



Maybe Baby

By Lori Leibovich
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Introduction

To breed or not to breed? That is the question 28 accomplished writers—including Anne Lamott, Rick Moody, Kathryn Harrison, and Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez—ponder in this collection of provocative, honest, and deeply personal essays. Based on a popular series at Salon.com, *Maybe Baby* features parents and nonparents alike exploring how and why they decided whether to have children.

This powerful work offers frank and nuanced looks at those choices, both alternative and traditional, from a wide range of viewpoints. From abortion to adoption, from ambivalence to baby lust, from single parenting to searching for the right partner to have a baby with, *Maybe Baby* brings together the full force of opinions about this national—but also intensely personal—debate.

Questions for Discussion

1. *Maybe Baby* divides essayists into three categories (against parenting, still uncertain, for parenting) with respect to their views on starting a family. To what extent did you find yourself in agreement with the essayists in the category that corresponds with your own views?
2. A number of the essayists in *Maybe Baby* explore the unusual circumstances of their families—twin girls born to a lesbian couple that chooses artificial insemination, selective reduction used to terminate a triple pregnancy. How has technology altered the landscape of reproduction and redefined parenthood in our society?
3. Several essayists in *Maybe Baby* explore their resistance to having a child. Why is the decision not to parent considered socially unacceptable and controversial in so many circles?
4. "Redemption" by Joe Loya and "My Tribe" by Asha Bandle consider some of the complications of raising children in the wake of incarceration and mental illness. To what extent do you think that such experiences might help prepare adults for the emotional complexities involved in raising children?
5. How would you describe the phenomenon of baby lust, and why do you think so many adults—especially women—experience it?
6. "Not a Pretty Story" by Dani Shapiro and "Cradle to Grave" by Kathryn Harrison examine the multigenerational conflicts that can arise when a baby enters the family. Why might the arrival of a newborn be especially unsettling to older generations?
7. To what extent is the decision to have a child a bid for immortality, or an extension of one's self?
8. In "Mother's Little Helper," Laurie Abraham describes alcohol as her generation's "answer to Valium"—a response to the dual stresses of intensive parenting and intense work. To what extent do you agree with Abraham's argument that the construction of parenthood in American culture is partly responsible for increased alcohol use?
9. In "Diagnosis: Broken," Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez describes the difficulty of accepting her young son's autism diagnosis. How do her experiences reflect the range of emotions parents experience as they navigate the uncertain terrain of raising children?
10. Of all of the personal accounts in *Maybe Baby* surrounding questions of whether or not to parent, which did you find especially compelling, intriguing, memorable, or heartbreaking and why?

About the Editor

Lori Leibovich was a senior editor at Salon.com for many years. Her writing has appeared in many publications, including the *New York Times*, the *New York Observer*, the *Washington Post*, *Elle*, *Cookie*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and in the anthologies *Mothers Who Think* and *The Real Las Vegas*. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and son.