

Whether and How To Become Parents

CONSIDERING PARENTHOOD: A Workbook for Lesbians

By Cheri Pies

Spinsters Ink; 274 pages; \$8.95

REVIEWED BY SHEILA KOREN

"**C**onsidering Parenthood" is subtitled "A Workbook for Lesbians," although it is also a significant contribution to the literature of parenting in general.

Written by a Bay Area social worker and health educator with the amusing name of Cheri Pies, it is a serious and responsible work that reflects its author's impressive scholarship as well as her 15-year history of involvement in women's health, planned parenthood, reproductive rights and disability rights activities. Since 1977, Pies has been leading groups for lesbians grappling with issues of whether and how to become parents.

"Considering Parenthood" is a timely, fitting literary complement to the recently released and highly acclaimed film by Kim Clausner and Debra Chasnoff, "Choosing Children" — also about lesbian parenting.

In one sense it's a shame that the book is directed at lesbians who, apart from those who had children before publicly acknowledging themselves as lesbians, are one group who *a priori* must be aware that parenting involves gathering information and mak-

ing decisions. Lesbians generally do not have children by accident. Any prospective parent would benefit enormously from the clarity and sensibility of Pies' approach to decision making.

While acknowledging that the decision to parent involves intuitive inclination as well as lists of pros and cons, examinations of priorities, proclivities, considerations of time, money and decision-making styles, Pies' book is filled with exercises that could be both easy to do and instructive for anyone considering children or anything else. Especially simple and enlightening is one in which she suggests calculating the time you spend each week on individual activities such as eating, sleeping, working, exercising, etc. If your total comes to more than 168, the number of hours in a week, it's no wonder you feel overextended and exhausted.

In the interest of promoting informed choices, Pies makes an extensive and sometimes exhaustive presentation of alternative parenting possibilities for lesbians, including insemination by donors both known and unknown; utilization of sperm both frozen and fresh; public, private and international adoptions; sex with men; foster parenting; legal guardianship and choosing not to parent at all. She maintains an information-sharing and non-judgmental style throughout — the only method she recommends against is sex with a partner's brother — and is progressive in her political perspec-



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Cheri Pies

tive, i.e., in recommending respect for an adoptive child's circumstances and culture of origin.

Aside from issues of how the child enters the home, lesbian parenting is "plenty" different, argues Pies, from its heterosexual counterpart. "Judgments about (lesbians') abilities to be good parents have often been obscured by deep-seated prejudice against homosexuality ... Because of this many of us think we must be more than simply 'ordinary mothers.'"

Conversely, many lesbians who become parents are confronted by an "unexpected sense of 'heterosexual privilege' which is unconsciously awarded to women with children when one's sexual orientation is not immediately obvious."

Quotes from Pies' *Lesbians Considering Parenthood* groups are interspersed throughout the text. Although few are profound, they're valuable in the diversity

they reflect. There is clearly no typical lesbian parent. Although too sparsely illustrated by the talented Marcia Quackenbush, "Considering Parenthood" is fortunately filled with valuable sample documents, provided by both Pies and lesbian rights attorney Donna J. Hitchens, for use in a variety of legal, custodial and familial situations.

Among the book's more notable and controversial elements — and a powerful example of its worthiness for mass distribution — is Pies' confrontation of the ethics of prenatal screening. "We must ask

ourselves what are the implications of aborting a *wanted* pregnancy," she writes. "A woman only rarely uses amniocentesis as a way of learning more about the health of her child so that she can be prepared to care for that child were it to be born disabled."

Long overdue, anyway, is a mainstream parenting book that includes lesbians, gays and single heterosexuals in its presumptive readership. Cheri Pies might well consider writing it. ■

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