

The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians: Tips and Techniques from Conception to Birth—How to Stay Sane and Care for Yourself

Rachel Pepper
Sand Francisco: Cleis Press, 1999

Reviewed by Sabine Meyer

“How-to” guides—especially those that claim to be “the ultimate”—have always turned me off. Hence, when the bright cover of Rachel Pepper’s book caught my eye during a recent visit to my local feminist bookstore, my first impulse was to discard it as yet another attempt to say it all. I quickly moved on, to browse through new fiction, feminist theory, used books, and the children’s corner which my two-year-old was already in the process of dismantling. I did return, however to the table that displayed an assortment of titles on mothering/motherhood. And when I ventured beyond the “baby-colored” bracelets, bottles, spoons, pacifiers, chew toys, and pink socks of Pepper’s cover, I found an abundance of detailed and well-presented information. Moreover, I encountered a tone of support and encouragement for a spectrum of voices and choices surrounding the issue of lesbians becoming mothers which I had not expected from *The Ultimate Guide*.

A new lesbian parent herself, Pepper bases her “guide” on information she has gathered during her own journey toward motherhood. An introductory chapter on projecting and planning for pregnancy briefly considers professional, financial, emotional/psychological, social, sexual and other demands and changes that having and raising children—especially as a single or partnered lesbian—are likely to raise. The chapters that follow offer detailed information on the logistical aspects of becoming a mother without a male partner: understanding/monitoring fertility, choosing sperm banks and/or donours, insemination, infertility treatment, pregnancy, labour, delivery, the impact of pregnancy on desire/sex/self-esteem, welcoming baby, and a list of resources and support networks. Taking a wholistic approach to her subject, Pepper includes the importance of understanding one’s desire to have a child, of establishing social-emotional support systems, of taking care of oneself, and connecting with others riding the “conception roller coaster”. By establishing a dialogue between her own experiences with “the wacky world of lesbian conception and pregnancy” (ix) and those of other lesbian moms/moms-to-be, Pepper creates a much needed sense of connection and reassurance for those of us who anticipate pregnancy but do not see ourselves addressed by conventional pregnancy books, most of which address the needs of the straight, coupled mainstream.

Unfortunately, *The Ultimate Guide* falls short of by-passing the rather

common equation of being able to “pay-for-it” with a license to “go-for-it”— a highly problematic class- (and perhaps also race-) specific presumption. In fact, having sex with or accepting a “direct” donation from a male friend or acquaintance might be the only choice for some of us who could not afford to conceive through medical intervention. Why not “go against the lesbian party line” (39) and explore further the diversity of choices made by lesbians who want to become mothers and the socio-political ramifications of these choices? Moreover, the talk about “boy sperm” and “girl sperm” leaves me wondering what it is that spurs our desire to be(come) mothers. The hope or desire of parents-to-be for a child of one or the other sex is an important issue in any book that deals with pregnancy and becoming a parent. However, when we “design” a child should we not keep in mind the very questionable nature of traditional efforts at gender assignment and the normative expectations that such efforts serve to enforce? Should we not strive to promote frameworks within which our children can reach beyond preconfigured, binary formulae of who they ought to be(come) and empower them to exceed those formulae?

In spite short-comings, *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians* fills an obvious gap by providing queer-friendly and queer-specific information on how to overcome obstacles we often face when we contemplate, map out, and pursue the process of becoming lesbian, bisexual, and/or single mothers. I highly recommend this resourceful and up-to-date compendium of “tips and techniques,” alongside other wholistic guides to women’s bodies/health and in lieu of the more traditional volumes that continue to refuse us a place in the realm of mothering/motherhood.

Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England

Mary Dockray-Miller
New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000

Reviewed by Donna C. Woodford

“Motherhood is becoming respectable, finally, in feminist circles,” notes Mary Dockray-Miller at the beginning of *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (1). Nevertheless, she notes that this respectability has been a long time in coming: “For years [motherhood] was something to be ignored, embarrassed about, or evaded as feminists defined themselves as daughters rather than as mothers” (1). In academia, motherhood often has been viewed as a trivial subject, not worthy of serious intellectual inquiry. Dockray-Miller’s