A Qualitative Examination of Childfreedom and Childlessness: The Life Experiences of Non-Parents in Australia

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Abstract : There is evidence that increasing numbers of adults of child-bearing age in Australia do not have children. While there has been research into the life experiences of non-parents, one of the issues is that the differences between people who choose not to have children – the childfree – and people who cannot have children – the childless – are not clearly defined. The qualitative research reported here adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach to examine the life experiences of non-parents. Potential participants from Australia were invited to complete an online survey describing their experiences of life without children. An examination of the data from 229 participants (188 female, 41 male) revealed that they defined their non-parent status as either childfree or childless. There are, however, five sub-categories of child freedom identified by the participants, whereas previous research has not recognized such distinctions. The variance in the definition of child freedom is important because it may be related to the life journey as a non-parent. The current paper will firstly discuss the different groups of childfree and childless people. Secondly, it will examine the life experiences and journeys of non-parents in light of how the participants defined themselves. From a social psychological perspective, the current research is important as it highlights the socially held stereotypes and the stigma experienced by non-parents in Australia.
Keywords : Australia, childfree, childless, non-parents, qualitative, social psychology
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