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Pregnant With Ambivalence

Millennial women share their thoughts, fears, and desires about—*maybe*—having children.

BY [DIANA BAND](#) / OCTOBER 4, 2017



Since turning 30, the question of whether I will have children feels like it needs an immediate answer. While some of my friends are having children, or deciding firmly against it, I've discovered I'm pregnant with ambivalence.

Luckily, I feel no familial pressure to reproduce. If anything, I feel more societal pressure NOT to have children—so much so, that I sometimes feel the decision is no longer mine to make. But then I think of my husband's grandparents, who survived the Holocaust in Poland but lost their only child. When they came to America and had his father, it was a

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miracle. It has served as a startling reminder of human resilience and perseverance—especially in the face of daily headlines that are more often than not, off-putting.

There's plenty of think-pieces for women on either end of the spectrum, but surprisingly few for the ambivalent. When I sent out the "bat signal" for interviews, a staggering number of women came forward. It turns out, there are a lot of us who feel pressure from both sides about our indecision. After years of putting off the question, we have suddenly found ourselves at the age where the hypothetical has become a reality, and that our decisions (or lack thereof), can have a significant impact on our careers, our relationships, and our futures.

What I learned from them was interesting. Despite diverse backgrounds and positions on having children, I heard the same things over and over: "I have too much student loan debt." "The climate is changing, and we're eating up resources at an alarming rate." "I'd love another, but childcare costs more than my mortgage." "It makes dating so complicated." "I need more time (to stabilize my career/relationship/finances/life), but then I'll be too old."

Despite these genuine concerns, the most significant theme of all was that we feel—or are called—selfish. And this was not only true for women who are child-free. Sara F., 31, and her husband decided for a variety of reasons that their first child would also be their last, and they've gotten a lot of grief over it. "Usually we respond with jokes, but we seriously believe having one child allows us to focus solely on his upbringing, experiences, and education. He will be more well-rounded—at least we hope so." Kelly R., 30, and currently child-free adds, "If a woman isn't emotionally, mentally, or financially ready for a child but is working on getting herself into a position to be more ready, I think it's actually selfless."

Women feel self-centered for wanting children, too. "I think the biggest source of pain is that I feel like having children is a selfish choice," says Elsbeth Z., 29. "I don't want to set my child up to live in a world of war, global climate crisis, economic failure, and poverty. I feel like I have so many sources telling me 'No, this is a bad idea.' I wish there were some telling me, 'Yes, you can do it, and you're not selfish for wanting to.'"



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Steph H., 34, offers some wisdom about that external conflict many women are faced with when making choices about whether to have children: “Trust your gut, intuition, God, the universe—anything you draw from that has always helped you to know what you know. Don’t get caught up in expectations, judgments, and comparisons that put you into someone else’s box.”

I hoped that in completing these interviews I’d get an answer to my own conundrum, but instead of an answer, I got something better—comfort. Knowing I wasn’t alone in my fears, desires and conflicts was surprisingly reassuring. It also forced me to look at my privilege, and realize how lucky I am to have a choice at all. So many women still don’t.

For those of us still grappling with our indecision, Meaghan W., 32, advises, “Be okay with not being sure. Every decision has a time and place in your life. It’s okay if this one’s not done cooking yet.”

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