

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

Reviewed by: Victoria Svanda, MacEwan University

In her book, “Two is Enough: A Couple’s Guide to Living Childless by Choice” Laura Scott presents us with a debated and honest position about choosing to live childless. Scott provides readers with perspectives which include her personal ones, and the perspectives of research participants in the Childless by Choice Project. This project began to further Scott’s understanding of the journey in decision making in choosing to live child-free. The purpose and audience for Scott’s book are set out clearly. “You may be a parent, a student, a teacher, or childfree yourself. Regardless of who you are or how you came to be reading this book, our common ground is curiosity” (p. 11). Although Scott does not reject or promote any particular position on the issue, Scott offers a variety of ideas, opinions and knowledge of professionals and her personal experience, as well as other’s experiences. Scott defines her purpose in writing this book as, “my intention is not to encourage a political or social movement” and “[it is] my hope that this book finds its way into the hands of those people who want and need these stories, and for whom this information is timely or instructive” (p. 12). There are a variety of themes offered in Scott’s book which are expanded on and repeated. Scott introduces compelling themes such as: (1) assumptions or judgements held about those living childless by choice, (2) pressure felt by couples choosing a childless lifestyle, (3) marriage without children, (4) reasons why people choose to live childless by choice, and (5) lack of support for childless individuals and couples.

There are many judgements and assumptions placed on those who have chosen to lead a childless life. These assumptions are explored in depth throughout the content of Scott's book. On a personal note, Scott shares that, "The assumptions people often make about the voluntarily childless troubled me because they [did not] come close to capturing my complex motives" (p. 4). For instance, some assumptions are that those who choose to live childfree are selfish, unfulfilled and will regret not having children. Regardless of society's movement towards free choice and openness, there continue to be repercussions based on what is viewed to be an inadequate choice. "The childless by choice reject the assumption of parenthood because it excludes so many of us and implies a less-than status or a less-than experience for those who are not parents" (p. 176). Throughout Scott's exploration of her personal experiences, she often expressed themes of feeling isolated. For example, Scott shares an experience as a child, "Unlike my girlfriends, I hadn't picked out names, nor did I spend any time thinking about what they might look like, or what I would actually do with two kids. As I grew into my teens, my imaginary kids seemed increasingly blurred, out of the picture, in the life I was dreaming up as I considered what it would be like to travel the world, run my own business, or teach" (p. 41).

Not only are childless couples overcome with assumptions and the judgements of others, they also feel immense pressure. The book begins with Scott feeling uneasy about a friend questioning her reasons for marriage if she does not plan on having children. Although society's values and ideals on marriage and parenthood have shifted over generations, we continue to assume parenthood is a natural stage in the life course. Scott confirms this notion that "for the majority of couples, the idea that you get married and have kids remains firmly entrenched" (p. 44). This persistent assumption can be overwhelming for many couples. However, Misty, a

participant in the Childless by Choice Project says “my reasons to remain childfree are natural-as natural as the longing for kids. It’s a feeling from my very being” (p. 207).

“According to the National Marriage Project’s report “The State of Our Unions: 2003,” nearly 70 percent of Americans disagree with the statement that “the main purpose of marriage is having children” (p. 44). For many couples rearing and raising children are a large part of their future, while other couples have an alternative vision for their lives together. To gain insight into marriage without children, Scott begins to explore the questions “How do couples come to this agreement [to have children or not that is]?” (p. 112). In asking this questions, Scott seeks to understand the couple’s reasons for living childless, and how they entered and overcame the decision-making process and the final decision regardless of family judgement, or outside pressure to have children (p. 112). In the book, seven childless couples are presented, offering a diverse range of experiences. After gathering the experiences of these couples, Scott notes a pattern, “Not only did these individuals choose a life without kids, but they also consciously chose spouses they thought they could enjoy as intimate lifetime partners- in a family of two” (p. 149).

As every couple’s relationship and experience is unique, so are the reasons why they have chosen to remain childless. Scott places participants who are living childless into four categories: those who choose to live childless at a young age and without external influences, those who choose a childless life to match their partner’s desire to remain childfree, those who delay having children and then made the decision not to have children, and those who are undecided (p. 43). Scott has dedicated a large chapter in the book on diverse motives for forgoing parenthood. A major theme in the decision-making process is surrounded around high value placed on freedom and independence. Many individuals and couples expressed a strong

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need for freedom to allow a focus on personal goals, interests and personal growth. In addition, many felt their lifestyle or career did not match with the demands of parenthood. On the other hand, other couples and individuals did not enjoy children, or felt no maternal or paternal instincts. After discovering findings on the research participants, Scott notes, “I was surprised and delighted to see that my personal motives for remaining childfree were represented in the top six more compelling motives, erasing any doubt I might have harbored about their validity and the degree to which others share them” (p. 110).

Although couples who have chosen to remain childless have thought deeply about their decision, and are often content in their decision, there may be feelings of isolation. There is a consistent theme of isolation and lack of support in Scott’s book. Scott speaks about her experience growing up in Ontario, “If there were any childfree by choice people in my neighbourhood, they blended in seamlessly with the rest of the childless folks. No one ever spoke about someone’s actively opting not to have a child” (p. 14). As society is changing and we are opening our minds and letting go of traditional norms and values, there continues to be a lack of understanding and support for individuals choosing a childless lifestyle. An interviewee discusses her experience in decision-making with her partner: “I thought there was something wrong with us, and I really felt isolated because I [could not] find enough information and books or materials on this lifestyle and people who have made this choice” (p. 61).

In conclusion, Scott’s interview process in the Childless by Choice Project allowed her to “understand that making the choice is often just one stage in the process. [Scott] found people who had moved beyond the assumption of parenthood, who were forging identities in a culture that still holds parenthood as the ideal, and were navigating a pathway that is increasingly acknowledged but not yet fully understood or accepted” (p. 8). Although Scott presents useful

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information about living childless, the title suggests this book acts as a “guide” which is deceiving to readers. This book presents research outcomes and personal experiences, but does not provide a step by step guide on how one should go about choosing a childless life. The content of this book invites academic audiences from the field of sociology and social work to encounter new perspectives on this life choice. Overall, this book offered unique experiences which pushes readers to explore other lifestyles and to critically think about the pressures individuals and couples experience to continue to conform to societal norms.