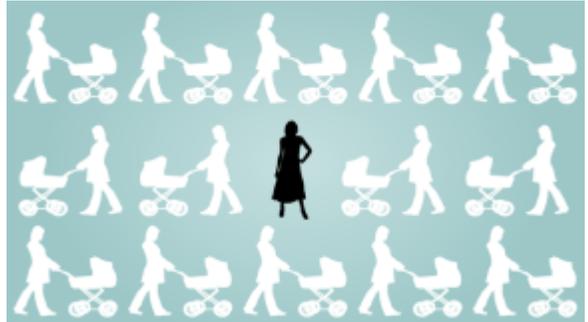
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I'm confused: why do you trust my judgment about everything else, but my decision to (or not to) give birth and raise children is questionable?

I would generally brush this off, but the truth is this conversation isn't singular. I've had the same discussion multiple times, with various friends, and the constant questions make me question myself: Is something wrong with me? Am I somehow less of a woman because I don't feel the desire to become a mother? Am I selfish, unloving, incapable of caring for another human being?

I shouldn't have to feel this way. I shouldn't have to feel the need to defend myself: No, I don't hate children. Yes, I think I could be a great mother. No, I'm not self-obsessed. Yes, I'm responsible and mature. But I do because the traditional family model excludes people like me who simply think that being a parent is not right for the lifestyle they imagine and criticize them for stepping out of the status quo.

Much of the criticism and questions I get are from the women who, like me, strive for justice, advocate for wage equity, speak out against rape culture and challenge the status quo. Yet, as we fight for reproductive rights, it seems that the right of a woman to decide to not reproduce is often forgotten. We fight to challenge the assumption that a woman is a whore if she has sex with multiple partners for pleasure, but we assume that eventually she will have sex with one man for the purpose of procreating. We fight to make birth control available to women who want it, but we assume that down the road she will stop taking it when the time is right to start planning for a family. We fight to provide women with access to abortion services, but we assume that in the future she won't need those services because the pregnancy will have been planned and that she's at a place in her life to carry her baby to term and raise that child.



Our society still expects adult women to become mothers. Remember earlier this year when Dr. Dominic Pedulla, a cardiologist in Oklahoma, [described birth control as a “poison”](#) because it suppresses a woman’s identity by denying her “potential to be a mother”? And when TIME magazine published an article entitled [“The Childfree Life: When Having It All Means Not Having Children”](#) in August, as if it were big news? The article describes the increasing trend of women electing to be “childfree” and their various reasons for making that decision. Criticisms of the article were plentiful – from the lack of male voices, to the cover photo of a young couple that showed the woman’s [“utter satisfaction with her size-4, cellulite-free, vacation-filled life”](#) to the “lame” reasons for avoiding parenthood.

I don’t need TIME to validate my decision to not have children. I started this blog by writing about all the reasons why I don’t want kids, but you know what? My decision does not need to be justified. No one ever asks a parent why they decided to have children, or criticize their decision as an effort to be less lonely or selfish.

I’m not trying to convince people to not have children. I’m not saying that children get in the way of one’s potential, of true happiness, of a carefree and fun life. The decision to be “childfree” isn’t selfish. Nor is it admirable. It simply is a personal choice that I get to make about my values, desires, circumstances, and the life I want. My right to choose does not end when society deems it the “right time” for kids.

Judging my character, telling me that I’m wrong for not wanting motherhood, assuming I’ll change my mind – those are responses ingrained in patriarchy and we (whether we define ourselves as feminists or not) internalize them.

Accept that it’s the right decision for me. Let’s live the ideal of being “pro-choice”.

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/09/09/the-irony-of-choice/>