



Two Is Enough: A Couple's Guide to Living Childless by Choice

Laura S. Scott

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Fall in love. Get married. Have children. For most couples, marriage and children go hand in hand. And yet, the number of people choosing childlessness is on the rise. These are the childless by choice—people who have actively decided not to have children—rather than the childless by circumstance. In *Two Is Enough*, Laura S. Scott explores the assumptions surrounding childrearing, and explores the reasons many people are choosing to forgo this experience. Scott, founder of the Childless by Choice Project, examines the personal stories of people who have faced this decision and explores the growing trend of childlessness. Scott's expert knowledge and analysis offer a picture of the childless by choice—who they are, why they've chosen to remain childless, and how they've had these conversations with loved ones. Honest and unapologetic, *Two Is Enough* recognizes the challenges of being childless in today's society and offers suggestions on how that same society can change to make room for the childless and the childfree.

Two Is Enough: A Couple's Guide to Living Childless by Choice Details

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Alison says

I like kids, that's pretty obvious based on my line of work, but it does get tiring when people think something's wrong with you for not wanting kids of your own. This book makes a great case for why people choose not to have children, and explains the thought that goes into that decision. You would hope people would respect your decision, whether it was to parent or not to parent, and hopefully this book will help people open their minds a bit.

Mindy says

This book was great, if a bit repetitive at times. For years I struggled with the choice to remain childfree. I always thought (based on media portrayal) that I would wake up in my 30's with a deep seated need to procreate. I've never been interested in children, as a child I was never interested in spending time playing house, pretending to "mom" dolls, or anything overly domestic. I had babysat as a teen but purely for a source of income and never because I garnered much enjoyment for spending time with children. The reason I bring all of this up is that during my struggles with my decision to be childfree I had never recognized these facts, it was only through reading this book and hearing others stories that I started to identify these characteristics in myself.

I also love how this book works to dispel myths of childfree, especially the fact that we're selfish. I'm so tired of hearing from people that I'm selfish for not having children. Is it selfish to know yourself, to know what you'd be good at, to recognize that you shouldn't do something just to do it because others tell you to? This is a much thought out and discussed choice between myself and my Husband and it comes from a place of wanting to dedicate ourselves to other goals in life. I think parenting is one of the biggest responsibilities a person can take on, and shouldn't you really want to take that on so you're the best you can be at it?

Also done well was this books ability to articulate how societies focus on having children can lead to rude or thoughtless questions as well as pushy comments. I will say that I find it incredibly "selfish" that people presume that they understand my thoughts and feelings. I also identified with feeling marginalized some of the time which I never really considered before reading this. Tell someone you're childfree by choice when they ask you how many kids you have and see how uncomfortable they get. Not all people, some people are curious and open, but others will try to shove parenting down your throat, or convince you that you 'need' to hold that baby. Nope I'm fine thanks, now bring me a puppy and we're on ;)

Overall this is a great book to read if you think you might want to remain childfree, if you're undecided, or if you just want to learn more about the thought and motivations that go into remaining childfree (parents pestering their adult children for grandchildren, this is a read for you). I would highly recommend it to those who have made the decision as well, it's very informative and breaks down the different motivations, myths, and realities of remaining childfree by choice.

Jenny Bunting says

As someone who is exploring the childfree decision for my life, I found this book to be statistics- heavy and not really a guide to navigating this lifestyle and decision. The author basically did a study and these are the findings of the story with some anecdotes from the test subjects thrown in.

I do think this book suffers from mis-marketing and there's a bait-and-switch for the book toting itself as a how-to guide. That said, I did find it an informative and worthwhile read.

Lynsey says

I have quite a lot to say about this book.

First of all, as so many have already said, it's not a "guide" at all, and that word really shouldn't be in the title. Instead, it is basically a book relaying survey responses of childless by choice couples, particularly the reasons they chose their childfree life.

This topic is particularly near and dear to my heart, as my husband and I fall into the "childless by choice category" and I feel that so many books out there are aimed at "childless by circumstance" people (i.e. people who want kids but can't biologically have them). So for that reason, I was intrigued -- and happy -- to see that someone was reaching out to OUR demographic for once.

The first half of the book often read like a scientific study, with lots of percentages. It was quite dull, and I found myself dozing off a few times, but forced myself to get through those parts because I was interested in what the author was saying...just not the way it was delivered.

Then, it caught my attention in Chapter 5, when the author started interviewing actual couples, and I was able to hear their stories from their own quotes. This was much more personable and enjoyable, as I was now seeing these people as real humans -- rather than percentages on a page.

It was great to hear from couples that think exactly as we do, as such couples are hard to find in this world.

I also appreciate how the book mentions the issues that childfree couples face (paying more than their fair share of taxes when they don't have children using the school system, being the ones expected to stay late at work because everyone knows they don't have kids, not getting time off to volunteer/do something good, yet parents get paid maternity leave, etc...the list goes on). Such conversations need to be started, and changes need to be made.

All in all, it's a good book. And there aren't many out there on this topic, so that puts it in the top of its category.

I recommend picking it up if you're choosing freedom over children -- and remember, if you get bored, just start from Chapter 5.

Methanie says

Decided not to have kids? Or still on the fence about having children? Feel separate from others who don't understand why you decided to remain childfree? Have children and trying to understand why someone would decide to forgo the experience? Then this book is a good resource for you.

About ten years ago, my husband and I made the decision to remain childless. It was a long, drawn-out, occasionally painful period of soul searching, but in the end it was the right decision for the two of us. We have no regrets.

Even though we are very comfortable with our decision, I still enjoy reading stories about other people's decisions to remain childless. Sometimes the journey of childlessness is a lonely one, and it's nice to get occasional confirmation from others who share a common perspective. I'm lucky to live in San Francisco, where people rarely bat an eye over couples not having kids. (Or other lifestyle choices, for that matter - "Oh, you're a bi-sexual polyamorous vegan living with a husband, girlfriend and a bevy of children from your combined relationships? Nice to meet you.") That doesn't mean that you don't still feel social isolation--especially during the years when all of your friends are having children and slowly drop out of your social circle to make room for other people who have kids. And I get why that is. But it's still hard.

One of my favorite quotes in the book was "If you're not a mother, then where do you fit into society? What do you have in common with all the other women? They don't really know what to do with you, because women are supposed to be mothers."

The good news is, it gets easier! Eventually, you do get more comfortable with being on the outside looking in. And when the babies slowly turn into teenagers, your friends drift back into your life a little bit more.

Until that day comes, I implore those of you who are feeling lonely and misunderstood to read this book. (And also, as an extra bonus, lots of myths such as "childless people are selfish" are happily debunked! So read and smile.)

Joy says

During the time when we remain childless, paid and volunteer work, responsibilities, and leisure interests "fill the gap" to the extent that there is no discernable void.

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there are those who look at this menu of choices and lose their appetite. They leave the table hungry for more satisfying fare, or they come to the realization that they were not craving parenthood in the first place. For many women, this menu might be like a chalkboard, changing daily.

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Again, this is the problem we encounter when we look at the childfree life simply as a choice, rather than a process. It's both, really. It's a series of choices, or decisions made over a timeline in which life experiences, observations, and people act as influencers.

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Lodged in our cultural permafrost are the carcasses of three ancient mammoths: (1) the expectation that we

will all become parents one day, and it will be a rewarding experience; (2) the idea that parenthood is a critical stage in human development and maturity; and (3) the belief that all couples should be encouraged to parent, regardless of their ability or desire.

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Many people intend to have children, but somewhere along the way their desire is thwarted or they change their mind. They may find themselves without a partner when the time is right. They may encounter circumstances beyond their control that make parenthood problematic, if not impossible. Or they may postpone parenthood and eventually conclude, “Our life is good just the way it is.”

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When you begin to challenge the assumptions around parenthood, when you begin to see some value in remaining childless indefinitely—a fate some of your peers can’t even begin to imagine—you find yourself on new ground. Parenthood becomes an option, not something that is fated, inevitable, imperative, or integral to your well-being. You are free to exercise choice.

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some admitted they would be terrible parents; they had spent time imagining themselves as parents or imagining how a child might feel being raised by people like them, and decided they did not want to be a party to that outcome. Others felt, after a period of self-analysis, that the only way to be true to themselves was to question the societal assumption that they would be parents, based on their sense that they lacked the necessary inclination, desire, or instinct that would have made child rearing a natural expression of who they are.

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When parenthood moves from being an assumption to a decision, people are able to experience the liberty—and consequences—of their own choice in the matter rather than settling on the notion that parenthood is a given.

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These couples valued the process of examining, on a case-by-case basis, the decision to parent; they looked deep into their own hopes and expectations, assessing their desire, skills, and suitability as parents.

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Most people living in North America are, or will become, parents. The decision not to have children remains the exception. Even today, when marriage is increasingly optional, the idea that kids are optional, too, has yet to be entertained by the majority. It exists only for those who can imagine a life without children and think it appealing, a choice that exists only outside of the presumption of parenthood.

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Many of my participants were self-described introverts. They used this term as a way to explain their aversion to the noise and hubbub that typically come with young children, or as a way to explain their preference for “quiet” or “peaceful” households that afforded them some “alone time.”

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Quite a few of the people I interviewed admitted to being “planners.” They preferred to carefully plan a trip rather than wing it, though these same people valued spontaneity in their day-to-day lives.

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He deduced that the childfree are typically inclined to consider the consequences of their actions.

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I also noted that my participants tended to approach their decision about whether to have kids very deliberately—logically, rather than emotionally. They did not want to leave it up to fate or whim. I heard the words “accountable,” “intentional,” and “conscious” used to describe the process.

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More than a few of my participants would be described as high achievers and were reluctant to commit to something as huge as parenthood without having at least some confidence in a successful outcome.

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Safer wrote that the childless by choice “reject parenthood, in part, because they lack the requisite ‘burning desire’ they bring to other major life enterprises. Many see themselves as perfectionists who could never live up to the impossibly high standards they would impose on themselves. They also don’t want to risk imposing their unrealistic expectations and exacting standards on a child.”

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marital satisfaction is greatest before the kids arrive and starts to decline sharply after the birth of the first child, reaching a low point when the kids are in their teens; it doesn’t rise again until the kids are grown up and have left home.

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found that the childless women experienced greater marital adjustment and satisfaction, which the respondents attributed to more shared activities and conversations with spouses.

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She asserted that our current “Supermom and Superdad” model for raising children—in which children’s demands repeatedly trump parents’ needs as a couple—is crazy-making, and that the only way to avoid that pattern is to nurture the parental relationship until it is solid enough to handle children’s assault, and then set strict boundaries.³

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If my friends who eagerly anticipated parenthood can’t successfully navigate the journey from couplehood to parenthood, then what are my chances, especially given that I am less motivated to pursue parenthood as a goal?

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My independence and my ability to be flexible in my life are too precious to me. Perhaps if I had a desire to have children, I would be willing to compromise my idea of freedom and independence.” For Nancy, though, that desire wasn’t there.

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“a solid understanding of the responsibilities of parenthood. They understand that children will reallocate their time, affect their career ambitions, their finances, their privacy, and their social activities, and they do not want these changes taking place.”

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Jodi, who had helped raise her younger sibling, valued her newfound freedom. “Basically, it comes down to being able to do just about anything we want without having to consider the needs of anyone else. As care providers when we were younger, neither my husband nor I got to experience this until recently.”

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Most of us are influenced by the experiences of friends and family members, whether we like it or not. In our attempts to empathize with parents, we sometimes project our own reactions onto their experiences. My respondents who were aware of having done this often found that it helped them come to the conclusion that they would not enjoy being a parent. Choosing to remain childless was a way to protect themselves from what they imagined to be a future of stress, anguish, or powerlessness.

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“American society is an inhospitable climate for raising children, where parents can never let down their guard in the face of popular culture, drugs and crime. In fact, nearly half the parents we surveyed said they worry more about protecting their child from negative social influences than about paying the bills or having enough family time together. Six in ten rate their generation ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ in raising children.”

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the majority of the women preferred to be around older children or teenagers rather than toddlers and infants, a finding that prompted him to remark, “The belief that all women are automatically enamored with babies is unsubstantiated.”

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they explain that their choice to remain childless was influenced by their partner’s choice, they say that if

they'd really felt a strong urge to have kids, they wouldn't have chosen to stay in the relationship.

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I value a strong and enduring relationship with a life partner more than I do the prospect of parenthood, but I can certainly empathize with those who desire a child above all else, because I can't imagine how Robert and I would manage if one of us were to change our mind.

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I also noted this pattern, particularly in the case of early articulators: Not only did these individuals choose a life without kids, but they also consciously chose spouses they thought they could enjoy as intimate lifetime partners—in a family of two. As Laura said about Dan, “We don’t just love each other—I also really, really like him.” Is the bar of compatibility, or affinity, set higher because these couples know there will be no distractions in the form of children, no reason to stay together if they become unhappy?

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What I do know from my interviews with childless by choice couples is that these partnerships are valid and filled with enough friendship, love, and mutual respect to sustain these couples over many years of marriage. It is also true that, as a nonvisible minority, these couples are fortunate to have found each other, and to have remained in agreement about what is likely one of the most important decisions of their lives.

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One of my participants, Kathryn, said, “I think that thinking it through and deciding not to bring a child into this world—knowing the type of person you are—is one of the most unselfish acts you can do.”

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What I have come to understand after many years of studying the childless by choice is that the decision to remain childless is typically not a rejection of children so much as it is a rejection of cultural norms, assumptions, and ideals that support parenthood as the normative life course over all other options.

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The assumption that the only path to responsible adulthood is parenthood is another tired remnant of a pronatalist culture that clearly does not hold a stitch.

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I did a bit of investigating and, sure enough, I found that adult children represent only 37 percent of elder-care providers in the United States.

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The suggestion that not a lot of thought goes into the decision to remain childless ranks right up there with selfishness as a common but unfounded assessment of childfree motives and processes.

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the acronym DINK—double income, no kids. This term is used to describe a relatively affluent, childless demographic, but more often is used, like “yuppie,” to describe a lifestyle associated with conspicuous consumption and materialism.

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So what do the childfree spend their extra dollars on—that is, those who actually have something left after paying the bills? Based entirely on my observation, it’s travel, hobbies, housing, relatives, pets, and charitable donations.

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Why do we, the childfree, need solace and strength? Because we are standing up to assumptions, beliefs, and ideals long held by the majority, which includes our family, friends, and neighbors. The choice we make to remain childless flies in the face of everything mainstream culture claims to value. We are rocking the boat, and I suspect this is why the backlash against the childless by choice sometimes seems disproportionate to our actual impact.

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By questioning “the notion that parenthood is a good thing,” the childless by choice create what he called a “clash of values.” Worst-case motives are ascribed to the childfree because “people don’t know the details,

and at some level they don't want to know the details," of why people might choose childlessness, because "it's a fundamental challenge to the way most people see the world."

The intentionally childless experience a plethora of reactions, including curiosity, suspicion, wrongful assumptions, defensiveness, avoidance, discomfort, rejection, marginalization, discri

Louise says

I was a little disappointed in this book. First of all, I got a little tired of hearing about the negatives of being a parent. Secondly, this book didn't really answer any of my questions, like where to find friends with similar goals, or how to handle forced social situations where you don't like your friend's kids. Third, the statistics were a little flimsy for me. Most of the book was anecdotal -- a lot of the time the author would mention things based on her experience. I don't really find that very convincing.

I felt like this was a book for people who wanted validation for not wanting to have children, not a book for people who were interested in exploring the realities of having a childfree lifestyle.

Nicole says

I really identified with this book. I don't think the personal profiles/interview style would appeal to everyone (it's not the most scientific), but it is upfront about what it is, and so far, I am utterly engrossed. Scott does a good job of questioning what it means to enter "adulthood" and challenges the assumptions of our pronatalist society.

Jessica says

This is a wonderful book that explores choosing to be childfree. The author decided to write this book when a friend asked her why she got married if she didn't want kids - as if that's the only reason to be married or in a relationship. Laura Scott surveyed and/or interviewed 171 people to find out 1) their reasons for choosing a childfree life and 2) to explore that decision-making process. What she found was a wide range of reasons people choose to remain childfree and that almost all of them expressed no regret about their decision. Scott explores the choices we have now dealing with having children or not, how people decided, what their primary reasons were, dealing with dating/marriage/relationships, the myths about childfree people and how to cope in a pronatalist culture. She also includes a copy of the initial survey she used in her study. While focusing on childfree individuals and couples, Scott is not anti-family or pushing this lifestyle on readers - she is merely exploring this option as one of many. Very well done!

Courtney says

I finally just gave up on this one. I had higher hopes, but eventually, it felt like I was just reading the same thing over and over again, just put into different words. It's more or less, "Sometimes people don't have kids. And that's okay. Sometimes they never wanted them. And that's okay. Sometimes they put off having them,

then decided they didn't want them or discovered they couldn't. And that's okay. Sometimes people just can't seem to have them. And that's okay." Over and over and over. It's as though those of us who are childless by choice need a very large affirmation that, yes, it's okay not to have kids. "Look! You're not alone! There are others out there! I've talked to all of them!" Probably worth checking out of a library or borrowing from a friend, but not worth paying full price for.

Jessica Ennis says

This book really made me feel less like an alien when it comes to wanting (or in my case, not wanting) kids. It was very nice to read that other childfree married couples are getting harassed just as often as I do, although it is also a little sad. The author really explores the stereotypes and derogatory questions that most childfree people face. Change in society's attitude about being childfree will be slow, but I am not going to let anyone bully me into a decision that I know isn't right for me and my husband. Highly recommend reading this no matter what your life choices are. If you are on the fence, already have children, or know for sure you don't want children, this book is for you. It gives parents a different perspective on life that they may not understand since they made different choices, while at the same time showing childfree people they are not alone at all in their journey.

Kricket says

warning: reading this book was a very personal experience for me, so this won't be an objective review. 2013 is the year i celebrate 7 years of marriage and the year i turn 30. when my husband and i were dating, we both felt that we didn't want children but we were also 21 years old so we reserved the right to change our minds. this hasn't happened, despite countless people telling me that i would wake up one morning and "just want them," especially once my friends started procreating. well- my friends have started, and here i am.

i DO like children. one of my favorite lines from laura s. scott is "i like kids, i just don't want to own one." i have nieces and a nephew and a very precious baby george in my life, and they bring me great joy. last week some little kids sent me homemade valentines in the mail and i thought i would combust with the adorableness of it all...but i still don't see any of them living in my house with me. it's also worth mentioning that i make my living working with teenagers. i love my job and for the most part i find teens delightful. but i've also seen firsthand what happens to these adorable desirable infants 13 or so years down the line. i've seen teens who have been screwed up by awful parents or the foster care system. i've also seen teens who, even with amazing parents- have been screwed up by mental illness or substance abuse or the stupid things their friends want them to do. even so, that's only one of many, many, many reasons i have chosen not to have children.

in summary, i don't want to have babies and this was a great book for me to read. scott explores the different reasons people might not want to have babies and why they are legitimate reasons, as well as the different reasons people tell childfree people they SHOULD have babies, and why they might not be legitimate. i've struggled with people telling me that i am selfish, that i won't truly be an adult until i am a parent, and that i will die alone and filled with regret. scott gently and respectfully exposes these myths for the crap they are, all the while wondering why it has to be an "us and them" thing. everyone should be free to choose whether or not to have children. everyone deserves to be respected for whatever choice they make. if you're struggling to make the choice, this book may be helpful for you. it offered me a lot of perspective and food

for thought.

Jan says

My husband and I are not planning on having children for a variety of reasons. I put this book on my reading list a long time ago, well before I ever knew that there were such things out there as childfree social groups (one of which we now belong to). I recently saw this book on the list and decided to go ahead and read it anyway, because it still sounded interesting to me.

I think that calling this book a "guide" is a misnomer. It certainly doesn't have any advice about how to live childfree. Not that I think one really needs a whole lot of advice ("don't get pregnant" is about it), although I see where if one was still deciding about whether to have children or not, this could be a handy resource. So maybe it wasn't really written for someone like me, what the author calls an "early articulator," someone who's known practically their whole life that they don't want kids.

Still, for me it was interesting to read about other childfree couples, about how they came to their decisions, whether they've regretted it, etc. It felt validating in a way. I've never felt much pressure at all from other people to have kids, or at least I haven't taking it as seriously as the couples interviewed in this book did. I've always just laughed it off. What do I care what other people think? But it's still nice to discover that there are other people out there who feel the exact same way about being a parent as I do.

If you've already decided not to have children, then this book might not be for you. But if it's something you're still contemplating, it might be helpful for you to read the opinions of people who've decided against parenthood.

(As an aside, I had an extremely surreal moment when I flipped to the back of this book to read about the author only to discover that she has the exact same haircut as me in her picture. When she went on to explain that she decided not to have children at 15 - the same age as me - and that her philosophy is "happiness is a choice" - me too - things got a little eerie.)

Laurie says

I really wanted to enjoy this book more; after all, I am childless by choice. One of my biggest problems with this book, however, is the author's own childless-by-choice status. For whatever reason, she offers back-handed insults to the people who choose to have children. I hate when people question my decisions regarding children, and I got equally peeved when the author questioned the decisions of others.

Other reasons it got two stars: The author also repeats herself -- repeatedly. The title, too, is misleading; the word "guide" needs to be stricken completely, as there's no guidance. Instead, it offers anecdotes from childless couples, statistics from her own research, statistics from other people's research and quotes from other authors' books on the topic. A big disappointment.

M says

I only rated this book as okay because I didn't really connect with most of it. I've been harassed about being childfree a few times, not enough to make me angry about it. I understand some people get a lot of pressure and/ or rude questions. I already knew many of the reasons people don't have children. I think this book is more intended for people who are having a hard time with their choice or don't think they have a choice about having kids. It's good that this book exists for them.

I am an early articulator who has known since the age of 12 that children were not for me. The marriage part I'm not sure about. Maybe someday, maybe not. I don't know that it really matters much to me anymore, though it did at one time. Part of my reasoning is that I don't need marriage to have children, and I don't need the ceremony. I have the happiness in my relationship that most of the married couples in the book do, and I am fine with that. I am unconventional enough to admit that even living with someone probably isn't what I want. Happiness comes in all forms. As long as you make the decisions that are right for you, that's really all that matters.
