Book Review

Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, and the Unexpected on the Journey to Motherhood *by Naomi Wolf*

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Misconceptions is a book worth reading and recommending to all new and expectant parents. Naomi Wolf, respected feminist author, has created an honest, well-researched, passionate account of America's pregnancy and birth culture. Perhaps feminism and motherhood will join to form a powerful force for America's women.

Wolf writes in her introduction:

Real motherhood is more impressive than the fantasy of it. That actual, specific, fierce maternal love that grows in the wake of that immense psychic and physical tremor that is pregnancy and birth should inspire awe, not sentiment. I wrote this book to explore the genuine article, not the Hallmark card; to trace the maternal bond as it forms, heroically and poignantly, in spite of, rather than because of, the obtuse and unnatural ideology of motherhood under which we labor.

Professionals in the field of perinatal education will undoubtedly recognize the passion that drives Wolf throughout her account of her own journey through pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. New and expectant parents can now discover the truths regarding America's birth industry. Wolf presents the same evidence-based information taught in childbirth classes in an interesting, easy-to-read format.

The book is divided into three parts titled "Pregnancy," "Birth," and "New Life." The first part includes sections that represent the nine months of pregnancy: "Discovery," "Experts," "Baby Values," "Losses," "Mortality," "Birth Class and Tour," "Mysteries," "Powerlessness," and "Waiting." In these pages, Wolf exposes the shortcomings of the system to which most women subscribe. She writes honestly about the lack of compas-

sion she received from her obstetrician and staff. She complains frankly about the patronizing tone of the book many pregnant women read religiously, *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (Eisenberg, Hathaway, & Murkoff, 1996) with its message, "Your baby needs to be protected from you."

A firm pro-choice advocate, Wolf's pregnancy inspires her to re-examine her views on abortion. What is the value assigned to fetuses, collectively and individually? She explores the roller-coaster ride that parents take as "routine" testing, such as amniocentesis and sonograms, which force difficult decisions. The birth class and hospital tour are seen as rites of passage in which students are often given only the information the obstetrical powers-that-be wish them to hear. Wolf states that many instructors are employed by hospitals in which policies differ greatly from what is in the women's and babies' best interests.

Women everywhere will likely identify with the experiences Wolf describes in Part Two, "Giving Birth and Behind the Birthing Room." During the birth of her first child, she remembers being "drugged and pinned." The unfortunately typical scenario unfolds: failure to progress, pitocin, continuous electronic fetal monitoring, epidural, fetal "distress," "emergency" cesarean, etc.

Midwifery is presented in glowing colors. Ina May Gaskin, the widely known midwife based at The Farm in Summertown, TN, shares many great insights throughout the book. In preparation for writing *Misconceptions*, Wolf spent time with Gaskin and other midwives. Midwives across America will likely appreciate Wolf's contribution in elevating the profession to a higher level.

Part Three, "New Life," is divided into five sections:

"Joy and Blues," "Calling It Fair," "Making Mothers," "Epilogue," and "A Mother's Manifesto." Postpartum depression is explored in depth. Wolf attributes much of this condition to the low status assigned to mothering in this culture, workplace pressures, partner pressures, and a general lack of support for new mothers. Personal relationships and division of responsibilities in the home are highlighted through deeply personal accounts shared by women and men interviewed for the book. Great honesty is presented in stories of breastfeeding, working inside and outside the home, falling in love with baby, and appreciating one's partner. It is akin to reading someone's journal, but with the benefit of a tremendous amount of research behind it.

The last section of the book, "A Mother's Manifesto," calls for a new movement: Motherhood Feminism. Concrete ideas are listed to guide the reader in her/his effort to overhaul the current pregnancy, birth, and motherhood industry in America. Included in these ideas are a real family leave act with six months paid leave, community play centers, family areas in airports, stay-at-home parents' contributions to the social security system, and many more.

Wolf's book also includes a helpful endnotes section and an excellent bibliography and index. The attention to detail throughout lends a professional quality not likely to be overlooked. *Misconceptions* should be added to many personal libraries.

Reference

- Eisenberg, A., Hathaway, S. E., & Murkoff, H. E. (1996). *What to expect when you're expecting* (2nd ed.). New York: Workman Publishing Company.

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