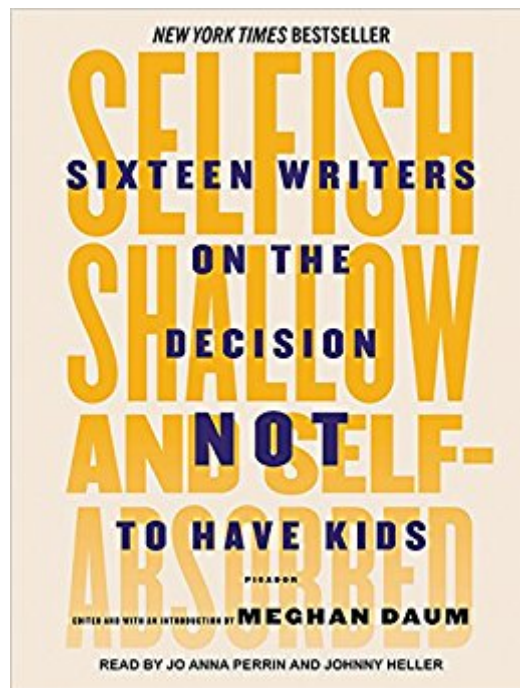




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Selfish, Shallow, And Self-absorbed: Sixteen Writers On The Decision Not To Have Kids



Synopsis

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, demanding career and the required 2.3 children—before their biological clock stopped ticking. Now, however, 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. The idea that some women and men prefer not to have children is often met with sharp criticism and incredulity by the public and mainstream media. In this provocative and controversial collection of essays curated by writer Meghan Daum, sixteen acclaimed writers explain why they have chosen to eschew parenthood. 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. *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed* makes a thoughtful and passionate case for why parenthood is not the only path in life, taking our parent-centric, kid-fixated, baby-bump-patrolling culture to task in the process. What emerges is a more nuanced, diverse view of what it means to live a full, satisfying life.

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Customer Reviews

"[This book] infuses every single thing we do and are." ---Publishers Weekly

Meghan Daum is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times and the author of *The Unspeakable*, *My Misspent Youth*, *Life Would Be Perfect If I Lived in That House*, and *The Quality of Life Report*. Her

essays and reviews have appeared in the New Yorker, Harper's, the New York Times Book Review, Vogue, and other publications. Johnny Heller has earned multiple Earphones Awards from AudioFile magazine, including one for Closing Time by Joe Queenan, and has earned two Audie Awards and many more nominations. Named one of the Top Fifty Narrators of the Twentieth Century by AudioFile, he has recorded over five hundred titles. Jo Anna Perrin is an accomplished actor who has appeared in film and television, as well as on stage in New York, Los Angeles, and regionally. The narrator of numerous audiobooks, Jo Anna has garnered critical praise from AudioFile magazine, Booklist, Library Journal, and Publishers Weekly.

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. Therefore, admitting to yourself and to the world at large that you are not mommy or daddy material takes guts. Some people believe that having children is a biological imperative, religious requirement, social and familial obligation, and the most natural thing in the world. For many, this is the case, but it is not so for everyone. Daum asserts that people who do not want kids do not necessarily "hate children," nor are they doomed to having "incomplete, ultimately sad lives." She adds, "There are just as many ways of being a nonparent as there are of being a parent." After all, one can be a terrific aunt or uncle, a valued mentor, or volunteer one's time without taking on the

responsibilities of parenthood. Pick up "Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed," a controversial and thought-provoking book, and see how you feel about this fascinating and important subject.

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. I think there's so much more to explore about nonparenthood than the experiences reflected by the creative class, but it's exciting to have a book that unabashedly features people who chose not to have children instead of commingling those stories with the men and women who have sadly had the choice taken from them. Recommended.

This book is a collection of 16 essays written by 13 women and 3 men about the various reasons they've chosen to remain childless. As someone who's struggled with the prospect of having children myself, having stated boldly at 12 that I never would - I find myself now at the point in time when I actually need to think about it much more seriously than I did years ago. Each essay is beautifully written and offers a different perspective on the matter. I found myself relating to many of the authors, and in turn understanding more about myself and my own motives and desires in the process. This book connects you to the side much less discussed on the taboo subject of childbearing; it humanizes the experience in ways sometimes funny, angry, sad, content, but always

moving. Good for: If you're also struggling with the idea of having your own children. Also if you don't struggle with the choice, but want to expand your empathy pockets and get a glimpse into the varied reasons why some people would choose not to. It's not just that they're all selfish, shallow, and self-absorbed. Cons: I had to change my reading style for this book in order to fully digest and appreciate its contents. I tend to become very engrossed in books and read chapter after chapter. If you do that with this book you will become confused and the stories will muddle together. I'd have appreciated a bit of a 'break' in between essays in the form of a biography of the writer, a note from Daum to help snap you back to the present, anything. Also, I understand why each of the contributors were writers, however, I'd love to see an expanded edition that features women and men from more diverse professional fields and backgrounds.

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