



Identity

Our Planet Is So F*****d That Some Women Are Choosing to Not Have Kids

"It sounds dramatic, but I'm just being realistic. The way we live currently simply cannot sustain more people."



By Linda Yang

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IMAGE BY CALLIE BEUSMAN

Climate change is real, anthropogenic, and only getting worse. In September, atmospheric carbon levels reached an irreversible tipping point, one that scientists have been warning us about for years.

Despite this extremely worrying fact, president-elect Donald Trump—who once tweeted, "the concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive"—recently announced that he had picked Myron Ebell, an active climate change denier, to lead the transition of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Read more: [Reuse, Reduce, Reproductive Rights: How Abortion Can Help Save the Planet](#)

This bodes poorly for us, and even worse for our potential offspring: Research shows that future generations will be the ones to suffer the worst consequences of climate change, not us. In light of this fact, some women are starting to rethink the idea of having children.

Harriet Spark, a social media coordinator and dive instructor living in Sydney, Australia, is one of them. "I work in environmental advocacy, so every day I'm reading and learning about the myriad of issues our world faces," Spark told Broadly. While at work, Spark encounters head-on the disastrous and already-evident consequences of climate change, such as the mass coral bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef.

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Spark's reasoning for abstaining from having children is two-fold: She does not want to contribute to pre-existing resource depletion by adding another human to this planet, and she does not want to bring a child into a world she sees as doomed. "It sounds dramatic, but I'm just being realistic," said Spark. "The way we live currently simply cannot sustain more people."

Stefanie Weiss, a writer in her mid-40s based in New York City, also decided to be child-free out of concern for the environment. "Years ago, there was a study I learned about," Weiss told *Broadly*, referencing a [2008 study](#) from a pair of researchers at Oregon State University. "There's this number, 9,441. That's the amount of additional metric tons of carbon you add to the atmosphere for every child you have. You can never take it back. That stopped me in my tracks."

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That same study put those 9,441 metric tons of carbon dioxide into perspective: If a typical American decided to recycle newspapers, magazines, glass, plastic, aluminum, and steel cans over the course of her entire life, she would save the environment from just 17 metric tons of carbon emissions.

While the concept of holding off on childbirth because of the dismal state of the world certainly isn't new, groups like Conceivable Future are. The nonprofit seeks to bring "awareness to the threat climate change poses to reproductive justice." "Our integrating question is, how does climate change affect people's reproductive choices?" said Conceivable Future co-founder Meghan Kallman. "This is a question that has resonated with huge numbers of people."

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Through local groups and nationwide advocacy, the organization hopes to open up the discussion for women everywhere. "We give everyone space to explore this really personal and also deeply political decision as it relates to their own lives," said Kallman.

Conceivable Future's community-led events have been hosted at old mills and

movie theaters but are more likely to be in someone's living room, Kallman said. The women's perspectives are often just as diverse as the venues. "We have some people who are really convinced they are not having children, some who have made a commitment to have children, and then we have people who are undecided," said Kallman. "Sometimes there are even a lot of kids [brought by moms] at the meeting."

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Their advocacy does not stop solely at the question of what climate change means to women's reproductive futures. "The people that we organize with go on to do all kinds of things, things that change [political] systems," said Kallman.

The organization currently touts 68 "testimonies," documents in writing or video that give human voice to grappling with reproduction in light of climate change. "The idea of testimony is that your truth and these lived experiences have more ability to move political structures than all the charts and numbers in the world," said Kallman.

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Deciding whether to have children is not an easy process for women, Kallman and others say. Still, they may be more receptive to the argument that abstaining from reproduction is the best choice from the environment. "I have seen a very gendered response," said Travis Rieder, a research scholar at the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics and author of *Toward a Small Family Ethic: How Overpopulation and Climate Change Are Affecting the Morality of Procreation*.

"Young women are way more likely to take this seriously and to see the message as empowering," he continued. "I've taught at Georgetown and I teach at Hopkins, and these are very ambitious young folks, and I imagine that a lot of these women already saw family planning as a challenge to their careers."

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Young men, he added, are far less likely to consider abstaining from having children. "In all my years of teaching this, the number of men who have been quickly converted I could count on one hand," said Rieder. "They are very vocal opponents." To Rieder, it makes sense that men would be less likely to carefully consider the impact of their reproductive choices: "I imagine that a lot of men

have either consciously or unconsciously assumed that they were always going to be able to have their family because someone else was doing so much of the labor," he explained.

That male arrogance rings true with Weiss, the New York City-based writer in her mid-40s. "It was mostly men, in my personal life and online, that told me I was selfish for making this decision," she said. "I was in a serious relationship with a boyfriend at the time when I made the decision [not to have children]. We weren't even at the stage where we were thinking about having kids, but he still argued with me about it. He thought that ethically I was wrong, that I was selfish."

Weiss sees herself as someone making a pragmatic, moral decision—the world cannot support more life, so she will not bring more life into the world. The irony of her ex-boyfriend calling her "selfish" is not lost on her. "It's because men don't even have to contemplate the decisions that women have to make, about their careers, about their bodies," she said.

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