

# Book Reviews

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## **The Mother's Guide to Sex: Enjoying Your Sexuality Through All Stages of Motherhood**

Anne Semans and Cathy Winks  
New York: Three Rivers, 2001

### **Reviewed by Batya Weinbaum**

The jacket blurb describes *The Mother's Guide to Sex* as “a hip, no-holds barred guide to sex and motherhood.” This book raises controversial topics such as why single moms are entitled to great sex, and how to get it; and ten good reasons to talk to your children about sex, and what to say. It is a good book to have in your office—if you teach women—for your pregnant students. *The Mother's Guide* reminds us: “Given that most of us were raised believing we shouldn't talk about sex, it's no wonder that we find it a daunting task” (61).

This book leads you through the life-changing event of giving birth. A valuable chapter, “Sex and the Single Mom,” explores topics such as what and when to tell your dates about your children. The authors advise, “most moms find that full disclosure helps them separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to screening out unsuitable partners” (260); and “it's best not to let your lovers spend too much time with your kids until you've become more serious about your relationship” (252). Semans and Winks recognize that “until society prioritizes the needs of moms – including quality child care (subsidized and on

site), paid maternity and paternity leaves, job sharing, and family-friendly work environments, we're never going to have enough time. So our advice to you is to grab the moments you can for personal pleasure. And seize every possible opportunity to agitate for social change" (249-250).

Other chapters explore topics such as building self-esteem, becoming a mother, sexuality as a parent, and raising sexually healthy children. The list of parenting resources at the back of the book are invaluable – I wish I'd had them at my fingertips earlier. In fact, the lists contain many addresses, websites, and telephone numbers I will pass on to my students. The list of research organizations will provide the basis for essays and reports, and the list of hotline numbers listed will be useful for students, as well. In fact, this book will help raise the consciousness of all readers.

## **At the Breast: Ideologies of Breastfeeding and Motherhood in the Contemporary United States**

Linda M. Blum  
Boston: Beacon Press, 1999

### **Reviewed by Lara Foley**

Linda Blum's book, as its subtitle suggests, provides a complex and nuanced portrait of ideologies of breastfeeding and motherhood in the United States. She analyzes nineteenth and twentieth century medical discourses, popular advice literature on motherhood and breastfeeding, as well as data from participant observation and interviews with 28 members and leaders of La Leche League. Further, in an effort to hear the stories of women who might be less influenced by dominant discourses, particularly working-class white and African-American mothers, Blum examines interview data from 34 women, recruited from an urban family practice clinic serving primarily low-income clients, as well as 19 women working as low-status hospital workers.

Blum situates motherhood and breastfeeding as both personal experience and public issue, developed in the context of power relations. She suggests that scholarship on motherhood historically has either privileged lived-experience or has constructed mothers as subjects of institutional and cultural discourses. Blum argues that a scholarly discussion of motherhood should encompass "women's stories, but framed knowledgeably, sympathetically in larger contexts; it is a view of women as active subjects but subject to particular constraints and conventions" (10). Her work does exactly that.

Blum gives an excellent overview of feminist theories on motherhood and