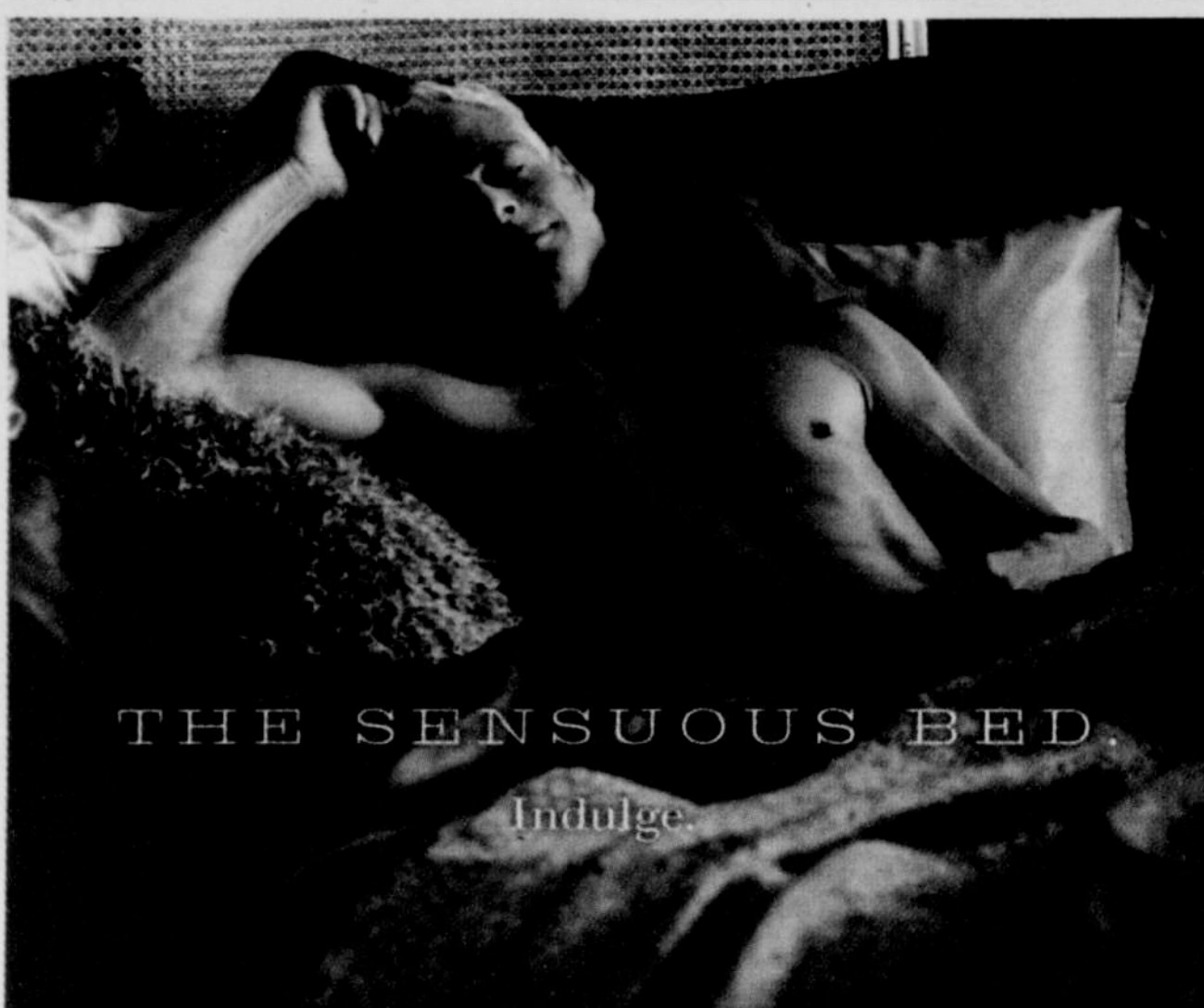




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books

The Joy of Parenting

Resources address the special challenges
faced by queers raising kids

by Joshua Ryan

Let's say you're a queer couple with parental longings. You and your partner have good jobs, a nice place to live, close friends, a supportive family—and, yet, there is something missing. You experience a sensation of fluttering inside whenever you hear squeals of laughter or stop in a school zone to let children pass. Perhaps at your last family gathering someone brought his or her baby to show to the grandparents. That sensation inside changes from a flutter to a pang: *I could be a parent, too.*

This is a calling heard throughout the queer community—and it's not just a fad. Reuters reports "the number of U.S. children with at least one gay parent is estimated at between 1 million and 9 million." The American Psychiatric Association estimates that 1 million to 5 million lesbian mothers are raising 6 million to 14 million children.

That's a lot of queers with kids. And that means the demand for books and other resources for queer parents has never been greater. Books on parenting have been out since Dr. Benjamin Spock published the classic *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* in 1946. Even though he died in 1998, Spock continues to have a major influence on parenting, with a litany of new books and a dazzling Web site of resources.

But are parental issues for heterosexual couples the same as for queers?

On the surface, the answer is a resounding yes. All parents face the challenge of raising children in a world that moves too fast and that forces children to grow up too quickly. But queers face additional challenges ranging from conception and parental rights to explaining to an elementary school classmate why Bobby has two mommies (or two daddies).

With only 23.7 percent of families falling into the traditional nuclear model—that is, two parents living together for the majority of their children's formative years—there are more kinds of parents than ever before. To help are queer-focused books on parenting.

Rachel Pepper's *The Ultimate Guide to Pregnancy for Lesbians* (Cleis Press, 2005; \$16.95 softcover) focuses on lesbians who want to ride the "conception roller coaster." The book carefully articulates issues related to fertility, conception and finding a sperm bank or donor. Many prospective parents

might not realize that sperm banks are like regular banks—you have to shop around for the one that best fits your needs. Some even have home delivery!

Prospective lesbian parents must make several choices related to conception. Is it better to know the donor? Is random sperm the better choice? Does the sperm bank accept "out" couples? If so, how out? Has the donor (whether you know him or not) had a complete health screening? Do you conceive at a clinic? Do you conceive at home? (I envisage a Martha Stewart scene of vanilla candles all aglow and a turkey baster.)

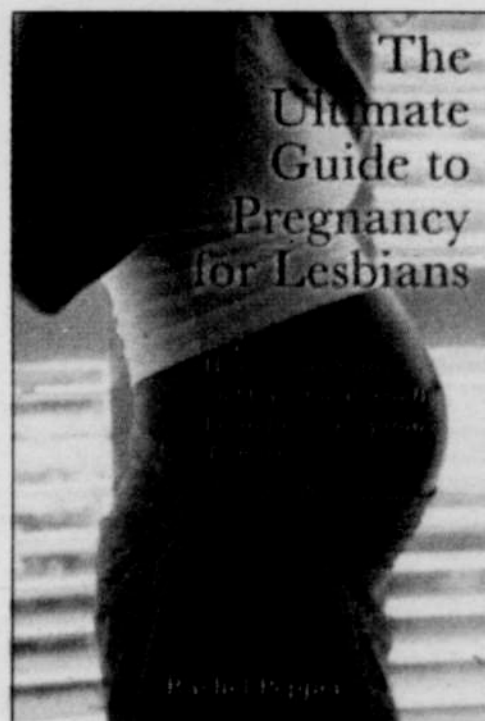
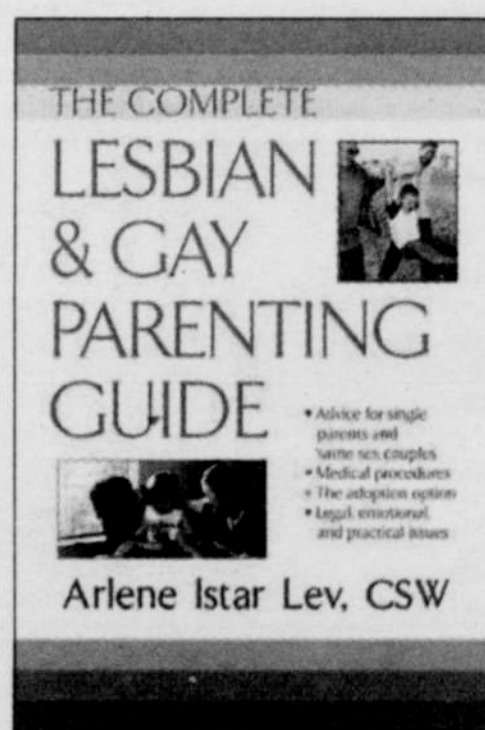
The "is my child going to be healthy" issue is of great consternation to hetero and homo parent alike, and *The Ultimate Guide* provides insight into conception that might not occur to the non-breeder. Pepper discusses fertility drugs, self-esteem during pregnancy and lesbian parental legal rights. She also addresses family concerns that can get thorny. After all, what are the roles of family for a lesbian couple? Pepper offers sage advice: "Remember that a family can be created in many ways and that all families grow and change with time."

Arlene Istar Lev's *The Complete Lesbian and Gay Parenting Guide* (Berkley Trade, 2004; \$15 softcover) is a more comprehensive resource because it encompasses multiple facets of the queer community. Some of these stories are heartfelt, like the

transsexual whose wife sued for nonpaternity and tried to remove the father's name from their children's birth certificates. There are also insightful discussions on how queers discriminate against queers.

Lev's book takes a more academic approach to queer parenting. A significant portion is spent on the complexities of adoption, knowing your legal rights and how to create binding agreements and register as domestic partners. These subjects might seem irrelevant in the excited rush of becoming parents, but no queer couple should contemplate parenthood without learning more about these issues and taking care of the appropriate paperwork before reproducing.

Another book, Peggy Drexler's *Raising Boys Without Men* (Rodale Books, 2005; \$23.95 hardcover), is probably the most controversial. The book is less about queer parents and more about how women can raise boys without a "man in the house." The book argues that



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