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Laura S. Scott. (2009). Two is Enough: A Couple's Guide to Living Childless by Choice. Berkeley: Seal Press.

Reviewed by: Jenna Horning, MacEwan University

Laura Scott delivers profound and well-researched answers to questions about living childless by choice in "Two is Enough: A Couple's Guide to Living Childless by Choice." Scott, herself, has "[become] increasingly comfortable identifying [herself] as childless by choice," and recognizes the unique opportunity to explore the commonalities that exist between those who share the same life choice. As such, she employs a practical, historical and personal framework.

Through utilizing two research tools: surveys and interviews she explores the reasons why childless by choice couples have decided to forgo having children. In addition to these insights and perspectives, she draws experiences from her own past that further prompt her to question the motives and the decisions made by the childless by choice. Throughout the course of the book, historical context is also woven together demonstrating how attitudes, and ideologies have changed regarding child rearing. By including these three tools, Scott compares and contrasts her own experiences with the couples she interviews, and examples from the past to create a well-rounded understanding of why some couples decide not to have children.

Using the personal framework, Scott takes moments to reflect on the stereotypes and misconceptions she has experienced through her own decision to live childless by choice. She opens the book with a prime example. To the question, "Why did you get married if you don't want kids," Scott notes her startled reply of "love… companionship." Ultimately, this question and her hesitant response end up formulating the basis for the book.

Fortunately, not all of Scott's personal experiences are negative and recognizes how fortunate she was to have childhood teacher Miss Vickers who "provided a role model for something different" (p. 23), while also being able "to create a family of affinity, rather than blood" (p. 23). As a single woman in the 1970's, having a child alone would not have been encouraged. As such, even if Miss Vickers "had wanted children, [Scott doubts] she would have gone that route" (p. 23). Applauding her former teacher for choosing to remain childfree, Scott also recognizes how difficult the decision can be with heavy societal and familial pressure.

In order to craft a full picture of the childless by choice movement, Scott looks back to historical examples where remaining childless would not have been an option. The notion of freedom Scott uses to reflect on her childhood teacher is heavily contrasted with University of Oxford professor, H.L. Goudge who spoke to a church congregation about the dangers of not having children in Nazi Germany. He speaks clearly that "the great outstanding evil is the widespread refusal of parenthood," (p.173), calling it "choosing the path of national suicide" (p. 173). Reflecting the ideologies of that time period, freedom was an idea propagated to serve national interest, as opposed to choices that citizens could actually make, such as choosing to remain childless.

Understanding that some parts of history lacked choice, Scott also aims to include alternate points of view concluding that not everyone sees the benefit in marriage and having children. Louise May Alcott believed "for liberty is a better husband than love to many of us" (p. 26).

While Scott's own personal experiences and historical foundations help to understand her reasons for writing this book and her own decision to remain childless, the bulk of the book reflects on the experiences of other couples. As such, Scott employs two practical research tools:

a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was designed to "feature eighteen motive statements and some open-ended and multiple-choice questions relating to motives and decision-making" (p. 6). The motive statements were crafted through identifying the most common reasons for remaining childless. In so as to "illustrate the complexity and nuances of the decision-making process of the voluntarily childless" (p. 8), the survey was supplemented with "twenty-eight in-depth interviews" (p. 8).

Scott was fortunate to find couples who were happy to share their experiences with her, openly discussing their difficulties and the motives that encouraged them to make the choice. In this research, she was able to address common misconceptions about the childless by choice and understand the truth behind them.

To the question: "What myth or assumption about people who are children/childless by choice do you feel is the most unfair or misleading?" the response most received was "that we are selfish" (p. 153). A participant in the research squashes this claim saying 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" (p. 153). Scott thinks about her own decision to remain childless and comes to a description of herself as "self-determining, not selfish" (p. 153).

In analyzing the responses, Scott further relates to the ideas shared with her by interview subjects making them clearer in not only her own mind but also of the reader. Gina, an interview participant, did "not wish to sacrifice [her] freedom" (p. 79) by having children, noting how her own parents had her without considering it and how she has suffered the consequences. Scott finds herself relating to this point saying, "I valued my freedom as a childless woman" (p. 79).

Another common theme that arose in the interviews was that many "participants were self-described introverts" (p. 71), a term that was used to "explain their preference for 'quiet' or

'peaceful' households that afforded them 'alone time'" (p. 71).

Scott was also presented the opportunity to view the decision-making process in real time with couple Tara and Patrick. The indecision Tara felt about having a child was a "point of contention" (p. 64) in the relationship who was given "the lead role in their decision-making process" (p. 65). Perhaps the most important note about their decision was the advice they had been given about "the kind of pressure you have when you buy a house or car, or when you make a career choice. That's nothing. Those are so changeable, so fluid" (p. 64). In time, the couple decided to let nature take its course and when Scott returned to their house, "It was obvious to [her] that this couple was ready to embrace parenthood – with intention, commitment and enthusiasm" (p. 65).

Through personal and historical references coupled with the experiences of other childless by choice individuals, the book is successful in addressing two areas: common misconceptions and the decision-making process. In the interviews, myths are broken down to reveal the true attitudes of the childless by choice and what their lives truly entail. In addition to these myths, Scott successfully approaches the decision-making process associated with the childless by choice, even providing the story of a couple in the midst of making the decision, who ultimately end up having a child. Ultimately, Scott provides reasons why couples decide to remain childless by choice and why the process is so important.

"Two is Enough: A Couples Guide to Living Childless by Choice" is a book that anyone considering parenthood should read, whether seriously or as a means to evaluate a future decision. Additionally, young people who are not yet considering parenthood would benefit from the book in that it outlines a potential life course and the decisions and sacrifices that are made for those who decide to have or not have children. Couples who have children would also benefit

from the book in that it provides insights ad perspectives from those who do not have children, allowing them to understand the other side.

Ultimately, even though Scott lives childless by choice, I did not feel that any bias crept into her research. The goal of the book was to present the reasons and motives for living childless by choice, which I felt was successfully accomplished. The fact that she identified with the same choice allowed for more comfortable, deeper conversations with those whom she spoke to. My only concern was that the discussion of the results was slightly repetitive in that ideas covered in the interviews also came up in the surveys. However, this also served to reinforce the points presented. Anyone interested in or working in the fields of sociology, anthropology, women's studies and psychology would benefit from reading this book. Overall, I enjoyed the book as it presented strong support for the choice to remain childless. I would recommend it to anyone exploring the topic of childhood and parenthood, whether that be to remain childless or to explore the decision to have children.