

Love (<https://channelvoid.com.au/love/>)

Who are you to qualify my choices?

Childfree and unmarried, I love my life.

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People look at me and my current relationship in a few different ways. They know that I'm in my mid-30s, unmarried and childfree. Some people will skirt around the issue of marriage assuming that it's something I want and that I'm waiting for. There is a subtle pity in their eyes. Seeing marriage as the crowning achievement of one's life, they can only assume that my partner is a commitment-phobe and that I secretly resent him for not having proposed yet.

Considering we've been together for seven years, it would be silly to assume that we have not spoken about marriage. We have. We just decided it wasn't for us. But people still treat me as if I'm the wallflower at a school dance who got left behind while everyone else got asked to dance. They are the teachers sending me piteous looks.

Other people immediately take a defensive tone when I mention we have no intention of getting married. Apparently me not wanting to do the same thing they've done is seen as a challenge. Or a decision they must defend. I'm not interested in why people get married. But people seem very interested in why I don't want to. They feel the need to pepper our conversations with all the cliches about how it changes your relationship and brings

you together. If the lack of a piece of paper meant that my relationship couldn't be as fulfilling or meaningful I would be very worried.

People often treat my relationship as a stepping stone. In their eyes, I am in limbo because I am not married and I have no children. While they might need their life defined in such clear cut ways, I don't. My relationship is not a stepping stone. It is a monolith that exists in and of itself. There is no need for marriage or children to validate it. Yet people persist with platitudes like 'you'll get there eventually.' Where *there* is, I'm not certain. There is nothing missing from our relationship that marriage or children would add. And I think that's what frustrates people. Understandably, they have gained much joy from adding both into their life, but they make the false assumption that both are necessary for a joyful life.

My partnership is valid the way it is.

The topic of children is even more fraught. Being a woman of a certain age, people—who don't know me well—assume that I'm about to have a baby any minute because the clock is running out. Little do they know that my clock ran out in my early 20s. When I politely explain that I don't want kids, I often get patronised with the oft-repeated phrase that all childfree women dread: *you'll change your mind.*

What is it about children that makes them certain they will know what a random woman will or won't change her mind about? Is it because children are so easy to raise, so inexpensive, so good for the planet that they think all women must want them?

It's frustrating to be a fully grown woman and have my decisions second-guessed by strangers. For those decisions to be dismissed, as if I couldn't possibly be knowledgeable enough to make a different decision than they did. This type of paternalistic attitude diminishes all women. It takes away our agency and our right to do what is best for us, rather than what society deems best.

I believe in choice for everyone. People have the right to have kids just as they have the right to choose not to. But why is one decision invalidated over the other? Why is one seen as natural and the other one quite the opposite? I am never given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to my decisions. People are always so sure that they are correct and that I'm making a mistake. Yet if I were to tell someone I think they made a mistake by getting married or having a kid, that would be seen as abhorrent. The fact that people feel able to comment on and debate my life choices without a second thought is indicative of how we, as a society, value women.

It often feels like there is a lack of respect and understanding given to childfree women like me. People argue against our decisions as if it's a public matter, open to debate. It's not and I would appreciate it if people could be a bit more open minded about why people might not choose to get married or have kids. Divorce rates and climate crisis are two reasons that easily roll off the tongue, but they are often dismissed. These are very real reasons to pass on motherhood, but people ignore and dismiss them.

As a childfree, unmarried woman I don't want to have to explain why I made the choices that I did—it's no one's business. I don't want to have to point out statistics about the state of the world to justify my decisions. They might be true, but they are beside the point. The only reason that matters is that *I don't want to.*

I'm not the only one struggling with society's expectations of me.

In England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics released a [report](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindiff) (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindiff>) earlier this year that stated that half of women who are 30 are childfree for the first time ever. Obviously, this is also related to the fact that women are having children later in life but it also points to a cohort of women choosing to never have children. The world is changing yet society at large insists that we fit into outdated models and structures.

The choice to be childfree wasn't initially my own but then I owned it. As my therapist said, I made a virtue out of necessity. There are many ways to be a mother without giving birth, and I chose none of them. As a teenager, I assumed I would get married and have kids as that was the normal thing to do. It was what was expected and at the time what I thought I wanted. In my early 20s when I found out that the traditional route of having children was not on the cards for me I adapted and built a childfree life I'm proud of. It opened up an alternative way of living that is just as valuable as a traditional life.

I just wish people would let me live it without judging or trying to persuade me I'm wrong.

Olga Alexandru is a Romanian-Canadian writer currently living in the UK. You can read more of her work [here](https://www.olgawritesthings.com/porfolio) (<https://www.olgawritesthings.com/porfolio>), or follow her on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/olgawritesx) (<https://twitter.com/olgawritesx>) for random musings on pop culture, getting older and grammatical errors.

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