

Low Marriage and Birth Rates Explained

Kitty Hannah Eden had “in her own words” a traumatic, abusive, miserable childhood. So traumatic, in fact, that she refuses to become a parent. Contraception and an abortion have helped her honor this commitment through two marriages

In her article “On Being Childless by Default, not by Design,” she writes that the cause of this trauma was her mother deciding that she did not love her father anymore and then moving her to the other end of the country. She suggests that she and her mother did not have a good relationship, either: “My stepmom is the mother I always wished for, someone I don’t need words to communicate with.”

Continuing, she writes that while a child is supposed to be “the walking embodiment of enduring love between two humans,” she as a child was “an object of resentment.” And as a result of feeling like an object of resentment, she “resolved early on in life that no child of mine would ever suffer that fate. They would be love incarnate or they wouldn’t be; they would have two parents or they wouldn’t be.”

Eden firmly believes that children should grow up with a mother and a father in a loving, healthy marriage: “More than material wealth, a child needs to committed, devoted, and loving parents to model what love is and how to be a human in the world.”

Her first marriage modeled neither love nor how to be a human in the world, which is why she decided to abort after becoming pregnant. The abortion, however, had serious consequences. She writes that it was a “no-brainer” and that she “never had any doubt it was the right [decision].” But she also shares how she cried in the operating room and felt as though her soul

was being crushed because she had to make the decision alone. Furthermore, she writes about the aftermath of the abortion: the “excruciating pain,” “profuse bleeding,” and breaking down crying at the sight of babies and pregnant women “for weeks on end.”

Even after divorcing her abusive first husband, she still refuses to have children with her current husband since “neither of [them] know exactly what a family is made of.” Her only model of a healthy, loving marriage has been her dad and step-mom’s marriage. But she points out that they did not raise her. Regardless, this is the type of relationship she wants for herself and the father of any potential children. She writes that she is “endlessly curious about what it feels like to look at a fellow human and be safe in the knowledge that they’ll always have your back.”

Intriguingly, she leaves the door open as to whether or not she will have children in the future.

Before stating that she knows she and her current husband will never have kids, she writes: “While I’m not opposed to having children, the conditions have to be right.” Is she suggesting that the conditions of her current marriage are not right, or that her parenting abilities (or lack thereof) will never be right? It seems obvious that she would like to have children. She herself admits that she does not yet know her own opinion. When speaking of her dad’s beautiful second marriage, she writes, “I may never have the chance to pass on this knowledge of love to any child of mine, and I’m not sure how to parse this nor what to feel.”

The author is clearly unhappy at worst and unsettled at best. Her recollection of her miserable childhood is heartbreaking. Given Eden’s background, it makes sense that she is afraid to bring to children into the world and continues to wrestle with these questions.

Even more saddening, however, is the fact that Eden is not the only one with this background making the decision not to have children. Her story offers an explanation for why millennials are marrying later – or not at all. This could explain why the birthrate is falling in the United States and why many couples of child-bearing age are choosing not to have children.

The real question, though, is what should be done. Even if Eden is not admittedly sad about her choice to never have children, others likely are. How can society as a whole give people the tools they need to raise children – or at least have a true choice about whether or not to do so?

One commenter, Dominic Powell, wrote after reading the article that he too had a miserable childhood and never thought he'd have children. However, a seemingly stable marriage and therapy have helped him help his son thrive.

Hopefully all couples like this commenter and his wife will find ways to heal from their past and feel that they are able to become parents.

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