

# My So-Called Selfish Life

***My So-Called Selfish Life* is a feature documentary directed by Therese Shechter. The film made its festival premiere in Fall 2021, with wider distribution planned for 2022.**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### THE BIG PICTURE

1. How does society equate female identity with motherhood? How have you personally experienced this?
2. Have you ever passed judgement on someone after hearing about their choice not to have children or their inability to have children? What are some biases that impact your own view of childfree or childless people?
3. What role does the media play in perpetuating the idea that all women must have children to be happy, successful, and fulfilled?
4. Have you ever thought a woman who chooses not to have children was “selfish”? Do you think your family, friends, or peers have ever felt this way?
5. For those who don’t want children, what kinds of reactions have you experienced when you explained your choice? How did you feel about these reactions and how did you respond?
6. What do you think about the way Therese’s own family never pressured her to have children?
7. How might this film resonate not only with childfree and childless people, but those who are parents?

### DIVING DEEPER

8. Has your culture, religious background, or geographic origin impacted your choice to have children, or the pressure you have faced to make that decision? How might these factors impact others?
9. How can we talk about the environmental benefits of smaller family sizes while remaining mindful of the ethical concerns around policing women’s reproduction?
10. Do you think current conversations around reproductive justice include enough childfree perspectives? If not, how would you broaden this conversation to address the specific needs of the childfree?
11. In the film, Therese shows examples of how the Nuclear Family does not have a monopoly on love, support—or legitimacy.
  - a. How are some people in the film creating their own versions of 'family' that differ from the traditional definition?
  - b. Do any of these alternatives appeal to you personally? Why or why not?
12. We often hear sentiments like, “The most important job any woman can have is being a mother.” Discuss your reaction to this statement.

## DISCUSSION-WORTHY MOMENTS

13. At timecode 52:11:14, we are shown statistics about the shifts in the U.S. fertility rate over the last 100 years: a steep drop in the 1920s-30s; a steep rise in the 1940s-50s; another steep drop in the 1960s-70s; and fairly stable from the 1980s until today:
  - a. Were you surprised by this trend? Have you seen this covered on the news?
  - b. Would it be your first instinct to classify a declining fertility rate as something negative? Why or why not?
  - c. Do you think a drop in the fertility rate could be a sign of empowerment? Why or why not?
  - d. How might fertility rate panic tie into issues around immigration, capitalism, and power?
  - e. Can you think of any examples of countries taking measures to increase fertility among their populations?
14. At timecode 45:56:23, Therese explains that “Pronatalism is pro-birth, but not every birth.”
  - a. Have you ever heard of the term “pronatalism” before?
  - b. How has the above statement about pronatalism historically played out in society?
  - c. How does the above statement still manifest today?
15. Throughout the film, we witness Lauren’s struggle to receive a sterilization procedure. At timecode 43:43:08 she explains, “Most doctors don’t really view sterilization as a medical need.”
  - a. How did you feel about Lauren’s decision to get sterilized at the age of 20? Is that something you might consider?
  - b. How would you react if a friend told you they wanted to get sterilized?
  - c. Do you agree that sterilization should not be considered a medical need?
16. At timecode 20:19:08, Leo explains: "Even in communities like the queer community that often break norms and challenge assumptions or stereotypes of how life should be lived, everyone is still under that pressure of what a traditional life should look like and what societal expectations are for them."
  - a. Discuss your reaction to this quote.
  - b. Why do you think the pressure of what a “traditional life should look like” remains so pervasive?
17. At timecode 49:20:15, Kimya Dennis reflects: “A big response that a lot of those of us of African and Hispanic descent receive when we talk about sterilization by choice is that we are confirming what whites want us to do: stop having children, allow the Black family to crumble, allow the Black community to crumble, give into eugenics. They’ll say that you don’t understand what’s going on. You don’t understand the history of our people. And I said I understand all of that. I said, ‘Never question my African identity because I’m child-free.’”
  - a. How might histories of oppression & dehumanization impact the attitudes of Black women and women of color around the decision to have children?
18. At timecode 01:01:04:02, Orna Donath discusses the often brought up fear of regret: “I can’t imagine becoming a mother and living for three decades miserable just because maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe at the age of seventy, if I will get there, I will regret.”
  - a. Do you experience regret, or a fear of feeling regret? How does this impact you?
  - b. Do you think fearing regret is a strong enough reason to decide to have children?