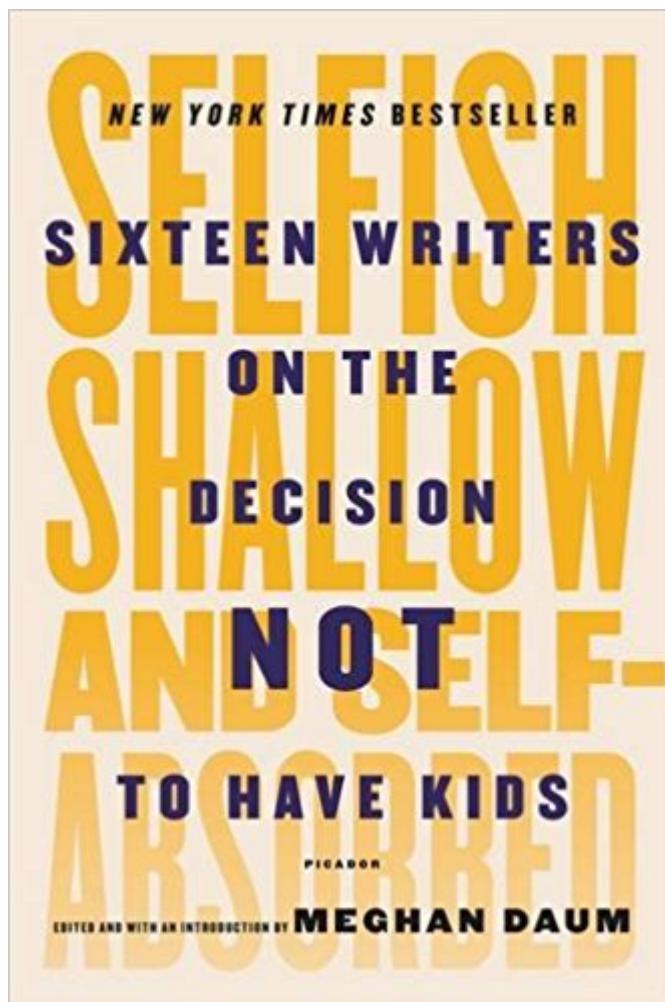


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Selfish, Shallow, And Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers On The Decision Not To Have Kids



Synopsis

Sixteen literary luminaries on the controversial subject of being childless by choice, in this critically acclaimed, bestselling anthology One of the most provocative and talked-about books of the year, *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed* is the stunning collection exploring one of society's most vexing taboos. One of the main topics of cultural conversation during the last decade was the supposed "fertility crisis" and whether modern women could figure out a way to have it all—a successful career and the required 2.3 children—before their biological clocks stopped ticking. Now, however, the conversation has turned to whether it's necessary to have it all (see Anne-Marie Slaughter) or, perhaps more controversial, whether children are really a requirement for a fulfilling life. In this exciting and controversial collection of essays, curated by writer Meghan Daum, thirteen acclaimed female writers explain why they have chosen to eschew motherhood. Contributors include Lionel Shriver, Sigrid Nunez, Kate Christensen, Elliott Holt, Geoff Dyer, and Tim Kreider, among others, who will give a unique perspective on the overwhelming cultural pressure of parenthood. This collection makes a smart and passionate case for why parenthood is not the only path to a happy, productive life, and takes our parent-centric, kid-fixated, baby-bump-patrolling culture to task in the process. In this book, that shadowy faction known as the childless-by-choice comes out into the light.

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Customer Reviews

Childlessness is not pitiful, disgraceful, or unnatural. This is the fundamental point in "Selfish,

Shallow, and Self-Absorbed," edited and with an introduction by Meghan Daum. The majority of the essays that appear in this collection are articulate and eloquent. Most of us are familiar with the stereotype of affluent and carefree adults who have decided not to reproduce. They have fulfilling jobs, travel wherever and whenever they please, take part in a host of recreational activities, and enjoy get-togethers with friends and family. In addition, their homes are quiet and pristine, with no toys cluttering the floor, and no sounds of screeching youngsters. This may be a portrait of some childless individuals, but it does not accurately represent all of them. The essayists, three males and thirteen females, are professional writers, so they are not necessarily representative of the general population. The majority of their pieces are witty, insightful, and honest; it is a pleasure to read such lucid, reflective, and poignant prose. We learn a great deal about why these individuals decided to forego parenthood. They describe, among other things, their traumatic experiences at the mercy of indifferent, abusive, or negligent mothers and fathers; a gut feeling that they did not have what it takes to properly nurture children; their craving for a predictable routine and the freedom to write without distraction; and their realization that they enjoy the company of other people's sons and daughters, but are happy to hand them over to their moms and dads at the end of the day. Every thinking and feeling person's heart goes out to infertile people who would love nothing more than to have a child.

Meghan Daum set out to capture the diverse reasonings of men and women who choose not to have children in this anthology of essays. She writes in her Introduction: "I wanted to show that there are just as many ways of being a nonparent as there are of being a parent. You can do it lazily and self-servingly or you can do it generously and imaginatively." This book rightly runs the gamut of those attitudes. Some essayists view motherhood as an infringement on the individual (Courtney Hodell) or a cultural imperative masked as maternal instinct (Laura Kipnis). Others approach the issue from an entirely different angle. That a history of depressive episodes may impact some future child (Elliott Holt) or how a larger group's decision to not procreate could lead to shifting demographics (Lionel Shriver). I was struck by how many of the authors felt the need to say they love children. To dispel the image of the childless ogre living alone and loveless. Even the term childfree is questioned for its analogizing children to something dangerous like cigarettes. It was those essays that were a bit more unapologetic about the choice (because, parent or not, it's a choice most of the time) that made the most impact. That didn't feature a seemingly throwaway statement of gratitude to a sibling who afforded them the right to live without judgment for not giving their parents a grandchild, or suggest they have filled the cultural script in some other way by being

successful in another area of life. There are ways to live that are neither child-focused nor career-focused, and those are the most interesting to me. It's a shame Daum only sought submissions from professional writers.

As a non-mom (or "childfree" in the book's parlance), but a happy aunt, Best Summer Camp Counselor Ever and a big fan of children in general, I've spent most of my child-bearing years married and stable yet with a general indifference about raising children of my own. I've never been able to put a finger on why my husband and I didn't put more energy into becoming parents. I was hoping this collection of essays, edited by Meghan Daum whom I adore, would have answered questions for me. I was hoping I'd have gotten more out of it. Unfortunately, many of the writers do come off as being self-absorbed to the point of monotony. Several of the whiny essays are indistinguishable from the next. Though each is well-written and interesting, many of the voices begin to run together. Similar family issues, relationship issues, mental health issues, all insisting a love for kids (to the point of protesting too much), all insisting their writing careers could not sustain the demands of children. For parents reading this in an attempt to understand the mindset of people who don't have children, the essays mainly reinforce bratty stereotypes about DINKS (Double Income No Kids). Very little new light is shed on this important topic. It's something I navigate often, as people of my generation are either raising young kids, ignoring the kids they do have, or ignoring the idea of creating kids completely. I do get flack for not being a parent, much of it unfair, self-righteous and pompous considering the issue is heavily layered and textured in all directions. These insular and very specific stories did not venture far outside of the writer's own heads.

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