

MAGAZINE

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Focused: Louise Vesey

The women who think they're too clever to have babies

They're educated with dynamic careers — and believe motherhood is beneath them. Warning: their views make incendiary reading

LOUISE VESEY has long approached her professional success with steely focus. After university she set herself up as an entrepreneur and built her own business.

She often works through the night in pursuit of excellence and believes one day she will become a millionaire.

Blessed with both brains and extraordinary drive, she already has plenty to show for her hard work. She has an expensive convertible car and wardrobes full of designer clothes. There is just one asset she cannot lay claim to: Louise, 34, doesn't have chil-

by Antonia Hoyle

dren. There are no tiny feet running around her impressive three-bedroom converted home; no bedtime stories to make her smile or loving cuddles given with abandon.

Yet being childless doesn't make Louise feel incomplete. Quite the opposite, in fact.

'I've never felt maternal and can't think of anything worse than having children,' she says. 'I want to do clever things and reach my full potential. A child would get in my way.'

Louise is one of a new breed of

middle-class women who, quite simply, consider themselves too clever to have children.

She has worked tirelessly to establish herself in the workplace and wants to enjoy the fruits of her success without any offspring to jeopardise it.

To Louise, the idea of 'having it all' is a myth. She is convinced motherhood would ruin her career and render her bored and miserable.

'You can be too intelligent to have children,' she says.

'To reach your full intellectual potential you need to be childless. If you are a thinking woman it's more sensible not to become a parent.'



Ambitious: Margaret de Valois

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PICTURES: IAN HOOTON/CLAIRE WOOD



THIS year's retrospective of Christian Louboutin's shoes at the Design Museum has been named its most popular exhibition of all time.

Perhaps the most recognisable element of his designs are the crimson soles — easily as iconic as his elegant uppers, which have been decorated with everything from Swarovski crystals to lethal-looking studs.

The furniture maker's son was born

STYLE CLASSICS: Louboutin

in Paris in 1964, and became a dapper presence in chic circles in the late Seventies and early Eighties. After a spell at fashion school, he interned at Charles Jourdan, then working as a freelance designer for Yves Saint Laurent and Chanel.

In 1991, he set up shop on his own, in Paris's Passage Véro-Dodat.


Princess of Monaco, Catherine Deneuve and Diane Von Furstenberg were among his first customers, but it wasn't until a year later the soles of his slippers turned ruby — finding black a little boring, he borrowed his assistant's red nail polish and transformed them with a lick of paint. His designs have been worn by

everyone from Barbie to Jennifer Lopez — Victoria Beckham is rarely seen without a pair of vertiginous heels. Perhaps his most loved is the Simple Pump with an 85mm heel, from £375, which comes in a rainbow of colours.

Even if you're going neutral though, the glossy slick of red turns heads. 'Men are like bulls,' Christian Louboutin has said. 'They cannot resist the red sole.'



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These are explosive and highly contentious sentiments but Louise is not the only one to voice them. A recent report revealed almost a quarter of women aged between 40 and 44 with a master's degree don't have children and that the more educated and successful a woman, the less likely she is to become a mother.

The report's findings are highlighted by author Jessica Valenti in her new book, *Why Have Kids?*, in which she questions the widely held assumption that motherhood is fulfilling.

'Child-rearing can be a tedious and thankless undertaking,' says Valenti, while questioning whether smart women might be better off opting out altogether.

'The majority of women who choose not to have children are among the most highly educated and successful. Perhaps it's time to ask: do women who don't have children know something that parents don't?'

Certainly, motherhood can seem a lot less attractive to those with the most to lose. The drudgery of endless feeding and nappy changes is arguably easier to cope with if you haven't had to give up a stimulating career to deal with it. If you can't afford holidays in the first place, you're less likely to object to the virtual house arrest that motherhood entails.

BUT, as therapist Marisa Peer says, the women who believe they are too clever for children will cost future generations dearly. 'Recent studies show intellect is passed on through females not males. So for very bright women not to pass on those genes is a great shame.'

So why do some bright women decide having children is beneath them? Louise, from Worksop, Nottinghamshire, says she has known since she was a teenager she had no wish to be a mother. Her elder brother, a carer, and elder sister, a teacher, both have children — but she was always seen as the ambitious sibling who would put her career first.

'My father, who was a teacher, encouraged my independent attitude,' says Louise. 'I knew I wanted to make a success of my life and that wouldn't involve having children.'

By 16, Louise had set up her own market stall selling porcelain flowers. After she graduated with a biology degree, she set up a nail bar business. Meanwhile, her friends started families.

'One friend had to quit her job as an estate agent at 23 because she was pregnant,' she says. 'She was just getting into her stride, but she ended up on benefits. I could see the envy on her face as I opened my second nail bar. A similar thing has happened with two other close friends. It's hardly surprising it put me off.'

Louise has had only two long-term relationships, neither of which sparked a maternal instinct. The first was between the ages of 20 and 22, with a miner. 'He said I'd want to have his children one day. He tried to make me feel a way I didn't and it created tension between us,' she says.

Her second serious boyfriend — who she stayed with for four years from the age of 25 — was equally pushy. 'He said I should want children, too,' she says.

'But all I wanted to do was work. Having a boyfriend became almost as much of an obstacle to my success as having a child would. And in any case, to have children you have to find the right man, when I don't believe there is one out there who understands me.'

Even with her biological clock

'Having children alters a woman's personality'

They live in a world full of baby gurgles

ticking in her early 30s, Louise says she didn't feel under pressure. 'I knew it wasn't something I'd regret,' she says.

'A lot of women try to have a career and a family but you should fulfil your own life before you bring another person into the world.'

Three years ago, Louise set up a company creating apps for iPhones. She has a staff of three and often works 48-hour stretches. She thinks women who are mothers don't understand her: 'I've always encountered jealousy from women because I've followed my ambition. Women who have children feel they've missed out.'

'Having children alters a woman's personality. It makes them boring to me.'

There are other downsides to having children, she adds. 'Lots of friends my age with children look ten years older because they're so sleep-deprived. When I see women out with their children they look so miserable.'

In her book, Jessica Valenti, who is 34 and a mother of a two-year-old girl, argues that the happiness motherhood is purported to bring is largely a myth, as is the maternal instinct that is meant to make women naturally adept at motherhood.

She dismisses the claim that motherhood is the hardest job in the world as 'a smart way to satiate unappreciated women', and suggests women with active brains could put them to far better use than having babies. 'How insulting is it to suggest the best thing women

can do is raise do incredible things.

Marisa Peer counts countless into who feel the same. 'I see City women about losing to female doctors never be able to they're caught. To many women looks an absolute Nonetheless women can be have children one. What and Lu t

Who knew?
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Eye-catching: Louise says not having children has kept her looking young

realised she hadn't got anyone to leave this to, that when she died she had no one and it was all a bit pointless.'

But for some, it seems, the excitement of a rewarding and stimulating career is too addictive to relinquish.

Margaret de Valois, 36, from Bromley in Kent, runs the global pensions team for an international accounting firm in London and looks after pension schemes worth £2.5 billion.

'I need intellectual stimulation of my career,' she says. 'I find being around other people who are intelligent fulfilling.'

'You have to have such a strong desire to have children to take on that responsibility. If that desire isn't there, it isn't a priority.'

AMATHS graduate and straight-A student, Margaret has known since she trained as an actuary in her early 20s that she didn't want to have children.

'I wasn't a mummy type,' she says. 'I've never cooed over babies. I felt a lot of my friends were looking to marry men who would be good fathers, whereas I wanted to find a man I was in love with.'

She married at 25. Her husband also works in the City. 'Having children wasn't something we needed to discuss. He didn't want children with me either. We knew it wasn't on the agenda.'

Margaret, who is also a trained classical musician and sings with the London Philharmonic Choir, insists her life is full and satisfying. 'We both have lots of friends and active social lives. I may not have children but I have a home, dogs and other relatives to spend my time with.'

She admits that in her early 30s she contemplated changing her mind. 'When I got to 33, I asked myself if I should have children but realised I was thinking about motherhood in the way I'd think about a work project — as the sort of thing that needed to be done, not something I wanted,' she says. 'I've spoken to so many women who love their children but said if you don't really, really want children, then you shouldn't have them.'

The perfection she demands of herself at work has also played a part. 'I'd want to be the best mother, just as I've wanted to be the best at everything else I've done,' she says.

'There is a myth that women who don't have children are selfish, but it's not true. It's just a lot of us would want to give our children 110 per cent just as we do with everything else in our lives.'

Her decision not to have children has affected who she mixes with socially. 'I don't particularly want to talk about what's going on at the school gates,' she says.

'Women with children have different priorities and gravitate towards each other. My closest relationships are with other strong women in their 30s and 40s.'

One can only admire their resolve and self-belief, but at the same time, hope those brilliant minds do not change — when it's too late.

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life,' she says. 'I realised I'd need to work to pay for it. Not having children started as a financial decision.'

But it soon became a lifestyle choice. 'My husband was away a lot and I didn't want to be stuck with a child in the evenings,' says Kathryn.

'I wasn't prepared to change my life to have a child. Perhaps you would call it selfish. But why shouldn't I think of myself?'

SHE has never believed motherhood can be combined with a career. 'Women at work would have children every year, take their maternity leave, then go back to work. What's the point? They can't get to know their own children.'

She was so adamant she didn't want children that, at 25, she paid a private clinic to sterilise her. 'I saw four GPs on the NHS first but they said I was too young,' she says.

'I was annoyed they didn't think I knew my own mind. I was scared of getting pregnant, of losing control of my life and of it being controlled by somebody else.'

The decision inevitably put a strain on Kathryn's relationship. 'My husband wanted the option of having children in the future. We argued but nothing was going to change my mind.'

'If my decision meant us splitting up, then so be it. This

was more important to me.'

Kathryn says the only person who ever questioned her views was her own mother, who died two years ago.

'She was a housewife who espoused family values,' says Kathryn. 'I once overheard her telling our relatives that I couldn't have children.'

'Implying I had a medical problem somehow made it more acceptable than simply saying I didn't want them.'

Kathryn divorced her husband when she was 30 — because, she says, he was unfaithful, not because of their differing views on parenthood.

Single and child-free, her career soared. At 36, she took a second degree in law and at 39 she became a magistrate for her local Sheffield bench.

Juggling her job with life as a JP entails working until late in the evenings and at weekends, and has left her with little time to date, let alone procreate.

'I have lived with men over the years but I haven't got time for relationships,' says Kathryn.

'Even now it's too late I don't regret my decision not to have children. There is so much I want to achieve.'

Yet according to Marisa Peer, many women do lament their decision. 'One of the hardest things I have to deal with is women in their 50s who regret not having a baby,' she says. 'One of my clients, who had a huge hedge-fund career in the City, woke up one day and

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BARBARA McMILLAN



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Ted Baker jeans, £79, houseoffraser.co.uk
Boots, £69.99, zara.com
Watch, £99.95, massimodutti.com

30s
Navy leather-trim dress, £195, net-a-porter.com
Top handle navy bag, £65, asos.com
Black ankle strap heels, £225, reiss.com



40s
Leather panel dress, £69.99, zara.com
Bracelet, £8.50, wallis.co.uk
Black court shoes, £95, dune.co.uk



50s
Jumper, £50, topshop.com
Tan leather skirt, £299, jaeger.co.uk
Bag, £64.99, mango.com
Two-tone shoes, £79.95, massimodutti.com



60s
Leather trim cardigan, £25, La Redoute, 0844 842 2222
Skirt, £35, mandco.com
Necklace, £55, stelladot.co.uk
Snake-print shoes, £30, Next, 0844 844 8000



70s
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