

professions in Canada and recognizes that “reproduction was (and is) in part socially constructed and that it tells us much about the culture in which it occurred” (7). She seeks to analyze “the structure of medicine rather than the motivation of individual physicians” (10), and to identify and elucidate the ways in which “medical practitioners examined issues, saw problems, and described what they did” (10). Through incisive analysis, Mitchinson records the history of childbirth in Canada.

Mitchinson situates women and obstetric practice in historical context and describes how women in childbirth were treated by physicians. Her data includes document analysis and interviews with women who gave birth and the physicians who practiced in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Mitchinson recognizes that the women and their physicians were unequal in power, she reminds the reader that women were not without agency. Women regularly did not comply with the medical view that prenatal visits were necessary, and often they sought information from experts other than their physicians. Mitchinson attributes women’s resourcefulness to the exigencies of their responsibilities. Moreover, as physicians were subject to legal and normative constraints, neither were they completely autonomous. Yet it was women’s organizations, Mitchinson tells us, that favoured medicalized childbirth as it represented safety in the face of high maternal mortality during the first forty years of the twentieth century. Awed by modern medicine rather than individual physicians, women sought the relative safety offered by modern obstetrics.

Giving Birth in Canada is accessible and thoroughly researched. In linking childbirth as experience with the medical profession as institution, Mitchinson’s historical account provides fertile ground for what C. W. Mills calls the sociological imagination, a place where biography and history meet.

Nursing Mother, Working Mother: The Essential Guide for Breastfeeding and Staying Close to Your Baby After You Return to Work

Gale Pryor
Boston: Harvard Common Press, 1997

Reviewed by Rachel Westfall

Nursing Mother, Working Mother reminds readers that breastfeeding is the healthiest, simplest, and most economical way to nourish a baby. In Western societies, many women take time off from their careers to give birth, and must soon find a balance between mothering and work. Through confession and

conversation, Gale Pryor—herself a working mother—makes a case for continuing to breastfeed after returning to work. She describes the health benefits of breast milk and identifies its unique qualities, but the underlying message of this book is that breastfeeding reinforces the bond between mother and child after a hard day's work. This is in keeping with the “attachment parenting” philosophy that permeates the book. Pryor advocates baby-wearing and co-sleeping, two key elements of attachment parenting. She explains how to carry a baby in a sling and describes the benefits of co-sleeping, although she neglects to give guidelines for safe co-sleeping.

Pryor presents breastfeeding and attachment parenting as tools for maintaining a secure relationship between mother and baby when they must be separated for hours each day. As she notes, mothers always have worked. In many other cultures, small children accompany their mothers as they work. What is unusual in our culture is that “we must be separated from our children while we work” (13). She describes the workplace with which she is most familiar—the world of business—and discusses the problems women face when trying to reconcile their pre-existing identities as professionals with their new identities as mothers. Pryor offers many practical solutions, such as visiting the office before returning to work to find a suitable place to pump breast milk. She briefly and inadequately describes manual expression of breast milk. She gives excellent advice, however, on how to use manual and automatic breast pumps, and how to store and handle breast milk.

Other tips in this book are as diverse as guidelines for choosing a daytime care provider for your child, and how to stop a let-down with your forearms to avoid having a wet shirt. The book offers the lay advice of one mother speaking to another. As is typical of lay advice, Pryor rarely ventures outside her own sphere of experience. In passing, she suggests the possibility of bringing one's baby to work, or having a care provider bring one's baby to work to be nursed.

By no means comprehensive, this book speaks clearly and empathetically to the reader and empowers the working mother to maintain a breastfeeding relationship with her baby. *Nursing Mother, Working Mother* is a fine addition to the reading list of any new mother hoping to balance mothering and a professional or business career.

A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother

Rachel Cusk
New York: Picador, 2002

Reviewed by Jane Satterfield

When she became a mother, prize-winning British novelist Rachel Cusk turned to nonfiction as an appropriate vehicle for cultural analysis. In *A Life's Work*, Cusk describes “the drama of which childbirth is only the opening scene.”