

Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It

Andrea J. Buchanan
New York: Seal Press, 2003

Reviewed by Debra Brenegan

According to Andrea Buchanan's, *Mother Shock: Loving Every (Other) Minute of It*, mothers align themselves with the "conventional assumption that motherhood is noble and joyous and uncomplicated." Using the extended metaphor that the transition into an often messy "real motherhood" is like "culture shock," Andrea Buchanan's book may help reassure new mothers who are experiencing ambivalent feelings of motherhood, but it will do little to explain the reasons for these feelings.

Buchanan spends approximately one-third of her book defending her premise that mothers are afraid, unwilling, or unable to talk about the less-than-great aspects of mothering. She cites instances when women friends claim to "love every minute" of their parenting responsibilities, leaving a sleep-deprived and sometimes stressed Buchanan bewildered. Buchanan had to stumble upon online mothering support communities and establish her own neighborhood playgroup before she finally met a few women who would dare to express anything but pure bliss about their mothering duties. She writes, "It's harder than you think to admit your even occasional dissatisfaction as a mother without feeling instant guilt, an immediate sensation of shame for even suggesting you might not be happy."

Buchanan's assumption that the majority of mothers purposely present facades of "contented womanhood" is problematic, however. Granted, media representations and "how-to" books often give the impression that mothers' loving instincts lead them along a smooth path of natural, spontaneous caregiving, but are not female support systems founded on actual experience rather than media images? It is surprising that Buchanan finds the opposite to be true.

Buchanan goes on to admit that she "slowly learned that feeling conflicted does not mean that I don't love my child." Her statement gives readers permission to set aside ambivalent feelings of self-worth and allows them to confront other issues common to new motherhood. Buchanan's book includes chapters on confronting advice-wielding friends and relatives, deciding when or if to have another baby, and establishing nurturing support systems, but her true gems of wisdom pop up seemingly unplanned amid her diary-like essays. For instance, she touches on the idea that once people find out she is a mother—and a mother who works from home—she "becomes less appealing, more easily dismissed." Moreover, in the middle of a heartfelt letter to her future daughter confessing love and sometimes frustration, Buchanan suddenly adds, "I wish

there was a better division of labor than Daddy when he has time and Mommy all day, all night.” Unfortunately, Buchanan quickly drops such pertinent subjects in favour of less interesting topics, such the guilt associated with bottle-feeding or a mother’s embarrassment when her toddler utters an expletive.

Buchanan’s assumption that her audience is driven by media images of motherhood smacks of condescension. She should release mothers from false assumptions and offer them more of her occasional nuggets of modern wisdom. For instance, she does not link her own satisfaction derived from a rare afternoon devoted to work to a human being’s need to contribute to the world by performing valuable work. Although mothering is valuable, society considers it economically valueless. Instead of confronting the underlying issue of the worth of women’s work both as mothers and employees, Buchanan concludes disappointingly that she is “an idiot” for forgetting that, “for now at least, those two things are mutually exclusive.” Readers are left to wonder about Buchanan’s purpose in writing her book.

Still, Buchanan’s style is warm and readers cannot help but be engaged by such statements as, “Now, if you moms of teenagers could kindly stop laughing at me.” Although she concludes that “as a mother I am also constantly addressing the question of balance, trying to weigh my own wants and needs against my daughter’s, trying to balance my interests with hers,” her book clearly lacks balance. Buchanan concentrates on the mundane choices associated with motherhood and society’s judgment of those choices. She does not show how contemporary mothers balance their needs, feelings, and desires with those of other people—including their children.

Twice Alive: A Spiritual Guide to Mothering Through Pregnancy and the Child’s First Year

Beth Osnes
Boulder, CO: Woven Word Press, 2005

Reviewed by Juliana Forbes

I must begin by declaring that I am not an unbiased reviewer of Beth Osnes’s *Twice Alive: A Spiritual Guide to Mothering Through Pregnancy and the Child’s First Year*. My children’s births and lives are woven inextricably throughout its words since I am a near and dear friend of the author. In fact, she and I, with two other mother friends, founded Mothers Acting Up, a movement to mobilize the vast political strength of mothers to protect the world’s children. I have been privileged to read Osnes’s work in gestation, was a support through