

Our selfish obsession with becoming parents



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A nosy parker asks, "Why aren't you having kids yet? You've been married for two years already! Why the delay? Your biological clock is ticking! You'll regret it later!" In my head, I respond, "What's it to you?" Instead, I smile and act like the respectful South Asian wife I'm supposed to be. The nosy parker is not one person; it's everyone, ranging from a precocious 12-year-old to people of older generations.

"You'll make such a cute little mini-Noora," says a well-meaning friend. "A child will strengthen your marriage and anchor your husband," says an acquaintance who has never met my partner. "Motherhood will give your life meaning," says another who believes my life is meaningless at the moment. "You'll die alone," says an elderly man who thinks I need to invest in a backup plan—a child to be my caregiver when I'm senile. Since it's everyone's business to ensure that I produce a child—whether my partner and I are ready for such a commitment or not—I've started questioning myself: Why should I have a child, if we ever do decide to have one? To find the answer, I've looked around at parents and their reasons for having children.

Some have children because they want a miniature version of themselves. A baby that looks like you or your partner, or a

mixture of both? That's a selfishly cute reason to produce a mini-you. But why want a mini-you?

A female child is often gifted with a baby doll, essentially moulding her into becoming what society expects of women—a mother. She rocks the baby doll to sleep or pretends to feed it a bottle of fake milk. Being a pretend-mother to a pretend baby can still be considered somewhat harmless, as long as the child doesn't grow up to think that the pleasure she received from being a role-playing mother is going to be equivalent to the joys of actual motherhood. A real baby is much more than an inanimate toy, with real needs and preferences. According to American author Teal Swan, the real child is a "dysfunctional doll," because they are their own person—something that parents with "doll syndrome" fail to understand. A role-playing mother puts her doll away when she goes to school, but a real mother can't put her child on a shelf when she goes to work. A role-playing mother pretends to feed her doll-baby with imaginary food when she feels like it; a real mother feeds her baby according to the latter's needs.

Having a flesh-and-blood child requires commitment and sacrifices. Dolls remain unchanged, but a child grows up with their own aspirations that may be against their parents' hopes. Are parents ready to accept their children, who may only resemble them in appearances, to be unique individuals and not just an extension of themselves? Will parents care for their children unconditionally and encourage them to form their own identities?

Moreover, many couples in dysfunctional marriages—including my



ILLUSTRATION: STAR

own classmates—decide to have children because they believe having a child will "fix" their marital problems. When a couple decides to take this path, they use the child to their own benefit. In many cases, the marriages remain "unfixed" as the child's birth can't act as a magical love potion that will save the parents' marriage. Ultimately, the child may be raised in a toxic environment, which may cement their mistrust in the institution of marriage.

Furthermore, many say that having children has given them a sense of purpose. Being a parent can be an important part of one's identity, but it can't be one's sole identity. If I'm to introduce myself, I won't say, "My name is XYZ, my husband is ABC, and I'm a mother to *Ka-Kha-Ga*." I'll tell my name and mention my profession, OR if I'm a full-time mother, I'll say so with pride, and then talk about my passions, interests or hobbies. My mother, who has two Master's degrees from Nagpur University, decided to be a full-time mother until I, her youngest, turned 17. She has authored seven books and conducts online discourse sessions about current social issues. My mother-in-law never had a job, despite having a degree from Dhaka University. She has raised two wonderful children, is a bibliophile and a cinephile, and is currently supervising a humanitarian project in her hometown. Both women had their own identities before becoming mothers; consequently, they didn't feel lost after their children grew up to be independent adults.

Lastly, having children because they'll grow up to be your caregivers when you're too old to look after yourself is an unsolicited advice often given to childless couples. Rearing children with that sort of selfish agenda is highly problematic.

So why have children? I believe there should be one intention behind having children: to raise virtuous human beings, devoid of prejudices and hate, championing love for all. According to the Baha'i philosophy, our purpose, for which we have, "from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that [we] may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony."

Your freedom ends where mine begins

The problem with the Freedom Convoy demos



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THERE is a comprehensive global perception that Canada is a nation where relative peace, justice, stability and the rule of law are institutionalised across public life; protests, riots, violence and divisiveness are associated with their southern neighbours. Yet, the ongoing pandemic and—crucially—the resulting socioeconomic effects, in conjunction with health mandates, have created ample room for a small but vocal group of individuals calling for a restoration of their so-called freedoms. The Freedom Convoy is supposedly being led by truckers and their supporters, who are protesting against Covid-19 vaccine requirements to re-enter Canada—rules imposed by Justin Trudeau's government as a public safety measure in January 2022. Convoys from across Canada descended on the capital city of Ottawa on January 29 and spread across economic hubs like Toronto and Windsor. The fundamental question is: How popular are these protests, and how necessary?

Let's look at the facts. Canada has a vaccination rate of above 80 percent (with two doses)—higher than countries like the US and the UK. Roughly 85 percent of

the 120,000 Canadian truckers are fully vaccinated, with the trucking industry being fundamental during the pandemic in ensuring a sustainable supply chain process, with regards to the smooth transfer of essential goods and services across Canada and the US. When it comes to restrictions, the decentralised nature of governance in Canada means that much of the public measures taken during the pandemic have been imposed by provincial governments—not by the Government of Canada. In essence, both left- and right-leaning provincial governments across the country have mandated the usage of masks in schools, introduced vaccine passport systems, and instituted public health fines.

On the other hand, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet have focused on driving forward a pro-vaccine message and pushed through unprecedented stimulus packages for workers and businesses, while outlining border restrictions relevant to the mobility of travellers and essential workers. In a nutshell, both the state architecture and the public have generally been receptive to the advice of health experts and medical professionals.

But now pandemic fatigue is setting in, and the polar extreme of this very fatigue is being manifested via the Freedom Convoy. It is important to point out that the trucking industry groups, including the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA), have dissociated themselves from the protests, indicating that a large number of those calling for the end of mandates

are, in fact, not truckers. Concerns have been raised as to the influence of far-right groups in determining the tone of the protests—even that of pro-Trump groups emanating from the US. The international ramifications are widespread as well, with similar demonstrations being mobilised in France and Belgium.

The Freedom Convoy may have started as a genuine means to kick-start a conversation around health mandates and fundamental rights. Yet, it has transitioned into a tool to call for Trudeau's resignation and a demand for the termination of all mandates—irrespective of who instituted them or the health implications of such a decision. "Unmask the children"—is what truckers who protested outside a school in Ontario demanded this very week. Citizens across the country, and particularly people of colour, have reported racist and verbally abusive language being directed towards them by demonstrators.

The situation on the ground remains politically fluid and volatile. In a first in Canadian history, the Emergencies Act was invoked on February 14—a constitutional instrument guaranteeing the federal government wide-ranging powers to respond to public welfare emergencies. It's expected that this will have the nod of a majority of parliamentarians to be enforced. Measures discussed include targeted law enforcement actions, along with directions to financial institutions to curb flows of funds towards the protests. At the same time, there has been wide-scale

indication of plans to remove restrictions across most aspects of public life in the coming month itself. While such has been based on the advice of health experts, it's difficult to unwaveringly deny that the Freedom Convoy has had no effect in policymaking in the past month or so.

There are those who will say that Trudeau is out of touch with the public—perhaps he is. Some will say that he is overreaching when it comes to enforcing his authority. And there is reason to question him on his government's spending patterns and rising inflation rates. Yet, to call for his resignation on account of existing public safety measures is a far stretch—especially given that he received a mandate to govern via recent elections, wherein he outlined very clearly a pro-vaccine and pro-mask road to recovery.

The Freedom Convoy consists mostly of a demographic and racial group who have not been oppressed systematically, and their rights have categorically not been infringed upon, in my opinion. The expectation to follow health guidelines and the science around Covid is one that's driven by a civic duty to keep each other safe, and it's for this very reason that a majority of Canadians, and 85 percent of truckers, are vaccinated today, and the country's Covid mortality rate remains relatively low. The minority of Canadians who are not, barring those with medical conditions, can choose to remain unvaccinated—but there is an opportunity cost of doing so, and that in principle is valid.

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QUOTABLE Quote



SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

(1908 - 1986)
French writer

One's life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation and compassion.

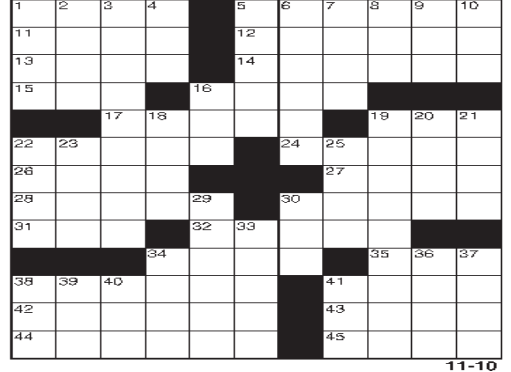
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 True statement
5 Stellar radio source
11 Magnetic metal
12 Loosen, in a way
13 Pants part
14 Wed in secret
15 "2001" computer
16 Borscht veggie
17 Bearings
19 Sticky stuff
22 Copying
24 Ice cream unit
26 Bobcat's kin
27 Visibility lessener
28 Printer's need
30 Daughter of Leda
31 Urgent call
34 Young kangaroo

DOWN
1 School member
2 Open space
3 Fossil fuel sources
4 Blasting stuff
5 Hive leader
6 Exempt if
7 Heaps
8 Easy victim
9 Tennis feat
10 Spectrum end
16 Implore
18 "Need You

35 Wedding words
38 Chastise
41 Burden
42 Steered clear of
43 Lively folk dance
44 Broadway's Bemadette
45 Regarding

Tonight's band
19 Sites of defensive stands
20 Seep
21 Ready for business
22 Swiss peaks
23 Firebug, for short
25 Enjoy some gum
29 "Dracula" author
30 Cow chow
33 Oboe parts
34 Law of the movies
36 Song for two
37 Capital on a fjord
38 Workout unit
39 Planning time
40 Diamond club
41 — pro nobis



THURSDAY'S ANSWERS

C A S A H O T E L
A D E L E I N A N T S
P O W E R P L A N T S
E R A N O T G E T
R E G R E W T O R E
R E E S E U S S R
C O S T G N A T S
A R T S R E C A L L
P I E B A A L E O
P O W E R B R O K E R
E L E N A M A T T E
R E D D Y T O S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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