

Kitzinger, Sheila. 1987. *Giving Birth, How it Really Feels*. London: Victor Gallancz.

Davis, Linda, Jo-anne Byrne and Susan Cullen. 1992. *Women in Labour: 32 Personal Accounts of Childbirth*. Melbourne, Australia: The Text Publishing Co.

The internet also is a source of birth narratives. A sample of stories told in the first person can be found at the following web sites:

<http://boards.parentsoup.com/messages/get/psbirthstories19.html>,

<http://unassistedchildbirth.com/stories.htm>

<http://pages.ivillage.com/misc/coatlicue/index.html>

[http://www.compleatmother.com/birth\\_stories.htm](http://www.compleatmother.com/birth_stories.htm)

## **Sleepless Days: One Woman's Journey Through Postpartum Depression**

Susan Kushner Resnick  
New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000

### **Reviewed by Faulkner Fox**

This is a harrowing book. Susan Resnick describes her descent into full-blown postpartum depression (PPD) after the birth of her second child, Max. She also describes her recovery, aided primarily by the anti-depressant Zoloft.

*Sleepless Days* is an informational memoir, meant to help PPD sufferers—past, present, and future—understand this oft misdiagnosed disease. Resnick appears to position herself as a feminist—although she never uses this word directly—shedding light on a critical women's medical issue that has been underestimated, ignored, and ill-treated by the male medical establishment. When Resnick goes to her family doctor with “an obvious set of PPD symptoms”—insomnia, constant anxiety, fear of hurting her baby, thoughts of suicide—he tells her she is suffering from “housewife's anxiety” and needs a good vacation.” He probably would have added that I needed a good bang had he not been trying so hard to appear sensitive,” she comments wryly.

Indeed, this book sheds light on the nature, prevalence, and terror of PPD. I initially came upon this book when a friend recommended it a year after I fell into a depression I never fully understood, saying “Check this book out. I think you had PPD.”

Reading *Sleepless Days*, I found myself thinking that I had suffered from PPD, but according to some of Resnick's designations of normal and pathologi-

cal symptoms, I am still experiencing it. (My children are now six and three.) As evidence of her recovery from PPD, for example, Resnick describes “making real food” on an afternoon when she has a babysitter. This is distinguished from what she did while depressed: “making some pathetically simple meal like pasta and jarred sauce or hot dogs and beans.” Cooking could very well signal mental health. Not cooking during precious babysitter time could also, at least to my mind, signal mental health.

My problem with *Sleepless Days*—and I think this will be of considerable concern to feminists—is that Resnick never looks at any of the structural stressors that may contribute to PPD. She claims the disease is caused by “a combination of physiological and psychological factors.” Hormonal changes, a history of depression, and a controlling personality can all be related to PPD.

When Resnick gets depressed, she is at home in the suburbs, single-handedly caring for an infant and a two-year-old. Her husband, whom she portrays as “tremendously supportive,” goes to work at 7:45 a.m., never returns before 6:15 p.m., and often does not get home until 8:00 p.m. Not once does she question their traditional division of labour and whether it may have something to do with her depression. (Studies show that rates of depression are considerably higher among stay-at-home mothers than working mothers, even when the working mothers are at low-paid and/or high-stress jobs.) Resnick’s goal, made clear throughout the book, is “to resume my post as a normal, loving mother.” Is it “normal,” I found myself wondering, that her husband works 10 1/2 to 12 hours a day while she, a well-published journalist, is home alone with two children?

When Resnick asks her husband if he thinks she is going to be okay, he answers: “Well, I think so, but I don’t want it to get out of hand so I’m stuck raising two kids. You’re the glue that holds us together.” Resnick, at least as she portrays herself in *Sleepless Days*, is much less prone to resentment than me (could unexpressed resentment possibly be a contributing factor to depression?), but I enjoyed imagining my response to such a comment: “It is out of hand, and I’m out of here. You do what I do 12 hours every day, and see if you don’t get depressed.”

Of course I am aware that attributing all, or even most, of Resnick’s PPD to structural inequities between her and her husband is just as near-sighted as claiming that PPD is all in a woman’s mind. Resnick wants to ascribe her recovery primarily to Zoloft, and I do not pretend to know enough about the medication to refute her. I agree wholeheartedly with Resnick, however, that PPD should be taken seriously and studied fully. I just want to make sure that structural factors, such as how household and childcare responsibilities are divided, are considered along with the psychological and physiological factors.