

*No*  
**CHILDREN**  
*by*  
**CHOICE**

In thirteen revealing interviews,  
men and women discuss why they  
have joined the growing number  
of people today making the tough decision  
not to have children.



*Berzelyn Lewis*

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Some would say the having of children is an expected and accepted part of life – that it is beyond choice. Reliable contraception and changing social attitudes, however, are making it possible for increasing numbers of people to postpone having children – in many cases, forever.

The choice not to have children is explored here in thirteen revealing, courageous interviews. These show that it is a decision that is as complicated as the more usual decision to have children. As one of the book's contributors says: 'I think it's an illusion that someone has a *choice* not to have a child; it's subject to emotions, events, circumstances . . .'

The 'emotions, events and circumstances' vary with each of these ten women and three men. But their collected voices create a much needed context of support for those who feel that life without children can be rich, demanding – and fulfilling.

Cover by Cathy van Ee



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## INTRODUCTION

Is the having of children ever really a matter of choice?

Some would say it is an expected and accepted part of life – and is beyond choice. Others would argue that the choice is pre-determined by factors like trust in one's parenting abilities, trust in one's partner or relationship; or by factors like one's sense of security, maturity, self-esteem; or by the emphasis invested in freedom and mobility; or on early experiences as a child within a family.

To what extent do economic factors, work ambitions, questions about the quality of life in the future or fears about the political state of the world play a part? Are there some people who question the imperative to reproduce, and some who simply do not? Are the anti-natalists social aberrants? Are they victims of circumstance? Are they irresponsible, or are they positive examples of individuals exercising an intelligent choice, and intellectual supremacy over genetic destiny?

Almost everyone who has intentionally not had a child has asked some of these questions, and for the first time in history it is now possible, with effective and accessible contraception, for women and men to challenge their conditioning and the

To begin to write a book like this I soon realised was too emotionally entangling for me. With its sprawling ambiguities the question of whether or not to have children has no neat answers and no categorical package solutions. It was too big and too unruly for me to delve into alone, which is why I chose to put this book together through a process of interviews.

I began with a list of over two hundred intentionally childless people. Of these two hundred I interviewed thirty, which led to this final published selection.

Such a sensitive and volatile subject as the not having of children became a vehicle of expression for aspects of people's lives which had rarely surfaced in conversation, and yet it became apparent that many of the people I interviewed were at boiling point in their readiness to talk. In some cases they had, they felt, been reduced to silent complicity and isolation in their seeming oddness to society.

The interviews I finally included seemed, in their candidness and diverse authenticity, to be those most likely to convey to the greatest numbers of people some positive examples to support a decision not to have children. The choice to be childless is one which many people are now confronting, yet few people have examples to follow, or a tradition or context which validates their choice.

The search for this is the issue at the heart of this book. Thirteen women and men talk about exercising their choice not to be parents, up to this point in their lives. The book also becomes an investigation of the degree to which they feel parenting or non-parenting is a choice over which they have any real power.

They range in age from twenty-one to seventy-one. They include a spiritual leader, writers, media people, a management consultant, university lecturers, a teacher, two people who have undertaken extraordinary long-distance walks, and a World War II aircraft maintenance worker.

It may seem that there is an over-representation of media and communications-oriented people. This is because the people in the final selection present a more unusual approach or a more extreme example of how becoming a parent would

affect their lives. Perhaps they have a more highly developed sense of what the trade-off is between their private lives as potential parents and the public life of their professions?

Women outnumber men in this book because they experience the choice, the chance, the conflict of conception, pregnancy and motherhood at its most intense levels: instinctively, biologically, intellectually and in their fantasy and imaginative worlds. For most women this imaginative world is highly populated with babies of their own, with scenarios related to infants, and yet, as revealed in the interviews, virtually no mention is made of parenting an older child, a teenager or an adult.

The urge to have a baby, or not to have one, is a powerful and potent image and yet it seems some women could oscillate and contemplate the meaning of having their own child from menarche to menopause before arriving at their post-reproductive years when the choice – if it has not yet been made – is taken away. Yet it seems important that a resolution or a sense of choice is established before this so that any sense of regret, loss, sadness, grief or powerlessness can more readily be managed.

The issue of childlessness is one which tends to preoccupy the white, middle and upper-middle class and so, to some extent, the question of non-parenting seems to be class related.

Research from the Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, indicates that the choice to be childless is closely associated with an educated, white-collar parental background, and with a high educational standard on the part of the potential non-parent.

This book is representative of that group, and I believe the cross-section of people talking here usefully demonstrates the wide-ranging reasons for choosing to be childless.

Those interviewed usually agreed for one or more of the following reasons: an intense reaction to the subject, a positive approach to it, or because we had previously discussed it in a personal or social context.

The taped interviews – which spread over many hours –