

# Book Reviews

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## **A Child on Her Mind: The Experience of Becoming a Mother**

Vangie Bergum  
Westport, CT.: Bergin and Garvey, 1997

### **Reviewed by Anna Beauchamp**

Vangie Bergum first coined the phrase “a child on her mind” to describe the core experience of motherhood in her earlier work, *Woman to Mother: A Transformation* (1989), for which she interviewed a group of middle-class women before and after the birth of their first child, and analyzed the patterns in their experiences of transformation into motherhood. She examined the decision to have a child, the experience of the child’s presence during pregnancy, the experience of labour, breastfeeding, and the transformative sense of responsibility that comes from living with an infant. She also included a section on various approaches to childbirth knowledge and their effects on women’s transformation into motherhood. *Woman to Mother* was limited in scope, however, by the small number of women Bergum interviewed (only six) and by the fact that they represented a rather homogeneous group.

In *A Child on Her Mind*, Bergum builds on her earlier research and extends her examination of motherhood experiences to include mothers from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, birth mothers who place their children for adoption, adoptive mothers, teen mothers, and mothers who choose abortion. While much of the material covered in the first two chapters comes directly from her earlier book, the pairing of her original research with the new material makes *A Child on Her Mind* a much more comprehensive look at the psychological impact of the experience of motherhood. Bergum’s central question throughout the book is “What is the experience of becoming a mother?” (3). In addressing this question, Bergum has both broadened her scope and deepened her analysis.

Bergum’s discussion of birth and adoptive mothers raises challenging questions regarding just how we define a “mother.” Pointedly naming this chapter “Adoption’s Two Mothers,” Bergum presents a compelling case that

there are deeply felt experiences of transformative motherhood both in choosing to relinquish a child for adoption and in making the commitment to raise an adopted child. Another chapter focusing on teen motherhood explores the effects of new motherhood on young women who are still in transition to adulthood. Bergum displays profound respect for the experiences of each and every mother she interviews.

Bergum shines brightest in her final chapter, “The Way of the Mother.” Here she does an artful job of drawing out the commonalities in the varied experiences of motherhood described by the diverse group of women she has interviewed, and she makes an eloquent case for motherhood as the basis of a morality of responsibility:

I suggest that the experience of women during pregnancy, birth, and nurturance demonstrates how the woman turns toward the child, and how, in this turning to the child (as Other), she comes to a renewed sense of herself (the Self). In this moral turn the woman asks the questions, “Who am I?” and “What should I do now?” Using reproductive choices as an example, I propose that moral questions and our responses to them stem from a relational root—the commitment that we have toward each other.... The stories of mothering are sources of moral knowledge. (134)

## **The Rhetoric of Midwifery: Gender, Knowledge, and Power**

Mary M. Lay  
New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000

### **Reviewed by Melissa Miller Chastain**

A well-researched, articulate contribution to the field of midwifery and rhetoric, this book analyses the recent Minnesota hearings on midwifery licensing and regulation. A professor at the University of Minnesota, Lay affirms that this book provides a “rare opportunity to study the medical and midwifery practices in conflict; the use of discourse to maintain professional jurisdictions; the exclusive claim to scientific knowledge and discourse by dominant professions; and the cultural status granted to women’s experience and knowledge of their bodies” (ix). Written in an approachable style, *The Rhetoric of Midwifery* not only offers an understanding of “how the hegemonic medical profession maintains its jurisdiction claims and how midwifery practice currently responds to those claims, but also insight into the role that discourse or language plays throughout these interactions” (x).