



The Baby Fever Paradox: Filipino Women and Their Power Over the Nation-State

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Abstract

Women throughout history are burdened with the social responsibility of bearing children, which is further enforced by the pronatalist perspective of the Philippines, manifesting in pressures and norms established to promote childbearing in women. In recent years, people have received these ideals; thus rousing the liking towards children and is intensified with the visceral emotion of baby fever. However, recent shifts in perspectives reveal that there are women who, despite being subjected to societal ideals, being at the most opportune period of their lives, and harboring an intense liking towards children, firmly elect not to have them. With only a handful of research documenting the interaction between baby fever and childbearing, the need to explore this paradoxical phenomenon emerges—the baby fever paradox. Thus, this movement highlights how women contest society's perception of them through their practice of self-determination and bodily autonomy. This paper seeks to unveil the reasons behind their choice of not bearing a child through a phenomenological study. Voluntarily childless, capable, middle-aged Filipino women who have experienced baby fever were interviewed, and their past experiences were analyzed through an interpretative phenomenological analysis that revealed the key themes that led to their decision. It was found that their being childless was in pursuit of their professional careers and self-ascribed purpose, traced back to their upbringing. In essence, their decision not to have children was necessary for the betterment of their personal lives. Hence, being voluntarily childfree in a society that compels you to love and long for children becomes a source of empowerment for women.

Keywords: baby fever; identity politics; self-determination; socio-political-economic; women empowerment