

WOMAN-ING WITH NO CHILDREN

UnMothering the Woman Project

Topic Background

Our society views the default “entry” into legitimate womanhood as the birthing of a child. Women who legally adopt children come a close second in the hypothetical hierarchy of “legitimate” womanhood. In the social African setting, most communities believe that children should not take part in conversations between older people. Only after you have gone through various rites of passage would you then earn the right to be part of the conversations in that circle. Giving birth to children is one of the unspoken rites of passage even in our society today. After giving birth to children, various conversation spaces are now accessible to you. Aunties and other older women now seek your voice during certain conversations (even if they are not related to mothering), your life decisions and opinions are questioned less and are viewed as more mature.

So where does this leave women without children? Women with empty wombs? Women who would rather not have children? How do women without children navigate their womanhood in the context of a society that views being a mother as the ultimate mark of womanhood? Are the women who lose a child while pregnant still seen as mothers, and by extension do they gain “access” into the conversations and spaces “reserved” for women with children?

We believe the construct of motherhood and womanhood is a lot wider than what most of us have been exposed to.

What we’re hoping to do

During this project, we would like to have conversations with different people who have embraced motherhood without necessarily having children of their own. We hope to be able to get a glimpse into the different challenges women who can’t have children, or have chosen not to, have in their expression and experience of womanhood.

We would love these conversations to spark further conversations and more understanding of these women. We hope that the conversations will also provide self-reflection prompts for all who listen.

How you can help

Interviewees:

We would love to hear your story and share it with the world! We will send a set of questions for your review in advance, and if you have any concerns, we would love to talk about them. We have opened ourselves up to truly empathise with what your experience is. However, you are the expert - this is your life. As such, we invite you to co-create this conversation with us. With this campaign, we hope to be able to do justice to your point of view.