



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
MEDIATING KINSHIP, REPRESENTATION,
AND DIFFERENCE



Queer Mother Memoir

Experiments in Life/Narrative

Robin Silbergleid



palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in Mediating Kinship,
Representation, and Difference

Series Editors

May Friedman

Toronto Metropolitan University

Toronto, ON, Canada

Silvia Schultermandl

University of Münster

Münster, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

This book series brings together analyses of familial and kin relationships with emerging and new technologies which allow for the creation, maintenance and expansion of family. We use the term “family” as a working truth with a wide range of meanings in an attempt to address the feelings of family belonging across all aspects of social location: ability, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender identity, body size, social class and beyond. This book series aims to explore phenomena located at the intersection of technologies including those which allow for family creation, migration, communication, reunion and the family as a site of difference. The individual volumes in this series will offer insightful analyses of the representations of these phenomena in media, social media, literature, popular culture and corporeal settings.

This series is currently accepting proposals. To learn more, please follow this link: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Anglistik/Research/Amerikanistik/research/index.html>

Robin Silbergleid

Queer Mother Memoir

Experiments in Life/Narrative

palgrave
macmillan

Robin Silbergleid 
Department of English
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI, USA

ISSN 2752-7352 ISSN 2752-7360 (electronic)
Palgrave Studies in Mediating Kinship, Representation, and Difference
ISBN 978-3-032-27087-0 ISBN 978-3-032-27088-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-27088-7>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2026

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sections of this manuscript have been published in slightly different forms:

“Pregnant Pauses: Re-reading Carole Maso’s *The Room Lit by Roses*.” (*Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 17.1 [Spring 2015])

“In Pieces: Fragmentary Meditations on Queer Mother Memoirs and Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*” (*Genders* 1.2 [2016])

“Mother Is a Gendered Verb: Embodied Acts of Care in Memoirs of Queer Family.” (*Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 15 [Fall 2024/Spring 2025])

I am grateful to the editors of those journals; to May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl, for their encouragement and interest in this work; to Paul Clarke and the team at Palgrave for bringing it to fruition; and to Matthew John Phillips for assistance with manuscript preparation. To the MSU College of Arts and Letters and the HARP program for funding. My deepest gratitude to Zarena Aslami, Heather Hewett, Melissa Hidalgo, Elizabeth Horn, Katherine Mack, Kristin Mahoney, Ellen McCallum, Maria Novotny, Abigail Palko, Kristen Renzi, and Divya Victor, who, in different ways, over the course of years, have engaged with this work in conversation, feedback, and unwavering support. To my “Representing Queer Family” class, Fall 2025, for their willingness to think through the complexities of many of these texts alongside me. To Alissa Cohen and Melissa DeRosia, solidarity in single motherhood; and to Mary Juzwik and Dusty Myers for our shared tent-schooling project during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. To Karen Thatcher VanEtten, for her care when it literally hurt to write. And to Josh and Hayden Silbergeld

who inspired this project and kept me grounded, especially during that summer of “camp.” They are the best choices I ever made. This work could not have happened without them.

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

Praise for *Queer Mother Memoir: Experiments in Life/Narrative*

Queer Mother Memoir: Experiments in Life/Narrative is a beautifully crafted study of life and narrative outside of heteropatriarchy. Robin Silbergleid deftly weaves together textual research, interdisciplinary theorizing, and personal reflection in the first book-length study of queer mother memoirs, showing how they theorize radical notions of reproduction, gender, and family. In elegant and insightful prose, she illuminates the many ways memoir can enable readers to reimagine the often difficult yet deeply rewarding work of caregiving and motherhood.

—Heather Hewett, *Professor, SUNY-New Paltz, USA*

In this genre-defining book, Robin Silbergleid, at turns erudite and tender, makes a compelling case for turning our intersectional feminist attention to “queer mother memoirs”: contemporary texts written by queer-identified women, trans folx, and non-binary individuals about their experiences of conception, pregnancy, infertility, and mothering. By amassing and studying this archive, Silbergleid articulates the myriad ways in which these stories, alongside her own, transgress the fundamentals of narrative and heteropatriarchy that together comprise the “dominant heteronarrative paradigm” constraining the intelligibility of so many lives/narratives of queer familial creation (9). Through careful readings of these memoirs alongside narrative and queer/feminist theory, Silbergleid makes evident the integral ways in which queer mother memoir forges unexpected fellowship and division: the shared need, for instance, between the cis-hetero infertile woman and single lesbian arriving at the infertility clinic, or the uncomfortable tensions gender identity and embodied desire experienced by both a trans man choosing to gestate a child and a butch lesbian performing straight femininity to potentially conceive with a one-night stand. By theorizing these and other stories of queer mothering, Silbergleid demonstrates how attentive engagement with queer family building exposes the flimsy fiction of the standard hetero-reproductive story for the house of cards it is. But she also, more radically, shores up for readers a menu of possibilities, of pathways—in Silbergleid’s terms, “experiments”—that have both paved the way for her own queer

motherhood journey and will, no doubt, beckon more of us along that path with her. Generous and whip-smart, witty and vulnerable, cerebral and embodied—even, at times, bloodied—*Queer Mother Memoir* testifies to the strength, resilience, and power of imagining one's life differently, then realizing it. If Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, is correct that “possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread,” the ideas as seeds that this book sows—beautiful, necessary—are nourishment indeed.

—Kristen Renzi, *Professor, Xavier University, USA*

In this groundbreaking literary study, Robin Silbergleid unpacks the complexity of queer mothering experiences through her insightful, nuanced read of the archive of queer mother memoirs she has curated to write into being her understanding of and appreciation for the queer mother. In the process, Silbergleid makes a crucial, field-expanding contribution to Motherhood Studies, undertaking the important cultural work of situating the contributions of the queer mother memoir to deeper, more nuanced understandings of the nature of family. This analysis grapples with the fundamental questions of who can be a mother and what does it mean to undertake maternal work, and by putting authors from seemingly disparate positionalities into conversation with each other, highlighting the maternal commitments each has made. The result is a canon-mapping study that generously imagines the potential of inclusively embracing and recognizing maternal identities through the process of telling (and listening to!) different narratives about family building.

—Abby Palko, *Colgate University, USA*

I devoured this book! Like the queer mother memoirs that it analyzes, *Queer Mother Memoir: Experiments in Life/Narrative* is groundbreaking in form and argument, imagining new ways of conceiving, doing, and writing motherhood. Interspersing accounts of Silbergleid's personal experience of queer mothering with critical readings of the archive of queer mother memoirs that she curated, *QMM* is autotheory at its best. Anyone interested in lived and literary experimentations in motherhood and family, as well as queer, genre, and feminist theory, must read this mind-blowing book.

—Katherine Mack, *Professor, University of Colorado,
Colorado Springs, USA*

CONTENTS

Queer Conceptions: Choosing Motherhood	1
Queer Pregnancy: Maternal Eroticism	43
Queer Narrative: Reproductive Loss	77
Queer Mother: Mothering Queerly	119
Coda / Mamafesto	145
Bibliography	155
Index	165

INTRODUCTION

“In modern-day western culture, mothers are almost invariably the object, either of too much attention or not enough”

—Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty*

At the turn of the twenty-first century, I was thinking of becoming a mother. I was living in Bloomington, Indiana, finishing a dissertation on anti-narrative and melancholia in twentieth-century American fiction. I was applying for tenure-track jobs. I was twenty-seven, then twenty-eight. My friends were moving away, having babies. I longed to do the same. As winter turned to spring, I kept books on the coffee table—Jane Mattes on becoming a single mother by choice, copies of *Martha Stewart Baby* (how I loved the pastel photos!) and Ariel Gore’s zine *Hip Mama*. I was full of optimism, reading my way to a different life. I didn’t yet know how difficult all of it would be. Infertility, miscarriage, high-risk pregnancy; more miscarriage, infertility, and high-risk pregnancy. And after: the daily work of single mothering times two.

That year, when I was thinking about motherhood, I did what any literary scholar would do; I checked out books from the library, ordered some from Amazon (which, back then, seemed exciting and novel): Carole Maso’s *The Room Lit by Roses*, Anne Lamott’s *Operating Instructions*, Toi Derricotte’s *Natural Birth*. Slowly, I was building an archive of books on motherhood outside the mainstream. I read. I mulled. I joined a listserv for “thinkers” contemplating becoming single mothers by choice. I was struck, everywhere, by the absence of my story. Although single motherhood in general was on the rise,¹ my version wasn’t represented in the

books that I read. There was a lingo most other SMCs used to describe their decision: “plan B.” But that designation wasn’t really accurate for me. I wanted a baby; I could do happily without the partner. I charged forward without sorrow, without any sense of what I might be losing. As I deliberated, my questions were pragmatic rather than philosophical: I wanted someone to tell me how to navigate life as an untenured academic and single mother. There was no story like mine, at least not that I could find, so I wrote it.²

I started my journey to motherhood more than two decades ago. That my narrative of motherhood and my narrative of academic life began at the same time is perhaps not accidental but a truism of the biological clock and the tenure clock. At twenty-eight when I completed my PhD, I was—if younger than the average—still aging quickly away from my reproductive prime. If freezing one’s eggs had been an option back then, perhaps I would have taken it, though I doubt it. I wanted to be a mother with urgency; I don’t think I would have deferred that dream, put it literally on ice.

* * *

I gave birth to my first child in February 2004, roughly three years after making the decision to become a mother. My story of motherhood was, from conceptualization, a story of motherhood outside heterosexuality and traditional “nuclear” family. Although I could have undertaken insemination at home, as many lesbian couples do, I never seriously considered that option, as pregnancy rates are higher when insemination is timed with ultrasound monitoring at the doctor’s office and ovulation induced by hormone “trigger shots,” not home ovulation kits. If I was going to build my family, I was going to proceed thoughtfully, methodically. I took it as a given at the time, without a great deal of soul searching or deliberation, but I was not just a woman trying to conceive but also, quickly, a fertility patient. In retrospect, that decision has shaped my identity in ways far beyond mothering on my own. That experience (trauma?) has taken me a long time to work through. Indeed: I am still working on it.

Is mine a story of queer motherhood? As I write, I have a twenty-one-year-old and a thirteen-year-old. They both resulted from trips to the fertility clinic, not sex. I am a mother because of assisted reproductive technologies and third-party reproduction, and my experience of maternity and motherhood has absolutely nothing to do with sex, romance, or partnership. I am still romantically unentangled and, more broadly, resistant to amatonormativity, bias toward couples, and defining myself in

sexual terms. Although single motherhood is common, elective single motherhood is not—even in my liberal university town. At the bus stop, one of my child’s first-grade classmates asked him, and then me, if his dad was dead; no, I repeated, we are a mom-and-kid family. He insisted, of course, that wasn’t possible; all children have fathers.

As my children grow, my motherhood story continues to evolve. I wrote *Texas Girl* (Demeter Press, 2014), my memoir of miscarriage and single motherhood, on the cusp of trying to conceive my second child. I wrote it in a moment of relative optimism, after the shock and trauma of high-risk pregnancy and early motherhood, at a moment that parenting, too, seemed easier; my child had outgrown food allergies that required a prescription formula through toddlerhood, had started preschool, and reached the golden age of four. The turn that followed—another three-year struggle with infertility, miscarriage, IVF, donor gametes, high-risk pregnancy, intrauterine growth restriction—rewrote my story of motherhood. Like all stories of queer family building, mine exposes the happy-ever-after family romance narratives as convenient fictions. I wrote my own story. Where are the rest?

* * *

This project is a book about queer mother memoirs, which is to say memoirs of queer motherhood and also queer memoirs about motherhood. *Queer Mother Memoir* both explores and enacts the ways that literary experimentation accompanies lived experimentation. Through a focus on North American memoirs by and about queer mothers, from 1997 to the present, this project excavates the tensions and relationships among reproduction, sex, gender, and narrative.³ If we are sold the story that these terms align, what happens when one of them is called into question? In building an archive of book-length personal narrative, *Queer Mother Memoir* seeks to contribute to conversations within motherhood studies, feminist and queer theory, narrative theory, and memoir/autobiography studies.

If, as Andrea O’Reilly contends, the work of motherhood studies is to “articulate and theorize the ‘voice of the mother,’” we might thus understand the queer mother memoir as a particularly fruitful site in which to explore, interrogate, and complicate what it means to become a mother both within and outside heteropatriarchy.⁴ The memoirs I collect here, written by individuals who identify as queer mothers, do not exist in a vacuum but grapple with the larger cis-heteropatriarchal culture in which they are produced; in these texts, the “queer mother” is a social construct, narratorial performance, as well as lived experience. As a literary scholar, I

do not take these books as how-to guides (although they certainly contain such elements) but rather vital discursive sites that play out personal and cultural anxieties about mothering as they are experienced by individuals who have chosen to mother without cisgender male partners. Moreover, none of the memoirs I consider present an uncomplicated or idealized version of the choice to become a mother; loss is, in many cases, foundational. The ways that these writers frame their individual narratives are vital and worthy of analysis. To what extent do they tell similar stories, and to what extent do they reflect cultural, legal, and technological developments over the last twenty-five years?

* * *

The key question for this project—what is a queer mother memoir—began in a class discussion during an honors/graduate seminar on motherhood, feminism, and literature, co-taught with my friend and colleague Zarena Aslami. We were teaching Cherríe Moraga’s 1997 book *Waiting in the Wings*, which we’d actually needed to distribute as a PDF for our students as it was out of print at the time. We’d chosen it for many reasons, including the fact that it was written by a woman of color and approaches the subject of family formation outside the context of heterosexual marriage. It is, as its subtitle proudly claims, a “portrait of a queer motherhood.” Going into the semester, we’d assumed it to be one of the more radical texts of the course; early in our conversation about it, one of our students raised the question of the book’s subtitle. What’s so queer about it, she wanted to know? It’s often those seemingly simple questions that demand complicated answers. At a historical moment in which the traditional nuclear family is still held up as the norm, despite statistical evidence to the contrary (according to the PEW research center, as of 2021, a mere 37% of US households consist of two married adults with children), it is tempting to read any alternative family building as “queer” in the broadest sense of non-normative. Yet what our student meant, as we spent several days working through the memoir, was a profound philosophical and generic question. What is “a queer motherhood,” and how does Moraga’s book begin to address it, in content, form, or both? With this question as its anchor, through the four chapters of *QMM*, I continue to re-center Moraga’s memoir as the foundational text in my archive.

As I set out to define the boundaries or contours of this study, I decided on the following characteristics: I narrowed my analysis to book-length texts that are explicitly autobiographical and sold as “memoirs”; they are by queer-identified writers, or at least writers whose perspectives are deliberately anti-heteronormative (that would include some, not all, work by

single mothers by choice, and some, not all, work about infertility). Foregrounding the experience and timeframe of (pre)conception, pregnancy, and the early “milkmother”⁵ months, the memoirs I consider are written by genetic and/or gestational mothers, the boundaries of which I discuss in more detail below. Overall, the families studied in these memoirs present versions of what Susan Golombok characterizes as “new families” that they have arisen after 1970 as a result of reproductive technologies, including in vitro fertilization and gestational surrogacy; as such, they are also deliberately chosen and carefully planned.⁶ This planning—which amounts to the desiring of a child for its own sake—is central to the memoirs I look at, as explicitly discussed in the first chapter on conception stories, which necessarily foreground queer experiences and reproductive technologies. These memoirs shed light on the ways that individual mothers and couples think about and negotiate—that is, give narrative to—both actual policy and also cultural norms and practices, including the way that they negotiate those experiences on an individual and familial level. The full-length book—as opposed to an essay, blog post, or interview—affords a substantive discussion and narrative that develops over time, something that might be hinted at in shorter works but not fully excavated. In its focus, this project thus overlaps with discussions in psychology, sociology, gender studies, and family law, though its “data” comes exclusively from published written long-form narrative.

Despite my deliberate centering of Moraga’s book as *the* foundational text in the genre of queer mother memoir, my archive has turned out to be largely white, which is an issue I will take up through my analysis and supports the general critique that “mother memoir” as a genre is largely white, which has its roots in nineteenth-century discourses of American motherhood. When I asked friends and colleagues for recommendations (what am I missing?!), the work they came up with by women of color was either not queer (Louise Erdrich), not in the right time frame (Audre Lorde), or not really memoir (Alexis Pauline Gumbs). Mother memoir, like mainstream discourses of motherhood, seems to be largely a white genre, as Nefriti Austin’s recent *Motherhood So White* makes painfully clear.⁷ In critiquing white cis-hetero motherhood, this analysis attempts to contribute more broadly to critique of white dominance within the contemporary publishing industry.

Even now, drafting this introduction, I am feeling defensive about the contours of the project: Why book-length? Why memoir? Why queer and not lesbian? Why mother and not gestational parent? Why begin in 1997?

The answers to each of these questions are in some ways complicated and in others very simple. Writing this book—not another one that it might have been—has its own desires, its own politics. I am desperately aware, as Eric Hayot points out in his study of academic writing, that this book might have been shaped differently.⁸ Another version works backward (what about Minnie Bruce Pratt, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde?!), another that explores a different genre (poetry? fiction?), another that takes up LGBTQ+ parenting rather than mothering. Those are not my books to write, at least not now.

The shortest and least sophisticated answer: I wrote the book that I would have wanted to read when I started my own journey toward counternormative motherhood. And I hope that doing so creates kinship with others.⁹

* * *

Queer

“Queer” is a highly contested term. Queer carries with it many suitcases full of personal and political baggage. “Queer eludes definition, but constantly asks that we define our terms.”¹⁰ Queer has to do with sexual orientation but also “‘queers’ more than sex, just as other kinds of queer effects can in turn end up ‘queering’ sex.”¹¹ “Queer names a practice, an approach, a way of relating.”¹² “Queer questions any notion of faithful reproduction, of more of the same, or even of predictable notions of variation.”¹³ “Queering makes the things we otherwise take for granted suddenly unpredictable, uncooperative, and unexpected.”¹⁴

My analysis undertakes a discussion of queer in three registers: as identity, as stance, as form. In general, I do not refer to queer as a reading practice—that is, in actively reading against the grain—beyond the pragmatic work that any exploration of genre definition does. I will also suggest that these three registers follow a roughly chronological progression: first, there are memoirs, like Cherrie Moraga’s, which are texts *by* queer-identified writers; then texts that situate their stories against and alongside the dominant heteronarrative paradigm; and, finally, texts that perform queerness in their narrative structures or forms. These registers coincide and culminate in the most radical books in my discussion, Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, Ariel Levy’s *The Rules Do Not Apply*, and Michelle Tea’s *Knocking Myself Up*. As these contours suggest, my understanding of queer narrative is capacious and indebted to a range of scholars working in feminist and queer narrative theory, including Judith Roof, Marilyn

Farwell, E.L. McCallum, and Teagan Bradway, as well as Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser's co-edited collection *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions* (2015).¹⁵ My analysis pulls together critical strands of Judith Roof's 1996 pair of books, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* and *Reproductions of Reproduction: Imaging Symbolic Change*, which, building on psychoanalytic theory, explicitly put sexuality, reproduction, and narrative in conversation. Roof deploys the term "heteronarrative" to characterize the co-implication of narrative and (hetero)sexuality, revealing narrative to be metaphorically if not literally heterosexual in its aims; but if, as she notes, "representations of reproduction often reveal anxieties about Symbolic change as well as providing compensations for it," queer mother memoirs provide a vital site through which to explore contemporary feminist and queer narrative practices; in telling the stories of queer reproduction, how must narrative itself be disrupted or adopt innovative forms?¹⁶

In *After Queer Studies*, Bradway and McCallum foreground several elements of queer that I take to be critical: one, it "produc[es] disturbances in one's social intelligibility." Such disturbances arise in part from intentional distancing from social norms and "embrac[ing] that distance"—that is, queer is not only a reading of a body but a production of a reading. Queer, in that sense, is a verb. It "marks an opportunity for reinterpretation. In this sense, queer is not an identity, a thing, or an entity but an *activity*. Queer names a practice, an approach, a way of relating." With Bradway and McCallum, I also center the body and bodily desire: "While queer offers elasticity, it always hinges on bodies, pleasures, relations, or desires at cross-purposes with heteronormativity."¹⁷ In that regard, as I will explore in readings of contemporary mother memoir, maternity that arises from reproductive technology and not as a consequence of heterosexual sex is, in some ways, necessarily queer. Yet queer, by contrast, does not function in my analysis as synonymous with lesbian or same-sex desire; to put it another way, the desire for queer family is a version of queer desire that may overlap with but is not coterminous with homosexuality: what of other non- or anti-heteronormative expressions of sex, desire, and reproduction (including nonbinary, trans, and asexual individuals who use assisted reproductive technologies to get pregnant)? That is, while this book gives space to texts that have been produced by lesbian-identified writers, lesbian sexuality, as such, is not a consideration this project takes up.¹⁸

I do not want to suggest that some of the texts in this archive are “more queer” than others; rather, I want to consider the ways that they mobilize various strategies (rhetorical, formal) to write the story of queer family. They do not take a unified approach, either in their literal methods of reproduction or their rhetoric about family, but rather represent their particular experiences in distinct ways. Although the politics of some of these works might be understood by some to be what Lisa Duggan has characterized as “homonormative” by the very fact of their focus on family building, I would suggest that these books exist at all is arguably a radical/political act.¹⁹ Christa Craven’s discussion of reproductive loss and LGBTQ+ family pointedly states: “Some queer people [and vocal queer theorists] have argued that incorporating children in LGBTQ families is ‘anti-political’ or even the ‘antithesis of queer’—conflicting with ideals of an anti-accommodationist, transgressive, queer politics that resists and subverts heteronormative cultural norms and practices. Yet many LGBTQ people—like those I interviewed for this study—deeply desire to have children in their families.”²⁰ In this regard, if Michael Warner contends in *The Trouble with Normal* that sex without reproduction may be understood to be queer, reproduction without sex is equally so. That is, family can in fact be a queer form of relating.

Mother

My project follows from the foundational assumption that motherhood is worthy of scholarly analysis. A focus on mothers, mothering, and motherhood is not inherently essentialist, pronatalist, or anti-queer.²¹ (I certainly do not believe all women should mother, or that the work of mothering is “natural” or biological destiny; I also happily acknowledge that transwomen can mother, and transmasculine individuals with functioning ovaries and uteruses can be genetic and/or gestational parents and social fathers.) Quite simply, this book centers discussion on queer mothers, as a doubly marginalized class worthy of intersectional analysis. As Andrea O’Reilly puts it in her introduction to *Matricentric Feminism*, “any understanding of mothers’ lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming and being a mother shape a woman’s sense of self and how she sees the world.” “For women who are mothers,” O’Reilly explains, “mothering is a significant, if not a defining dimension of their lives.”²²

Within the confines of this analysis, who counts as a mother, and why does the designation “mother” matter? Given the reproductive

technologies and family structures that I consider, it is entirely possible for a child to have one or more social mothers (the one who performs the work of parenting), a biological or gestational mother (the person who provides the uterus), a genetic mother (the person who provides the egg). For a straight, fertile, cisgender woman who conceives through sex in a heterosexual partnership (married or not), these three roles overlap and align. In queer family building of all kinds, these roles are disimbricated and troubled. In general, I use the term “mother” here, instead of the more inclusive “gestational parent,” in order to separate out gestational carriers/surrogates who are not also social parents of the babies they carry, and in order to acknowledge that reproductive labors, including caregiving, are not, in fact, disembodied and/or gender-neutral, a subject I take up in greater detail in Chapter Four. However, when the nature of the parental relationship is clear from the texts I discuss, as Krys Belc’s *The Natural Mother of the Child*, I follow the writer’s lead in the choice of terminology. In looking to memoir, my interest is in how individual writers define and discuss their own mothering/parenting. Recognizing this particularity is political and ethical.

My decision to foreground motherhood has partly to do with my own identification as mother (not parent), but I also take seriously O’Reilly’s claim that “mother” is in fact a different social class and identity category than “woman.” In looking at the texts that I do, then, I am interested in the experience of maternity—that is, gestational motherhood—the site that most explicitly brings the body and bodily labor as acts of care into a discussion of what it means to mother: the messiness of gestation, birth, breastfeeding. By contrast, “parenting” involves acts of care undertaken after birth and, as a gender-neutral term, evades the significant ways in which such work is often gendered and, consequently, devalued and even discriminated against. For example, my experience of “maternity leave” was different than a male colleague’s experience of “parental leave” because I was recovering from abdominal surgery, overwhelmed by hormonally-induced panic attacks, and attached to my child by the breast. While his parenting might also be affected by his gender identity, the word “parenting” evades and avoids this particularity in favor of something seemingly more neutral and disembodied.

For the practical purposes of narrowing my archive to a manageable size, I do not consider narratives of adoption and non-gestational motherhood in these pages.²³ While “mother” remains a contested term that will

continue to be unpacked throughout this analysis, my focus is on family forms that arise as a consequence of reproductive technology (including the use of donor gametes), and on the maternal body, from conception through pregnancy and postpartum. In this focus, my analysis builds on the work of Diane Tober in *Romancing the Sperm* as well as Rikke Andreassen's *Mediated Kinship*, both of which focus on families forged without cis-men, by either single women or lesbian couples, who use donor sperm and medically assisted reproduction in order to build their families; they are biological, but not always genetic, mothers. In this regard, Andreassen explicitly defines queer motherhood by the absence of men.²⁴ Additionally, as particularly evident in their analyses, *choice* is central to queer motherhood.²⁵

Memoir

First and foremost, this book comes out of a belief in the power of life writing as political and social representation. If, as Bradway and McCallum note, literary studies has been a major location through which to “[tackle] the queerness of reading, writing, and language,” memoir offers a particularly useful site to explore both queer lives and also literary practices, as well as their co-implication. As they note, “there is a profound need for marginalized readers to discover selves reflected in a world that otherwise denies their very existence.”²⁶ Not surprisingly, then, scholars including Valerie Rohy, Shalyn Claggett, and Wendy Moffat have noted the particular value of nonfiction narratives as a significant site for future work in queer narrative theory; “lifewriting,” Moffat claims, “could be the best ground to explore queer subjectivity.”²⁷ Such an acknowledgment is not uncomplicated. Although the autobiographical pact demands that it be truthful, memoir is not fact, nor is anecdote data. Whereas David Bergman notes that as “same-sex relations become less stigmatized and homosexual orientations become a part of the fabric of life, LGBT autobiographies will be read increasingly for their literary rather than for their medical or sociological value,” my analysis considers memoir as literary object that has additional affective, theoretical, as well as relational value; memoirs do not merely describe lives lived but create queer kinship and community.²⁸

Amidst a larger turn toward the so-called fourth genre of creative nonfiction, memoir has risen to prominence over the past several decades as a major category in mainstream publishing. Throughout this analysis, I use the term memoir to refer to book-length works of personal nonfiction,

which exist as a subset of the broader category of life narratives (or life writing), including autobiography, personal essay, and numerous shorter forms such as social media posts and texts, as well as hybrid forms.²⁹ In current parlance, memoir, as Smith and Watson note, “has shifted to denote life writing that takes a segment of a life, not its entirety, and focuses on interconnected experiences”; it is, they contend, “more malleable than the term *autobiography*, foregrounding historical shifts and intersecting cultural formations.”³⁰ I invoke it here with the belief that generic labels are, more than anything, pragmatic, both to collect similar texts around which we might ask broader literary questions, and because they are marketed as such. Notably, even as we are in the midst of a memoir boom over the past several decades, the genre has been condemned almost categorically.³¹ Whatever problems memoirs may have (individually or collectively), my goal is not to judge them as deficient or to hold them up as exemplars but rather to think through more objectively how as a group of texts written over the past twenty-five years (and counting), they sketch the contours of and in fact theorize queer motherhood; as Heather Hewett notes in her incisive introduction to motherhood memoir, “the categories of ‘mother’ and ‘memoir’ are not static, but rather reflect changes in cultural understandings and practices.”³² Simply collecting them has value in itself.

In its focus on individual experience and personal voice, memoir is particularly critical as an area in which to understand the lives of marginalized individuals, and queer mothers, as both queer and mother, are at least doubly so. As motherhood scholars O'Reilly and Elizabeth Podnieks note in their introduction to *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts*, “[a]utobiography (including diary and memoir) is an especially valuable arena in which we can register and understand the ways that women inscribe an ‘I’ or series of ‘I’s in the authoring of their own maternal selves, accounting for and expressing awareness of factors such as the body, sexuality, gender, race, class, and nationhood.”³³ In short, they offer complex intersectional “truths” (and narratives) about the experiences of contemporary motherhood. Julie Avril Minich takes a similar approach regarding the work of queer memoir in general, arguing that such works “are an antidote to the hate-filled ‘lies’ of a homophobic America.” In addition to arguing that memoir provides positive representations of queer subjects, Minich provocatively raises the question “[if] we imagine queerness as more than just sexual object choice, we might wonder if there is a formal or thematic distinction to queer writing.”³⁴ Looking at examples by Monette, Audre

Lorde, Samuel Delaney and others, she says “they are concerned with lives that do not proceed through the traditional life events associated with heteronormative constructions of time and produce texts that are similarly punctuated and interrupted in unexpected ways.”³⁵ In this regard, this project considers the way that queer mother memoir has developed as a nascent genre, incorporating particular tropes and/or plots, and putting pressure on traditional narrative forms. More broadly, as this analysis insists and performs, memoir functions as a site of queer knowledge production, one that circulates both in and outside disciplinary knowledge of the university; beyond telling life stories, then, queer memoir operates as a form of “low theory” that J. Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* defines. Instead of making abstract proclamations, memoir theorizes from life itself. It is autotheoretical. “As a cultivated writing praxis,” Moraga writes in her new introduction to *Waiting in the Wings*, “creative nonfiction allows for a broader panorama of experience than a genre restricted to the empirical. It is one which permits dreams to presage and queer bodies to serve as repositories of memory.”³⁶ I can think of no better framing for an argument for queer memoir as autotheoretical, for valuing embodiment and embodied knowledge.

Such is the work of memoir, theory as/in practice. The stories that we tell about queer motherhood theorize and enact cultural work. “Theory,” Sara Ahmed insists, “can do more the closer it gets to the skin.” Memoir provides a way “to drag theory back, to bring theory back to life.”³⁷

Experiments

My use of the term “experiment” is grounded in the archaic definition, which refers to knowledge gained from “experience as opposed to authority or conjecture” (OED). Within literary study, it has become a catch-all term used to describe difficult or otherwise innovative texts. As intimated in my own subtitle, I am interested in the convergence of these understandings of experimentation. Like Bradway and McCallum, whose work takes up “the social implications of formal and aesthetic innovation” for queer theory, this book is interested in aesthetically interesting, formally challenging texts.³⁸ And while the term “experimental” has often been problematized in literary circles for its lack of specificity, particularly as dismissively applied to the work of difficult texts by women and other marginalized writers, I want to suggest, on the other side, that there is something flexible and capacious—anti-normative (or, perhaps,

queer?)—about the term “experimental” that I want to preserve. While I do not want to imply, reductively, that formal experimentation by definition is anti-normative, it is also worth considering how narratives about queer life put pressure on or challenge received forms.³⁹ Without falling back on authorial intent in a very obvious way, this project explores the aesthetic and rhetorical strategies these books mobilize as a textual counterpart to the lived experiences being described. That is, these texts signal both experiments in life and in narrative (and life-narrative).

My approach is indebted to the innovations of feminist critics since the 1990s—the timeframe of the earliest primary texts I consider—particularly Rachel DuPlessis’s *The Pink Guitar*, Elisabeth Meese’s *(Sem)Erotics*, and Jane Gallop’s *Anecdotal Theory*, which perform experimental critical modes as a way to undertake feminist critique; that these innovations arise contemporaneously with the rise of memoir and creative nonfiction, both in and out of the academy, is not coincidental. This project seeks to speak with and through experimental texts, rather than for them: readings of queer texts as queer theory. *Queer Mother Memoir*, too, then, is an experiment in voice, as well as a testament to my own experimental motherhood, borrowing from my work as a memoirist and scholar of/in creative literary criticism. The subtitle “Experiments in Life/Narrative” refers thus not only to the nature of the books that I am considering and the experiments of life lived, but also its own approach to critical practice. As such, it dovetails with the recent critical turn toward “autotheory,” which Lauren Fournier defines as “the integration of the *auto* or ‘self’ with philosophy or theory, often in ways that are direct, performative, or self-aware”; it situates theoretical engagement “alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment.”⁴⁰ “Fusing self-representation with philosophy and critical theory,” Fournier and Brostoff claim, “autotheory moves between ‘theory’ and ‘practice,’ between ‘living,’ ‘thinking,’ and ‘making.’”⁴¹ Although they have a longer and more complicated history, such autotheoretical modes are, in Fournier’s words, “very much in the *Zeitgeist* of cultural production today”—particularly as undertaken by feminist, queer, and BIPOC thinkers and artists.⁴² While the term began to “trend” in academic spaces with publication of Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* in 2015, the fact that queer maternity serves as the content—and theoretical context—for the contemporary prominence of autotheory has been underplayed or outright ignored by most critics. I would argue this is not coincidental, but part of the dismissal of motherhood as legitimate site for intellectual engagement. (Mothers can write memoirs, but can they do

theory?) Following Nelson, then, in *Queer Mother Memoir*, I delve into the embodied experiences of queer motherhood not simply alongside theoretical citation but *as* theoretical encounter. Whether or not they overtly integrate literary theory—as Nelson does—I would suggest that all the books I consider in this archive function to *theorize* queer motherhood. In this regard, the adjectival form “autotheoretical” is more apt to characterize a range of projects, including those called “memoir,” that theorize from and with embodied experience. Thus, as I work in these pages to theorize queer mother memoir, I do so in a mode that is also personally engaged. Call it auttheory or personal criticism or critical-creative or performative writing or creative nonfiction. Call it an essay, an attempt. Or maybe, simply, experimental.

As both literary scholar and creative writer (memoir, poetry), I believe in the middling space of the hyphen in scholar-writer as a mode of inquiry. As an experimental, hyphenated, or hybrid monograph, I understand the work of this book as a type of “research creation” or “theorypractice” that Natalie Loveless characterizes in *How to Make Art at the End of the World*. From Loveless, we might also understand this practice as queer, a polydisciplinary project that arises first and foremost as joyous intellectual curiosity that goes against (queers, that is) the traditional monodisciplinary monograph. This book is in some ways a polygraph, one that tells the truth in multiple, anti-normative ways that I hope are, as May Friedman says, “methodologically promiscuous.”⁴³ That is, while this project is a scholarly investigation into memoirs by queer mothers, it is also a memoir of queer motherhood and, I would suggest, ultimately a queer project itself, the final experiment in life and narrative undertaken here. In the end, this book is not non-theoretical, or anti-theoretical, but perhaps alternatively (queerly?) theoretical. That is, this project is interested in the productive tensions between queerness as represented in texts, as performed by texts, and in the co-implicated practices of reading/writing. What would it mean to write queerly (verb) about queer writing (noun) as queer theory? That is the hope and attempt of this book.

* * *

QMM takes as a foundational assumption that books matter to actual readers, including me. My critical readings of the texts I reference are often entwined with my actual readings, references to occasions on which I read these books. The so-called literary value of these memoirs varies widely, ranging from the remarkable success of Nelson’s *The Argonauts* to little-known memoirs by little-known publishing houses; regardless, their value lies in the fact of their production and in the stories (that is, largely the

content) that they tell about queer families. Compiling some of these lesser-known works here is a modest way to help them reach the audiences for which they are intended.

I want to put these stories together and build an archive because it is still, in 2025, relatively hard to find books of queer motherhood. Focused on a range of texts that seek to define and also trouble the genre of “queer mother memoir,” this project is first and foremost meant to be a compilation for those desperate to find their narratives echoed back, and it uses these works as a direct challenge to scholarship that has yet to embrace them. Following Margaret Söner Breen’s *Narratives of Queer Desire*, my own project “seeks to explore various literary texts whose narrative patterns powerfully engage social justice issues and in so doing offer authors and readers alike strategies for thinking, reading, and articulating ways of resisting oppression, including cultural, legal, and psychological oppressions, especially with regard to non-conforming expressions of gender and sexual desire.”⁴⁴ That is not to say that these works by necessity rely on realism or didacticism as a strategy; in fact, the most interesting texts that I consider are formally as well as conceptually experimental. But the simple fact of representation *is* political—and the curation of these stories is as well, in acting as a resource for readers searching for these representations of family.

Despite the relative proliferation of mother memoirs, there is, to the best of my knowledge, no existing single-authored monograph on memoirs about motherhood, much less queer motherhood.⁴⁵ Such an intellectual gap has to do with the distrust of motherhood and “reproductive futurity” (Edelman) in both queer theory and a great deal of feminist scholarship as well. As Shelley Park pointedly says, “Insofar as mothers are ‘breeders’ and breeders are the presumed antithesis of queer, the notion of queer mothering is rendered oxymoronic.”⁴⁶ Feminist studies tends to ignore motherhood, and motherhood studies is largely heteronormative.⁴⁷ All four key terms outlined above in some way gesture toward the marginal.

* * *

I explored potential structures for this book as I looped around the track, in those last days before the COVID lockdowns, when I still had access to a track. Chronology seemed like the easiest approach. And yet, as I began to edit an unwieldy manuscript into something that looked more like a book, I found that thematic concerns and stylistic approaches are, in fact, more useful. The result is a largely chronological but thematic approach that cuts across four chapters: one on conception, one on pregnancy, one on infertility, and one on motherwork. Rather than discuss primary texts

in single chapters, my discussion loops back and around, as many address more than one of these topics. Each chapter returns to Cherrie Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*, the first to openly declare itself a book of "queer motherhood." In these chapters, I focus on the bodily experiences, as well as psychological and social considerations, that allow queer family to come into being. Moreover, in focusing on infertility and maternal desire, it becomes easy to see that the central act of queer family building is not sex but assisted reproduction.

Chapter One: Conception

Building on the central premise of Cherrie Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings* (1997)—"lesbians do not make babies with our lovers"—this chapter begins its exploration of queer mother memoirs through the lens of conception stories. Confronting the complicated reality of Moraga's declaration, twenty-first century memoirs such as Harlyn Aizley's *Buying Dad* (2002), Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's *How to get a Girl Pregnant* (2011), and Natalie Meisner's *Double Pregnant* (2014) all foreground the emotional and practical processes of queer conception, including the use of assisted reproductive technology and selection of sperm donor. In looking to queer conception stories, this chapter thinks about both literal conception (egg meets sperm in uterus or petri dish) and the intellectual and metaphorical conceptualizations of family that occur when conception is deliberately chosen, rather than as a natural consequence of heterosexual intercourse. It is this choice—which is inextricably bound to but also the inverse of the choice to abort an unwanted pregnancy—that is the fundamental grounding of queer family building. Kinship building for those who are not in a heterosexual partnership is necessarily chosen; there are no "accidental" conceptions by lesbians. If it is expected that heterosexual families reproduce, and also that reproduction is a result of heterosexuality, *maternal desire*—that is, the desire to be a mother, to have a child—is, as Alexandra Kimball suggests, queer. In this chapter specifically, I am thus interested in thinking about how queer narratives explore the desire for a child, set against legal and cultural narratives about queer family building.

Chapter Two: Pregnancy

In its focus on gestation, the second chapter foregrounds the bodily experiences of maternity and matrescence as experienced by queer-identified individuals, beginning with Cherríe Moraga. Memoirs of queer pregnancy—including Carole Maso's *The Room Lit by Roses* (2002), A. K. Summers's *Pregnant Butch* (2014), and Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015)—productively trouble the relationships among sex, gender, and reproduction. Such memoirs honor the embodied experience of gestation and birth to offer nuanced counternarratives that challenge the ways that the pregnant body is narrativized and described within cis-heteropatriarchal culture. If heterosexual reproduction has been used within literary studies as a dominant metaphor through which to understand narrative structure, queer reproduction would therefore seem to queer narrative itself. While each of the chapters in *Queer Mother Memoir* addresses some part of such queering, I contend that narratives of queer pregnancy afford a particularly significant space for disimbricating maternal desire from gender norms. Queer pregnancy memoirs affirm the rhetorical and lived specificity of maternal experience, offering narratives of pregnancy that both acknowledge and then deviate from the standard hetero-reproductive narrative, countering the essentialism in mainstream culture as well as the anti-natalism at the heart of so much queer theory. This is particularly evident in the books' exploration of maternal (auto) eroticism as a mode of queer relationality.

Chapter Three: Infertility

This chapter explores maternal desire through infertility and narratives of reproductive loss. Narratives of medically assisted reproduction—including Jennifer Berney's, *The Other Mothers* (2020), Suzy Becker's *One Good Egg* (2013), Ariel Levy's *The Rules Do Not Apply* (2017), and Michelle Tea's *Knocking Myself Up* (2022)—foreground the queerness of maternal desire, the desire to reproduce and build a family outside heteronormative family. Although the fertility clinic and reproductive technologies arose as a way to help straight, married couples, they have also made possible family building by individuals who identify across the LGBTQ spectrum. Looking to a range of textual examples, then, this chapter centers the complicated relationship between social or structural infertility experienced by all individuals who lack access to sperm, egg, and/or uterus and

and biomedical infertility recognized by doctors and insurance companies; it attempts to unpack the overlap and distinctions between “infertile” and “queer.” In thinking about the inability to conceive, this chapter returns to the idea of chosen family building and kinship networks, as it explores maternal desire separate from mothering practice.

Chapter Four: Mothering

The final full chapter of this project situates *Waiting in the Wings* in conversation with recent queer mother memoirs—including, Carla Rachel Sameth’s *One Day on the Gold Line* (2019), Krys Malcolm Belc’s *The Natural Mother of the Child* (2021), and Jennifer Finney Boylan’s *Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders* (2014)—to move away from an understanding of biological maternity to consider the work of mothering in heteropatriarchal social contexts. Via the memoirs I curate here, the argument of this chapter, simply, is that motherwork matters and that it is embodied labor, undertaken by individuals who identify as mothers in intersectional contexts and who are not afforded the privileges of cisgender fathers. While queer theory and trans studies provide us critical frameworks through which to understand the problem of essentialism, matricentric feminism provides a critical reminder of the intersectional identities that undergird carework. That is, there are lessons to be learned by exploring the ways that queer *mothers* and motherwork undertaken in private domestic contexts complicate both essentialist and gender-neutral readings of reproductive labor. The figure of the queer mother, as she narrates her own experience via memoir, offers an instructive theoretical lens, both critiquing patriarchal motherhood and pointing to new directions in kinship, family formation, and care. In light of conversations about inclusive terminology, what is the value of maintaining a distinction between “mothering” and the more generalized term “parenting”? How might mothering itself be a mode of queer relationality? I address these questions within a discussion of single mothering during the coronavirus pandemic and suggest the lessons that emerge from queer family forms.

* * *

At bedtime, I read my child the book *What Makes a Baby* that he has pulled from his shelf. He wants to know if only boys have sperm. He wants to know if a person is transgender (though he does not yet use that word), will they still have their sperm or their eggs. He wants to know how the sperm gets to the egg, a question I remember asking my mother also around age eight. This series of questions involves me talking about

erections and seminal fluid. My child is giggling because it all seems so ridiculous and implausible (yes, it is!). But this isn't about sex; these questions have to do with IVF, because that's how he came to be. He also wants to know what happens if the embryo (in the book, it's called a "tiny thing") doesn't start to grow, is the mommy sad? I think about my embryos' arrested development in the lab and failed IVFs, the faintest pink lines on home pregnancy tests and Schöedinger's two-week-waits that drag on for the entirety of the first trimester; I think about a salad container full of spent syringes, non-stress tests and intrauterine growth restriction and how sure I was, how sure, that once he was cut from my body, he wouldn't breathe on his own. Yes, I say quietly, if she is trying to have a baby and it doesn't grow, the mommy is sad. This is reproductive education in the twenty-first century when your donor egg/donor sperm baby wants to know how the hell he ended up in your uterus and started growing. These are the hard questions. These are the moments in which you are very much *there*.

And, yes, it is true what my doctor and other donor egg mamas told me so long ago that mostly on a day-to-day basis I don't think much about those donor gametes, about the origin story of my own queer family. It's making lunches and checking math homework and tossing a ball in the yard. It's sitting on the floor in the bedroom reading mommy blogs and stretching my neck while the kid falls asleep.

My motherhood story has always been tied up with books. Before I became a mother, I read books about becoming a mother. Then I read books, blogs, magazines, how to guides about mothering—the how to get them to sleep book, the how to discipline them book, the how to feed the food-allergic kid book. In a broad sense, I am interested in what happens when the technology of narrative is mobilized to talk about reproductive technology, and the way that family building via assisted reproductive technology is made possible is partly because we begin to tell different narratives about family building. When I went to the reproductive endocrinologist at twenty-nine, I needed to sell her a story about work-life balance and how I was going to Do It All By Myself Thank You Very Much. But if you are a high school student with lack of access to birth control and get knocked up the old-fashioned way, you will be encouraged to keep the baby, not have an abortion. The stories we tell matter.

At heart, this analysis is a story about reproductive choice. What I have termed "queer motherhood" is in practice chosen motherhood. As it is imperative to keep in mind after the fall of Roe in America, a full

examination of reproductive choice means both that individuals can choose not to be mothers (to have an abortion, to choose to live childfree) as well as choose to become mothers under conditions that support them.⁴⁸ The memoirs that I look at explain how they came to the choice to mother, the means of doing so, and, to an extent, the choices involved in creating something resembling queer, or anti-normative, family.

Such emphasis on choice works to unsettle the seeming pronatalism and essentialism at work in becoming a mother. While admittedly, no choice is made in a vacuum (pronatalist culture works hard!!), queer motherhood must in the end be acknowledged as a legitimate life choice, one that does not come without consequences as well as joys. Queer family building is lived experiment, not theoretical argument.

This book unfurled for me in layers. What began as a simple desire to collect books that were similar became something more complex and ultimately intersectional. What are the larger narratives about family that these books of queer motherhood, taken together, tell? What are their particularities? In what ways do they engage questions of class and economic privilege, as well as whiteness and race? What do they say about who can build families and how, in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries? What does it mean that there is simultaneously a proliferation of such narratives (several came out while I drafted this book!) and a dearth put out by the larger publishing houses? I am interested in their content as well as structure, as I firmly believe that any amount of political and social change is predicated on narrative change. We need to tell different stories about the family if we expect different policies and laws and social support. Narrative, too, is a reproductive technology.

I turn off my child's light and leave the room. I have the family now I always wanted to read about. Tomorrow I will write about it again.

NOTES

1. Precise statistics are difficult to gather, particularly given the question of intentionality and the difficulty of teasing out truly single from unmarried but cohabitating. Sarah Hayford and Karen Benjamin Guzzo indicate that "[i]n the five years before 1988, 5.5% of first births were intended births to unpartnered mothers; in the early 2000s, the corresponding figure was 6.2%, although levels were slightly higher in the 1990s." In "The Single Motherhood by Choice Myth," *Contexts* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 70–72.
2. Katherine Elizabeth Mack's recent book *The Case for Single Motherhood: Contemporary Maternal Identities and Family Formations* (University of

- Alabama Press, 2024) provides a thoughtful analysis of the rhetoric of elective single mothers, including a discussion of a range of memoirs including Alexandra Soiseth's *Choosing You* and my *Texas Girl*.
3. As I will pick up in Ch. 1, in some ways, this analysis might be seen to tackle what Michael Warner describes as "reprosexuality": "an interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity" (76). Yet in the alignment of heterosexuality and reproductive capacity, this term can carry with it a problematic ableist (and singlist) understanding, one that ignores the ways that infertile heterosexual couples, single individuals, and queer couples reproduce without sex and, moreover, the way that the desire to reproduce might in fact have nothing to do with sexuality and sexual behaviors as normatively understood. See Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Harvard University Press, 1999).
 4. Andrea O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (Demeter Press, 2016), 5.
 5. See Pamela Douglas, "Milkmother Memoir," in *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating/Writing Lives*, eds. Justine Dymond and Nicole Willey, 131–52 (Demeter Press, 2013).
 6. Susan Golombok, *Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
 7. Nefirtiti Austin, *Motherhood So White: A Memoir of Race, Gender, and Parenting in America* (Sourcebooks, 2019). There are many such critiques of mother memoirs, including Justine Dymond and Nicole Willey, eds., *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating/Writing Lives* (Demeter Press, 2013); Heather Hewett, "Motherhood Memoirs," in *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, eds. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, Andrea O'Reilly, and Melinda Giles (Routledge, 2019); and popular articles, including Deesha Philyaw's "Ain't I A Mommy: Why Are So Few Motherhood Memoirs Penned by Women of Color?," *Bitch*, Summer 2008. While I do not dispute this claim, I do wonder if mother memoirs are in fact disproportionately white or simply reflect larger trends in publishing.
 8. Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* (Columbia University Press, 2014).
 9. I am indebted to Teagan Bradway's discussion of "queerness as a creative experiment in relationality" fostered via reading, in "Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form," *PMLA* 136, no. 5 (2021): 711–27. The significance of my own archive is partly to create networks—relations—between readers thinking about queer motherhood and new forms of kinship.
 10. Margaret Gibson, ed., *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* (Demeter Press, 2014), 1.

11. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), 161–62.
12. Teagan Bradway and E.L. McCallum, eds., *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.
13. Gibson, *Queering Motherhood*, 1.
14. Ibid., 1.
15. Additionally, Valerie Rohy provides an incisive overview of the relationship between these terms in “Queer Narrative Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory*, eds. Matthew Garrett, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 169–82. And, as E. L. McCallum puts it, these terms “have engaged in a longstanding and mobile conversation.” See “Thinking through Queer Narrative Forms with Ben Marcus and Renee Gladman,” *Narrative* 30, no. 3 (2022): 367.
16. Judith Roof, *Reproductions of Reproduction: Imaging Symbolic Change* (Routledge, 1996), 9.
17. Bradway and McCallum, eds., *After Queer Studies*, 3
18. Scholars such as Gregory Bredbeck have argued for a strict distinction between an identitarian LGBT narrative and a more politically radical queer narrative. Throughout this discussion, I use these terms more fluidly.
19. Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, eds. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94.
20. Christa Craven, *Reproductive Losses: Challenges to LGBTQ Family-Making* (Routledge, 2019), 30.
21. Margaret Gibson’s edited collection *Queering Motherhood* offers a useful introduction to the issues that arise when maternity and queer theory are placed side by side. Some of the essays in the collection are practical, considering, for example, the question of whether, or, to what extent, LGBTQ parents have different “ideologies of motherhood” (4). But more expansively, Gibson’s book troubles the “classic” (her term) work of queer theory that has “largely operated outside the realm of the parental” (11). As she pointedly says, “provocative notions such as Lee Edelman’s objection to ‘reproductive futurity’—in which the symbolic Child is invoked as a futuristic rationale for existing subjugation—remain distantly removed from questions of how the reproduction and *parenting of actual children* might take place” (11, emphasis mine).
22. O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 1, 2.
23. To be sure, these stories of adoption and non-gestational motherhood are critical in terms of redefining the way we understand the nature of family building, and further work on this subject might well explore what it means to build a queer family from adoption. For a provocative recent example of book-length memoir

- about lesbian family via adoption, see Francesca T. Royster, *Choosing Family: A Memoir of Queer Motherhood and Black Resistance* (Abrams Press, 2023).
24. Rikke Andreassen, *Mediated Kinship: Gender, Race, and Sexuality in Donor Families* (Routledge, 2019). In laying out her project, Andreassen says she is focused on “queer motherhood (involving women who reproduce without men)” (3). Although it’s tucked into the parenthetical, this definitional elision suggests that deliberately undertaken single motherhood is more closely aligned with lesbian motherhood than it is with other forms of single motherhood, at least in terms of conception, and conceptualization. Although there is substantial overlap between all unpartnered mothers in the day-to-day negotiations of their lives, in both intellectual and pragmatic ways, the literal and figurative *conception* of family, is quite distinct. I am thinking for example of books like Jill Talbot’s *The Ways We Weren’t*, a memoir which highlights the difficulty of single motherhood resulting from her partner’s abandonment. This narrative is, from conception on, distinct from deliberately undertaken (single) motherhood.
 25. Scholars of reproductive justice remind us that choice is bound to privilege. If the writers I consider largely have class—and to some extent racial—privilege that provides greater access to reproductive choice and care, they do not have fertility/reproductive privilege by virtue of their queerness. Francesca Royster provides an important exploration of these issues within the context of the legacy of slavery and anti-Black racism in the United States in *Choosing Family*.
 26. Bradway and McCallum, eds., *After Queer Studies*, 9, 10.
 27. In particular, I would highlight both Wendy Moffatt and Shalyn Claggett’s contributions to *Narrative Theory Unbound*. As Moffatt puts it, “the future of queer theory is in the past. It will come in queer life work” (225). See “The Narrative Case for Queer Biography,” in *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions*, eds. Robin Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, 210–26 (Ohio State University Press, 2015). More obliquely, see also Rohy, “Queer Narrative Theory.” Rohy discusses the significance of nonfiction coming out stories to explore the vexed relationship between the terms “narrative” and “queer”: “In such texts, queer communities cultivate their own generic forms, seeing narrative as not only compatible with queerness but essential to it” (172).
 28. David Bergman, “Autobiography,” in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, eds. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 656. Bergman notes that queer autobiographies have two audiences that result in shifting rhetorical stances; as he explains, “On the one hand, these works are written for outsiders to arouse sympathy and understanding from heterosexuals; on the other hand, they are written for insiders to lift the spirits of fellow ‘sufferers’” (643). Inversely, there are multiple reasons for reading autobiographical works: “We read auto-

- biographies to learn about lives very different from our own, or to find solace in lives that are like our own, or to delight in the pleasures of the text” (656).
29. For a thorough discussion of memoir as a genre situated within larger trends in life writing, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography Now: An Updated Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 3rd ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 2024). As they put it, “a shift from *autobiography* and *memoir* to *life writing* and *life narrative* signals that a more capacious and flexible set of frameworks is being articulated for mapping a global history of autobiographical acts and practices” (8). For a discussion of memoir through the specific lens of mothering and motherhood, Heather Hewett’s chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood* offers a succinct and thoughtful discussion, as does the introduction to Dymond and Willey’s *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating/Writing Lives*.
 30. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 271, 7.
 31. Arianne Zwartjes pointedly says, “Memoir, as a form, has historically been both feminized and disparaged, and writing with any element of the personal by a female or nonbinary author is very likely to be lumped into that category.” See Arianne Zwartjes, “Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory,” *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* 6, no. 1 (Fall 2019). Even theoretically savvy writers such as Maggie Nelson have a fraught relationship with memoir as a genre; notoriously Nelson adopts “autotheory” as a preferred term in lieu of calling herself a memoirist, even as she acknowledges the large-scale “derision of the personal” in her recent book *The Slicks*, writing, “While critics of varying affiliations carry on with their distaste, readers and listeners everywhere continue to be passionately drawn toward deeply personal work, if only because it tends to make us feel less alone to hear how others experience being a human being.” Maggie Nelson, *The Slicks: On Sylvia Plath and Taylor Swift* (Graywolf, 2026), 19.
 32. Hewett, “Motherhood Memoirs,” 191.
 33. Andrea O’Reilly and Elizabeth Podnieks, eds., *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women’s Literatures* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 7.
 34. Julie Avril Minich, “Writing Queer Lives: Autobiography and Memoir,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. Scott Herring (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 59, 60.
 35. *Ibid.*, 69.
 36. Cherríe Moraga, *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood* (Firebrand, 1997), ix. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
 37. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), 10.
 38. Bradway and McCallum, eds., *After Queer Studies*, 11.
 39. E. L. McCallum puts it this way: “Innovative writing—narrative on the edge—is not inherently queer, but in testing limits it can open up a new matrix

of relationality for queer and its others, as well as new possibilities for off-kilter political intervention and experimental connections, outside of our habits and comforting stories (“Thinking through Queer Narrative Forms,” 381).

40. Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (MIT Press, 2021), 6, 7.
41. Alex Brostoff and Lauren Fournier, “Introduction: Autotheory ASAP! Academia, Decoloniality, and ‘I,’” *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 3 (2021): 490.
42. Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 7. Although I use “autotheory” here, as a way to situate this book alongside others that have similar approaches and politics, I will confess I am largely skeptical of its recent emergence and academic acceptance, as compared to earlier iterations, such as the “confessional criticism” of the 1990s, as well as critical-personal essays written by women scholars of color, including Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Audre Lorde, whose work has been retroactively reframed as “autotheory.” Noting as much, Fournier says “As an impulse, autotheory can be traced through early feminist conceptual art, video art, performance, and body art, as well as cross-genre writings by women of color [. . .] Certainly, the practice of theorizing from the first person is well established withing the genealogies of feminism, and after the 1960s it takes on a particularly conceptual and performative valence.” (8). In this regard, Fournier’s book is useful in thinking through these larger cultural and academic trends. To my mind, the demarcation “theory” in “autotheory” seems to make relevant (sexy?) work that has been undertaken before and maligned, not unlike “reader response criticism” or, in fact, “memoir.” As Fournier says, “Does the invocation of theory lead to the work being perceived as more critically legitimate than if it had softer designations?” (13). (In a word: yes.) Despite these misgivings, considering the ways that I invoke the embodied experiences of selfhood as a way into larger theoretical concerns, “autotheory” seems like the most apt descriptor for this analysis at this point in time. In addition to Fournier’s book, two special issues on autotheory in *ASAP* and *Arizona Quarterly* (edited by Fournier and Alex Brostoff, and Robyn Wiegman respectively), as well as a new anthology *Autotheories* (edited by Brostoff and Vilashini Cooppan) offer instructive compilations that attempt to define, and sometimes perform, autotheoretical work; they offer distinct genealogies for the development of autotheory. See Alex Brostoff and Lauren Fournier, “Introduction: Autotheory ASAP! Academia, Decoloniality, and ‘I,’” *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 3 (2021): 489–502; Robyn Wiegman, “Introduction: Autotheory Theory,” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76, no. 1 (2020): 1–14; and Alex Brostoff and Vilashini Cooppan, *Autotheories* (MIT Press, 2025). There is arguably an entire book project in this footnote. I look forward to writing it.

43. May Friedman, "On Being Impossible: Thoughts on Ethnicity, Embodiment and Kinship," *Life Writing* 18, no. 3 (2021): 402.
44. Margaret Sönsner Breen, *Narratives of Queer Desire: Deserts of the Heart* (Palgrave, 2009), 1.
45. At present, the most comprehensive discussion of mother memoir is Dymond and Willey's edited collection *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating Writing Lives*, which offers a useful roadmap to the development of the motherhood memoir as a discrete genre in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries; putting pressure on mother memoir as a conceptual category, the collection situates it within a broader context of other autobiographical writing by women, including diaries, blogs, and earlier works of narrative nonfiction such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Notably, the chapters are often anchored in personal narrative and broadly suggestive of next steps in scholarship on the subject. As they write in their introduction, "This collection says, in response to the naysayers who have made it difficult for female authors of life writing to get serious attention in the academy, that motherhood memoirs belong in the canon" (17).
46. Shelley M. Park, *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternality in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* (SUNY University Press, 2013), 1.
47. In an insightful overview article, Samira Kawash offers an important critique of academic feminism on the grounds that it has marginalized the study of mothers and motherhood studies as a developing field. See Samira Kawash, "New Directions in Motherhood Studies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 4 (2011): 969–1003. "Motherhood," as O'Reilly claims, "is the unfinished business of feminism." O'Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 2.
48. As Nancy D. Polikoff makes clear, lesbians choosing motherhood and lesbians choosing *not* to mother are two sides of the same coin of reproductive choice and politics. See Polikoff's "Lesbians Choosing Children: The Personal is Political Revisited," in *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly (Demeter Press, 2007), 196. More broadly, with a foundation of bodily autonomy, these are the very tenets of reproductive justice, as laid out by SisterSong.



Queer Conceptions: Choosing Motherhood

The end, I tell my students, is usually in the beginning: *My daughter was conceived over the phone during a conversation with my on-again, off-again something-or-other*. This is the first sentence of my 2014 memoir *Texas Girl*; it is also the beginning of the life-narrative behind it. The story of my becoming a mother outside the confines of heteronuclear family. The dividing line in my life between something perceived as normative and something not. One day I was writing my dissertation on anti-narrative and loss in contemporary American literature; then I got a job and started buying copies of *Hip Mama*. That was spring 2001. Now, on almost any Saturday you can find me chasing a child through the grocery store, in black leggings with a hole in the thigh, my hair in a knot that's halfway between a ponytail and a bun; that is, I look like any ordinary, harried, middle-aged, middle-class Midwestern mama; stop running, I snap at the kid, and the other mothers smile a knowing half-smile. Sometimes, in the frozen foods aisle, because I am quite literal for a poet, I remember the embryos in cold storage, the potential for new family stories. If you tracked down my medical records, you'd know the ghost children that follow me everywhere. If you read my university bio, you'd know I like experimental narrative and hybrid forms; I like standing between.

* * *

Before I became a mother, I read books about becoming a mother. In the dawn of the twenty-first century, at the computer in the university library

that had just recently replaced the physical card catalog, I found Jane Mattes's book on becoming a single mother by choice; I found Julianna Baggott's poems *This Country of Mothers*. Back then, mother memoirs were still hard to find; Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions* was about the only one. I remember tentatively posting my first message on a listserv for women thinking about becoming single mothers. I was desperate for stories that mirrored my own. I started tracking my menstrual cycles; I wrote everything down. Soon my friend M. gave me a copy of Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings* she'd had signed, and given to me like a blessing: "Much light on your road of motherhood," Moraga had written. I did not at the time see the similarity between Moraga's road and my own, though they both began with desire, doctor's offices, and a quest for DNA. Now, what feels like a lifetime later, I see Moraga's book clearly as the foundational text in a line of (what we might understand to be) queer mother memoirs, and Moraga as a clear foremother to me. I say "what we might understand to be" hesitantly, in parentheses, because, arguably, the very act of defining something as *queer* is anything but. It's a statement of confidence, of boxing in and out, when I think more of sliding screen doors; the boundaries are more permeable than any attempt at definition would suggest. Yet I will insist, echoing Fredric Jameson, that genre provides an intellectual scaffold to ask the questions we need to ask.¹ In the pages that follow, I treat queer mother memoir not as a static object but as a conceptual framework. What happens when we conceive a group of texts *as* queer mother memoir?

As Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings* sets up, the queer mother memoir performs its queerness in its relation to heteronorms: through the sexuality of the protagonist, through subverting binary gender norms, through conceiving and building family—and the story of the family—otherwise. In this way, the conception story is both central to queer mother memoirs and the conceptualization of queer narrative.

* * *

The years I was trying to conceive, I drove back and forth down the highway, spinning the same questions. If this cycle didn't work, what medications would I try, would I do another IUI or move to IVF, at what point would I, as my doctor suggested, stop and surrender to donor egg or embryo? I rehashed our conversations while Erasure played on endless loop on the CD player (*oh that I should be ever so lonely / Driving the pain right through to my heart*). When it was over—that is to say, when my much-longed-for second child was a small human in a car seat and not an abstract idea—I missed the quiet of the drive. I never missed the waiting room at the clinic. These days I turn laps around the track. The counter

on my Fitbit, the clock on the wall, says I get somewhere—4000 steps, 2 miles, 30 minutes—but I always end where I begin. As I turn, I turn over the same questions about the books I am trying to write, plans for the summer, behavior charts. I am interested in the braid, in double helixes of DNA, in the ouroboros, in the mobius strip. *My daughter was conceived over the phone during a conversation.*

* * *

This book begins its exploration of queer mother memoirs through the lens of conception stories; it centers both literal conception (egg meets sperm in uterus or petri dish) as well as the intellectual and metaphorical conceptualizations of family that occur when conception is deliberately chosen for its own sake, rather than as a natural consequence of heterosexual intercourse. It is this announcement and act of reproductive choice that is the fundamental grounding of queer family building. If much queer family and kinship has been understood via the idea of “chosen family” described by Kath Weston, I would suggest expanding this notion of “chosen” to understand it not as an alternative to biological family but one consciously and deliberately constructed.² Family building—whether by adoption or pregnancy as a strategy—is necessarily a choice for those who are not in a heterosexual partnership. In general, queer women, either single or in a lesbian partnership, do not *accidentally* become pregnant.

Queer family building, from conception forward, is fundamentally entangled with narrative. The queer conception story must be thought through, told, and in many cases, literally validated by the medical and legal powers-that-be in order for the child/family to come into being. I am thinking here, for example, of the story one must tell at the fertility clinic to the doctor and often to the social worker/psychologist in order to declare one’s desire to solicit help in building family. The story one tells extended family and friends. And ultimately, the story queer parents tell their children about how they came to be. The story of conception begins, that is, with a narrative of desire. *My daughter was conceived over the phone.* I took that story with me to the doctor’s office where I explained what I wanted to do—needed to justify my choice, in fact, as a twenty-nine-year-old (much older of course than many married mothers) who wanted to have a baby, whereas had I quietly, without fanfare, proceeded into unprotected sex and gotten pregnant, no one would have given it a second thought.³ In fact, as Diane Tober remarks of single women who have planned their families via donor insemination: “Single, straight women who conceive with intent are considered more responsible for creating their

own difficult situation, and they may be judged more harshly for using a donor than they would if they had a one-night stand in a bar.”⁴ Chosen single motherhood is read as queer, illicit, whereas accidental single motherhood is an unfortunate consequence of doing what heterosexual sex is supposed to do (even if the timing is “wrong”). I had a desire and coherent narrative that declared me psychologically and financially stable enough to proceed. I told that story to my mother, to my siblings, to my friends. They asked me if I was sure. They asked me, what if I found “Mr. Right.” In these questions, they asked me to put fertility on hold in order to write a proper social narrative, with the right characters, undertaken in the right order, at the right time. The insurance company, too, needed a narrative in the form of a diagnosis to authorize treatment; it was performative. Through my doctor’s word, I was declared infertile. I became it. Through narrative I willed my family into being.

* * *

Published in 1997, Cherrie Moraga’s book is one of the earliest in a developing genre of mother memoirs at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁵ Anne Lamott’s *Operating Instructions*, from 1993, is probably the most widely cited, as it comes from a larger publishing house; Moraga’s, put out by the small press Firebrand, was out of print for years and just rereleased in 2022. While one could situate *Waiting* in other contexts, with other lineages—looking back instead of forward, say—I am interested in the way that Moraga taps into a major movement in the late twentieth century to reconceive the nuclear family at a moment of significant cultural anxiety about its demise. While the “momoir” boom as a whole has been notoriously criticized as being largely white, largely straight, largely cisgender, Moraga’s book—penned by a self-identified “butch” and woman of color—serves as a distinct counterexample, highlighting the anti-normative always already present in mother memoir.⁶ As Kate McCullough notes, Moraga “uses the specifics of her identity as both Chicana and lesbian, making clear by contrast the institution of motherhood’s white racialized and heterosexualized vectors.”⁷ Despite (because of?) this significance, Moraga’s book is appallingly lacking in critical commentary; a basic MLA bibliographical search for “*Waiting in the Wings* and Moraga” has *no* hits, with slight modifications in search terms resulting in four references since publication.⁸ This broad lack of literary criticism, coupled with the insistence by scholars as well as mainstream journalists that momoir as a genre is white and straight, functionally erases Moraga’s centrality to the genre in order to preserve generic “normativity.” Mother memoirs are almost always queerer than they are dismissed to be; as Jacqueline Rose reminds

us, “I have never met a single mother (myself included) who is not far more complex, critical, at odds with the set of clichés she is meant to effortlessly embody, than she is being encouraged—or rather instructed—to think.”⁹

Offering a profound counternarrative to white cis-heteropatriarchal motherhood, Moraga uses personal narrative to partake in the conversation about family values circulating in American culture. Notably, *Waiting* was published on the heels of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which was passed into law in November 1996, limiting the definition of marriage to one man and one woman and therefore tacitly banning gay marriage. With rapidly shifting family formations, partly as a result of advances in assisted reproductive technology as well as divorce, there was significant conservative backlash; as Judith Roof puts it, “nostalgia for the nuclear family is the defensive ending to a story whose middle has begun to go another way.”¹⁰ This cultural context is central to understanding the rhetorical framing and narrative of Moraga’s book for its multiple audiences, which openly declares itself “queer.” Thinking through the possibilities of queer family, Mark Rifkin suggests that “kinship as family and household formation (as modes of domesticity) marks both that which queerness must critique and evade and that which it must engage and champion. Queerness names what exists beyond the bounds of kinship but also ways of inhabiting the space, forms, and/or feelings of kinship differently.”¹¹ Moraga’s book engages these tensions and situates them as the guiding force of queer mother memoir, as they inform the central tropes of the memoirs in this archive: the conception story (Ch. 1); sexuality and pregnancy, or maternal eroticism (Ch. 2); mothering practices (Ch. 4). With Moraga in mind, this chapter reconceives the conception story of (queer) mother memoirs.

From its opening sentences, Moraga’s book foregrounds the relational issues and logistical challenges surrounding queer reproduction, and the constituent parts of conception narratives. As sketched in *Waiting in the Wings*, queer mother memoirs beginning with Moraga’s foreground the search for a sperm donor. Such a basic quest narrative underwrites thematic exploration about gender, sexuality, and the nature of family. Because conception does not develop into a story without conflict, which is to say, it doesn’t come easily—due to social or medical infertility or other misfirings that keep egg and sperm apart—conception narratives provide a particularly productive site through which to theorize queer narrative. Or, as Warhol and Lanser suggest in their introduction to *Narrative Theory*

Unbound, “to understand, analyze, and rectify—heteronormative systems and practices and their attendant binary assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality.”¹² If queer conception necessarily relies on third-party reproduction, narratives of queer conception likewise destabilize the binary logic that undergirds traditional notions of narrative and gender. Introducing a third term into a “same-sex” couple, the search for a sperm donor mimes the search for a marriageable mate in the romance narrative, even as it allows for the “wrong” ending, the building of a queer family. In this way they overtly engage with, and to varying degrees challenge, heteronarrative.

From the outset, Moraga’s book situates itself within the context of queer and lesbian narratives of family building. The book opens with the proclamation *lesbians don’t make babies with our lovers*. From this declaration, the book begins to interrogate the easily assumed connections of sex, gender, and reproduction in *fertile* cisgender, heteronormative relationships—that is, couples with reproductive privilege. The first paragraph asserts its point of departure from heterosexual conception:

We make babies with strangers in one-night stands or on the doctor’s insemination table, with friends in a friendly fuck or a loveless mason jar, with enemies who at the time were husbands or boyfriends, or ex-husbands whom our children call papi and whom we may still consider family. We cannot make babies with one another. Our blood doesn’t mix into the creation of a third entity with an equal split of DNA. (15)

She continues: “Sure we can co-adopt, we can co-parent, we can be comadres, but blood mami and papi we ain’t” (15). In these opening sentences Moraga leans on opposition—don’t, cannot, doesn’t, ain’t—to frame queer conception in opposition to heterosexual reproduction. Her sexual orientation has rendered her socially if not also biomedically infertile; conception will not happen in the bedroom but likely in the doctor’s office, will necessarily involve a third party, one who supplies DNA and possibly, though not necessarily, social family.¹³ The language is telling. Queer individuals don’t conceive a child as a result of “making love” without birth control; they “make babies” through deliberate choice and effort. From this opening, Moraga also foregrounds blood ties; while she has certainly chosen to make a family, she has done so deliberately through gestation and chosen genetics. Speaking of her previous role as a non-biological co-parent to a lesbian partner’s child, Moraga simultaneously acknowledges the value and privilege of that role of “comadre” who parents, she says, “without duty,” and yet still prioritizes the connection of biology and “blood” in her desires

to parent.¹⁴ Her language in these opening passages, particularly her choice of verbs, makes clear the importance of choice and of familia as creation, beginning with the epigraph drawn from her own work, *Giving Up the Ghost*, which reads, “It’s like making familia from scratch / each time all over again... / with strangers, if I must.” And the role that Ella (the name she has given her lover in this book) plays as co-parent, is, she highlights, distinct from that of the person who provided sperm. Contra to the concerns of conservative legislators in the 1990s, Moraga’s book is not about the absence of a father but rather the creation of a modern, matricentric Mexican family.

Although Moraga’s is not a book that is “about” infertility—a subject I take up explicitly in Chapter Three—it does of course highlight the difficulty with which conception occurs outside the context of a heterosexual relationship, requiring substantial intellectual, emotional, and physical labor. Such work is in fact what makes conception into a plot, as opposed to a single event. Moraga sets up her quest for family against a proclamation from a doctor that she would not likely get pregnant easily. Having consulted the reproductive endocrinologist “to make sure everything was in working order” (28), Moraga learns that the odds of her conception were “bad,” for her age, as “even for forty-year-old heterosexuals who are ‘doing it all the time’” face steep odds for conception (28). Notably, this discussion takes place in a single paragraph, given to the reader after we have read that Moraga is pregnant; in this way, *Waiting* is distinct in focus and framing from memoirs that cover a longer time period or involve infertility treatment and clinics. The possibility of biological difficulty conceiving due to her age shifts instead to a discussion of what may be understood as “social infertility”—here, a lack of access to gametes—and the resulting consideration of a sperm donor, the other half of their child’s DNA. Moraga does in fact conceive quickly, at home, in the privacy of her bedroom. She suggests that her son was “waiting in the wings” for her; he was she says, “a spirit, who, for some time, was wanting to get here, through me. And when I finally opened my heart and listened, he took hold of me right away. I was pregnant with the first insemination; six months later he was born” (16). Moraga intimates that the very conceptualization of family, an intellectual and emotional “openness” to the possibility, allows her to conceive “right away.” Although such easy conception is statistically unlikely given Moraga’s age, the narrative framing is important. Here Moraga illustrates the rhetorical work of memoir; she takes the fact of her easy conception and reads it as sign. Rafael, as she

frames her story, is the outcome of maternal desire, rather than heterosexual sex. (Carole Maso's *The Room Lit by Roses*, which I take up in the next chapter, likewise presents conception—on an airplane, with a stranger—as charmed, fated.) Even as she defines queer family, Moraga asserts her fertility; she is a “real” woman—hyperfertile, she suggests, compared to a straight woman her age—even if she is also self-identified butch.

Because she conceives quickly, the focus of Moraga's memoir is less on the process and mechanisms of conception and more on genetics, cultural heritage, and redefinition—that is, conceptualization—of family, which are, for Moraga, overtly defined as queer and Mexican. In this, her book takes up the same sorts of issues that sociologist Tober outlines in *Romancing the Sperm*, including those involved in choosing a sperm donor, the politics of redefining family, and the gender/identity issues that arise through this process. As Tober puts it, “Thinking about assisted reproductive technologies, who has access to treatment, how donors are chosen, and how family is defined gives us insight into the nexus of cultural values and how those values are reproduced through individual bodies” and, I would add, narratives.¹⁵ Throughout the memoir, Moraga makes an attempt to claim a more radical notion of family, connecting its queerness with its Mexican-ness. It is also, critically, about blood ties and DNA, as much as it is about chosen family. As Moraga explains, she has not been a proponent of gay marriage or even “domestic partnership” arrangements, which she ties specifically to white middle-class lesbians. “No,” she claims, “I’ve always longed for something else in my relationships—something woman-centered, cross-generational, something extended, something sensual, something humilde ante la creadora. In short, something Mexican and familial but without all the cultural constraints” (18). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the book highlights Moraga's cultural background in relation to her ultimate choice of a sperm donor.

Ultimately Moraga chooses a donor who is already like family, her friend Pablo, to continue her heritage; as she says, “I am to be the mother of a Mexican baby. [...] I picked a man for his brains and his dark beauty. And the race continues. But mostly I picked him because I knew he loved me without wanting me. A gay man. A queer contract” (39). In disimbricating love and sex in this narrative of family, Moraga highlights a connection built on platonic, familial love and racial affinity rather than romantic love or sexual desire. Although he was not intended to be “the father,” Moraga

explains, after Rafael's birth Pablo's "fatherhood" grew "as organically as Rafa himself," becoming part of "the family" (38). This move simultaneously acknowledges the deliberateness with which Moraga (indeed, all lesbians) build their families, and also the importance of preserving family lineage and blood ties, in the absence of a child's genetic connection with a second social parent. It is in choosing Mexican sperm—paternal DNA—that Moraga, whose own father is white, can sustain "la raza." This tribalism is consistent with what both Tober and Andreassen find in their analyses of single women and lesbians who have used sperm donors. In fact, catalogs of sperm donors do in fact highlight race, national origin, and basic traits such as eye and hair color and height, making it nearly impossible to build family without first considering such traits. As Andreassen remarks, "race and whiteness" are consumable commodities in donor conceived families; the interviews she conducts with lesbian and single women prioritize selecting a donor with shared attributes, so the child has a greater likelihood of "looking like" the mother.¹⁶ Similarly, in the memoirs I consider in the remainder of this chapter, race and/or ethnicity play a significant role in marking sameness within the social family.

More broadly, the two larger considerations for Moraga in discussing her queer family building efforts are the Mexican heritage, on the one side, and the AIDS epidemic on the other; to be clear, these are not distinct but rather fundamentally entangled within Moraga's discussion. Explicitly putting in conversation Rafael's birth with death, the book opens with an epigraph from Montaigne: "We do not know where death awaits us: / so let us wait for it everywhere. / To practice death is to practice freedom." The prologue likewise sets up the narrative as Rafael's "struggle for survival / for life in the age of death / the age of AIDS" (22). Building on this framework, at critical moments in the memoir, Moraga references the AIDS crisis, in particular the illnesses and deaths of close male friends. Describing a trip to a cathedral, for example, Moraga finds an altar "dedicated to those who have died of AIDS" and prays for her "own personal list of HIV-positive sisters and brothers" (35). Framed in this way, queer individuals choosing family—choosing birth—can be understood as a direct response to the association of queerness with death. As Moraga puts it, "Somehow my giving birth involves me in this trajectory [...] the regeneration of the raza" (38). Rafael was born, Moraga reminds us, "with history" (85). Writing of the impending death of Rafael's paternal grandfather, Moraga remarks that both she and Pablo are "trying to figure out what blood and bones had to do with this business

of making queer familia. But we're Mexicans. Blood matters" (119). Here Moraga places in tension the queerness of chosen family forms and the traditional emphasis on genetics and blood ties. They are both significant to her, and also interconnected. "Growing up, the *we* of my life was always defined by blood relations. *We* meant family" (17). Although Rafael and his grandfather have never met, there is an "electric current" between them, Moraga explains (120). Choosing family, it seems, is very much entangled with genes and culture. Choosing her particular sperm donor—Mexican and gay—reproduces queerness.

* * *

For me, these questions about family and genetics are not abstract. It's the week before St Patrick's Day and my son wants to know if he has any Irish in him. He wants to know because his sibling has some Irish ancestry (a full 50%) and this seems like a good thing. I honestly can't remember the hodgepodge of genetics that make up his DNA. At some point after the third failed IVF, the donor largely didn't matter, at least to me. I tell him we're all Jewish, we all share that. That seems to placate him for now, the assertion that we're all the same somehow. Later, when he asks to look at the donor profile, I can't find it in my filing cabinet or my computer hard drive, which feels symbolic. Calling the sperm bank to get access feels insurmountable. Our stories are entangled, my child's and mine, but they are not the same. I chose anonymous donors for a reason; partly, I think, I wanted to pretend they didn't exist, that my child was mine alone.

* * *

Since the publication of Moraga's book, autobiographical writing about motherhood has proliferated. Although an exact statistic is difficult to determine, at this writing, a basic [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) search under the term *motherhood memoir* nets more than 2000 results, with 391 for the exact term.¹⁷ As she describes the process of conceiving her son in *Waiting in the Wings*, then, Moraga also helps conceive queer mother memoir as a genre. The second- and third-generation texts I consider here push readers to think beyond the sexual identity of the writer to the redefinition (queering) of family forms that happens when queer-identified individuals raise children outside heteronuclear family. They challenge the alignment of gender, sexuality, and reproduction that fertile straight couples take for granted. And, as discussed more overtly in Chapter Three, they put pressure on, and challenge expected narrative patterns to do so. That is, they queer both the content and form of the "momoir."

If *Queer Mother Memoir* on the whole sets out to collect such memoirs and create a coherent archive, in the remainder of this chapter I want to

foreground the ways that the conception narrative develops in queer mother memoirs after Moraga's. Harlyn Aizley's *Buying Dad* (2003), Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's *How to get a Girl Pregnant* (2011), and Natalie Meisner's *Double Pregnant* (2014) all foreground the process of queer conception and choosing a sperm donor. Queer pregnancies in the twenty-first century are exquisitely planned. At home or in the doctor's office, with anonymous or known sperm donor, with intracervical or intra-uterine insemination or in vitro fertilization, queer mother memoirs foreground issues of reproductive choice and illustrate a deliberation to family building that, ironically, heterosexual coupling often lacks (statistically, nearly half of pregnancies in the United States are unplanned).¹⁸ Even when conception comes relatively easily, as in Moraga's situation, queer mother memoir conceptually affords an opportunity to think seriously about reproduction and kinship.

Although the books diverge in their details, their emphasis on the quest for a sperm donor and attendant questions about third-party reproduction aligns with the findings of Tober's analysis in *Romancing the Sperm*, which offers an anthropological view into conception of single women and lesbian couples who use sperm donors to build their families, gathered via interview, from 1991 to 2001—that is, contemporaneous with the earliest memoirs I consider.¹⁹ Yet as the remainder of this chapter enumerates, in contrast to relatively brief private interviews, book-length memoirs provide literal space in which to theorize the conception of queer family. As they write their families into being, I am interested in these imaginative renderings, both as individual narratives and as a collective, speaking to and against heteronormative preconceptions about what family might look like. If, as Roof notes, “our ideas about reproduction, thus, come as much if not more from the shape of the story than from any observed phenomena,” queer conception stories offer a particularly useful site through which to put pressure on narrative structure which “requires binary opposites even if organisms can reproduce other ways.”²⁰

Harlyn Aizley's *Buying Dad: One Woman's Search for the Perfect Sperm Donor* builds on the conception narrative set up in the opening of Moraga's memoir. Unlike Moraga, who conceives easily at home with a known donor, Aizley's journey to conception is longer and more complex. A book in two parts—one that focuses on conception and the second, shorter section that focuses on gestation—*Buying Dad* explicitly focuses on the processes and choices, both medical and consumer, involved in lesbian family building via anonymous donor insemination. It also tackles related social and psychological concerns, such as what it means for

lesbians to build a family, with support from their families of origin and society at large. My analysis of Aizley's book is comparatively long, as it is the first memoir to offer such elaborate analysis of queer family built from donor sperm; (re)reading it now, twenty years later, it feels much less radical than it seemed to me at the moment of its publication, when it was the only book of its kind. While not an easy route to family building—it takes Aizley about a year to conceive—it is also not extraordinarily fraught. Unlike the memoirs I consider in Chapter Three, Aizley's story does not involve IVF, multiple miscarriages, or even great drama with her partner. Notably, Aizley is Jewish, middle-class, and presumably what we now term "cisgender." She wants something she ultimately receives, with a can-do attitude, hard work, and a lot of money. In this way, the book's rhetoric trades on neoliberalism as a way to achieve and normalize Aizley's family building efforts. The book is prefaced with an epigraph from *Alice in Wonderland* and, indeed, the entirety is set up as a grand adventure (a "search") toward family building. And it is in many ways a typical romance plot, a straight narrative placed on top of a queer story, to borrow from Marilyn Farwell. There is a quest, there is a conflict (desire vs. biology), there is a resolution with a happy reproductive ending. If narrative is a powerful "ideological system," by changing the protagonist, as Farwell reminds us, "the lesbian subject functions as a powerful disruptor of narrative."²¹ Whereas for fertile heterosexuals, conception functions as the ultimate end of a romance narrative, for queer women, attempts at conception substitute the search for a sperm donor for that of a life partner; such substitution offers a familiar narrative paradigm (heteronarrative) that serves to normalize queer family.

Anchored in this reproductive narrative, the book explicitly confronts the social conversations about queer family building at the turn of the century, before the legalization of gay marriage in the United States—a context the book acknowledges when Aizley discusses what she refers to as her own internalized homophobia and related concerns about whether two lesbians can be "good mommies" (as I'll take up later in this chapter). In this way, the book speaks directly to the family values concerns of the 1990s and early 2000s that crystallized around representation via Dan Quayle's notorious comments about Murphy Brown.²² On the whole, the memoir offers a reflection on queer motherhood in a very literal sense: what it means to get pregnant in a queer relationship. Yet through overt contrast between the protagonist and other lesbian characters, Aizley's book makes an implicit argument that donor conceived families can in fact

support traditional family values. Although contemporary critics may dismiss its project as homonormative—in alignment with Lisa Duggan and Michael Warner’s cogent analyses of shifts in LGBTQ culture—I would suggest more generously that the book strategically mobilizes such normalizing rhetoric to address the concerns of its historical moment.

The first part of the book, aptly titled “The Decision,” opens with Harlyn’s thirty-eighth birthday party, with her girlfriend Faith at the grill. The opening chapter, titled “I’m Not Forty,” sets up the biological context of aging as a major consideration in her family building narrative; she declares “it’s one thing being childless at thirty-eight, and totally another thing being childless at forty.”²³ This overt discussion of aging is typical of queer conception stories, which confront the biological clock and the realities of age-related fertility, regardless of sexual orientation.²⁴ That is, as she frames the story, the most significant obstacle for family building is neither law nor culture but biology and timing. Aizley’s opening chapter thus situates family building within a broader cultural phenomenon and cultural conversations around queer family: “Suddenly it’s the twenty-first century and not only have sitcom characters and talk show hosts come roaring out of the closet, but those sticky bastions of anonymous masturbation once reserved for heterosexual couples struggling with male fertility are now ardent soldiers in the lesbian revolution. Lesbians are accessing sperm banks!” (4). Rhetorically foregrounding the similarity between heterosexual and lesbian women—they just need sperm, not a husband!—the possibility of family building is presented as a “mixed” blessing; like heterosexual women trying to conceive, Harlyn and other lesbians too must “face the inevitable *tick tick tick* of our biological clocks” (5), have sometimes difficult conversations with their partners, and decide whether to pursue parenting. In short, as she puts it, all prospective mothers “have to grow up” (5).

Beyond these practical questions of timing and biology, Aizley considers her own temperament and maternal desire. Whether or not to have a child is presented as a legitimate choice—a “decision,” to use the section title—that all uterus-bearing individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, might consider—neither a biological nor cultural imperative: “While there are those women, gay and straight, who have known for as long as they can remember that one day they want to mother, others of us have spent most of our adult lives waiting to be swept away by even the shadow of a maternal urge” (7). Ultimately, Harlyn’s decision to pursue parenthood is presented in a single paragraph, following the death of her

grandmother and her mother's cancer diagnosis (8). That is, with her family of origin diminishing, Harlyn and Faith quickly decide that Harlyn, the younger of the two, will try to conceive first. The question of whether to use a known or anonymous donor—arguably one of the most central decisions in queer family making—serves as the major source of their disagreement. Picking up questions raised by Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*, they contemplate how involved the donor should be and what that means for their understandings of family. After attending a workshop on family building for lesbians, they decide to look for a known donor, but one who will not be an active co-parent. Considering two possible donors, Aizley summarizes their options this way: "So, basically, we want a handsome, smart, kind man to donate sperm to us and then blow like the wind out of our lives" (22). In this regard, they understand the donor as largely an outsider, an instrument to help build their family, not an additional family member himself. Although Aizley's tone is lighthearted in approach, the memoir presents the complicated calculus that goes into family building when it is deliberately undertaken. She and her partner decide, for example, not to look at a picture of their donor: "better to fantasize a man who looks like your partner, than to raise your family in the shadow of a stranger whose photo lurks upstairs in a locked file cabinet year after curious year like some sort of ghost daddy" (30). In this regard, their choice to distance the donor, to understand his function as largely practical, is consistent with the findings of qualitative social science research on lesbians who build families with sperm donors.²⁵

After this initial plan doesn't work out, they agree—after roughly a year of thinking and discussion—to proceed with an anonymous donor instead. This relatively new possibility for conception, aided by sperm banks, makes it possible for lesbians to conceptualize their family without the involvement of a "dad." Although anonymous donation may be emotionally easier than negotiating a familial relationship with a friend or other known donor, Aizley's narrative highlights the obstacles that lesbians inherently face in their route to family building. "More than ever," she confesses, "I find myself wishing I were with a man. On those days I assume that if I had chosen a man as my life partner instead of a woman, everything would be so much easier. I would have all the sperm I wanted as well as the blessing of society" (23). However breezy and speculative Aizley's language is here, there is a darker undercurrent—the awareness of how complicated their family building is in terms of both the practicalities of biology and homophobia, internalized and in broader US society. Maternal desire is

complicated; for lesbians, they need to be all in. With no possibility of an unplanned pregnancy as the passive result of sex, family building for lesbians necessarily requires a series of active choices. As Aizley suggests, the difficulties that lesbians face while building family are both about access and also about acceptability—two significant ways in which straight fertile couples have obvious advantage (privilege). In this way, Aizley describes the process as antithetical to, even as it parallels, stock narrative tropes of romantic courtship and reproduction: “if the acquisition of an object of affection is the result of an unpredictable and spontaneous explosion of the heart, then the acquisition of anonymous sperm is exactly the opposite. It is calculated and particular” (25). Against such calculation, Aizley wants a donor with whom she is compatible and might organically “have a chance of hooking up with outside of spermland” (43).²⁶

Much as Moraga’s memoir highlights her investment in having a “Mexican baby,” Harlyn and Faith foreground traditional notions of ethnicity and blood ties when choosing an anonymous donor. This priority is, as noted above, largely consistent across donor conceived families, regardless of race; recipients tend to choose donors who look like them or their partner. As Aizley puts it, “We figure because we are Jews ourselves, even the ickiest of our tribe will look warm and fuzzy and familiar” (32). While such an emphasis on race, ethnicity, and national origin raises the specter of eugenics on a larger scale, on a personal one, familiarity helps soothe the anxieties that come with needing a third party—a stranger—involved in the intimacies of getting pregnant. Moreover, choosing a donor of their own “tribe” substitutes larger kinship ties for the loss of Faith’s genetics.²⁷ Having finally found a sperm donor—a Jewish man they call “Baldie”—they undertake insemination at home: “Why not see if we can get pregnant the romantic way, with a syringe and a glass of wine?” (35). While Aizley’s tone here is satirical, in choosing to inseminate at home they prioritize privacy and intimacy (“the romantic way”) over medicalization. That the majority of the memoirists I consider in this archive make the same choice—to begin with insemination at home—is suggestive of the emotional consequences of medicalizing fertility and the ensuing desire to keep reproduction a family matter, as it would be for fertile heterosexual couples. Indeed, when the nitrogen tank arrives for their home insemination, Aizley decides to dress up it up as Faith, “wrap[ping] one of her shirts around the tank and prop[ping] her glasses beneath the hat” (66). Aizley thus provides a visual metaphor of the loss of ability to conceive

with her partner; she tries to turn the sperm into her lover, something akin to “*The X-Files* and *If These Walls Could Talk 2* rolled into one” (68).

Whereas Moraga’s memoir opens with a generalization about the obstacles that stand in the way of lesbian conception, Aizley works hard instead to normalize her desire for family. In fact, there is a recurrent thread throughout Aizley’s memoir that attempts to unpack Harlyn’s own internalized homophobia. Early in the book, for example, they attend a workshop of other lesbian parents-to-be but instead of finding a shared community, the other workshop attendees are set apart: “part of what bonds Faith and me is the myth we share that, *despite our intimate relationship, we are not lesbians* [...] We never needed to find new family in an identity, never needed to create a world of acceptance, because our world always accepted us” (11, emphasis mine). Aizley points to a bigger existential question about her reluctance to label herself: “This is why I am afraid to identify as a lesbian, I think. Maybe it’s not fair to bring children into this world to be raised by an oppressed minority” (12). This is one of the many ways in which we see Aizley struggling to present her choices, her family, as “normal,” even as she has some trouble reconciling the loss of radicality of her choices (it’s as if she wants to be accepted but also stand out as different). Generally, the book notes the acceptance of family and family building, describing LGBTQ family building as joining “the monotony of mainstream culture, rather than creat[ing] a new world order” (38); “This is what we get for years of struggle for equality: mundane ordinariness. Acceptance” (39).²⁸ Such tension between a desire for purported normalcy on the one hand and a preservation of radicality on the other plays out larger cultural anxieties in LGBTQ politics. Yet Aizley overstates her claim; tacit social “acceptance” excepting, laws, insurance policies, and the practices of medical clinics present significant obstacles in queer reproduction.

If queer conception is deliberately chosen, it also reflects the unknowns or “IFs” of infertility treatment more broadly. Choosing family, regardless of sexual orientation, does not mean it comes easily. After a few attempts at conception at home, Aizley’s narrative shifts toward the process of medicalized pregnancy and accompanying loss of agency experienced by infertility patients. After the third cycle, Harlyn is aware that things are out of her control: “*You can’t* count on conceiving by a certain time. *You can’t* decide to give birth during your summer vacation. *You can’t* plan the physical and mental health of your child. *You may not* even be able to plan there being a biological relationship between your child and that of your

partner. *You can't plan a thing*" (85, emphasis mine). Aizley's use of anaphora underscores this loss of certainty at the center of queer family building, as well as the use of narrative to make sense of a situation that is chosen and deliberately undertaken but also evades control. Beyond this lack of agency, Aizley makes explicit too the financial costs and emotional weight associated with trying to get pregnant, costs that fertile heterosexuals do not have. While it is easy to criticize the fertility industry writ large for practices that amount to making money off people desperate to have babies, such critique fails to recognize the biological and social privilege that married fertile couples have: to have a baby without going through any of that expense and labor. As Aizley's memoir illustrates, at their best, fertility clinics offer technology to make up for those losses, and it is deeply unfortunate that there isn't—more than twenty years after the publication of this memoir—easier and more affordable access to reproductive healthcare for all.²⁹

As Aizley's journey becomes more complicated and reliant on reproductive medicine, her rhetorical framing and priorities align more with individuals in the infertility community; her commentary reveals resentment toward those she presumes to be fertile in her family and community. For example, when during a phone call, her sister says she's going off the pill, Aizley remarks, "she has her very own sperm bank complete with fresh free-range sperm guaranteed to live for 120 hours in the privacy of her undisturbed womb" (114). Moments like this one, which are slightly snarky in tone, reveal and take aim at the reproductive privilege of fertile heterosexual couples. Calling out that privilege is a significant function of queer mother memoirs as a genre. Although getting pregnant for lesbians is always challenging due to lack of access to sperm—as Aizley reminds her readers here, frozen sperm doesn't last as long as fresh even as it costs more—there is undeniably more emotional distress, logistical difficulty, and financial cost, as attempts to become pregnant become more complex and medicalized, with pharmaceutical assistance and/or intensive procedures such as in vitro fertilization. For Harlyn, this realization manifests as psychological angst tied to sexual identity: "It always boils down to this: Maybe I don't deserve to have a stable life and family because I'm gay. Maybe there is something wrong with me. [...] and for that maybe I don't deserve to have my own family" (116). Harnessing anaphora (maybe, maybe, maybe) to highlight her distress and question her decision to build family, she spins a story in which fertility is the consequence and blessing

of heterosexuality; the heteronormativity leans toward internalized homophobia.

Finally, Aizley presents the possibility of having a family as a stage of normal growth; ambivalent at the beginning of the book, Aizley realizes she is ready to become a parent with a new plan at the fertility clinic (IUIs “back to back” on two days, to maximize the presence of live sperm during the window of ovulation) and a sense of calm: “The house is clean. I have had my own room, gotten into graduate school, dropped out of graduate school. I have fallen in love, out of love, then back in love again. I have lived alone, learned to drive a stick shift, bake bread, and climb a mountain. It’s time for the next thing. I’m ready” (120). When she returns from yet another medical appointment, she sees the possibility of home and family:

At home, Faith is baking a chicken and transcribing music. The kitty is fast asleep on our bed. The plants all seem to be thriving. Nothing about our life together resembles developmental apocalypse. Perhaps I do use my sexual orientation as an excuse for avoiding insecurities far more complex and interesting. Perhaps we’re just fine, no more confused and neurotic than the general population. Maybe, just maybe, a child would be very lucky to live here with the two of us. (117)

Reinvoking anaphora through “maybe” and “perhaps,” Aizley rewrites her family story to underscore their domestic normality and the implicit argument that Aizley and Faith may be literally lesbian but not radical or queer in a political sense. Yes, to be sure, there are financial and legal challenges to family building but she suggests there is nothing about what they are doing that undermines the very nature of family. Situating their family-building efforts as a natural stage in human development (a heteronormative temporality), Aizley leans into what Katherine Mack describes as legitimizing rhetoric—an approach which is distinct from newer memoirs, like Michelle Tea’s *Knocking Myself Up*, that I discuss later.³⁰ In this regard, it’s important to understand the memoir as a cultural artifact of the late twentieth century, when the choice to create family this way *was* in fact a relatively novel act that faced significant logistical, financial, and legal challenges even as mainstream culture bemoaned the decline of the nuclear family. “Assimilation,” Rikke Andreassen posits, “(or verbalization [sic] that one is just like any other mother, despite being lesbian) might be a strategy for survival in a homophobic context.”³¹ To put a sharper point on it, the cultural acceptance of queer family requires telling an acceptable story. Memoirs like Aizley’s do this cultural work.

As Aizley's memoir reveals, maternal desire is fundamentally tethered to devastation and loss. Loss of self. Loss of control. Desire is overwhelming: "Perhaps I'm afraid that if I really let myself know how much I want this then who knows what more I will do to achieve it [...] Maybe I will endanger myself. Maybe I will go too far. Or worst of all, I might just join the masses of women who *want* a baby" (194–5). Maternal desire here is both equated with normative femininity and also excessive, pathological, and, dare I say, queer. "It's all just too much, this frozen-sperm thing. Do you think thirty-nine-year-old lesbians should even be trying to get pregnant? And how about the infertile heterosexual couples you see—what about them? How far do you think women should go?" (196). In these passages, Aizley repeats the word "too"—too far, too much—to suggest that *wanting* a child is a problem. (On the other hand, *having* a child, born from fertile heterosexuality, is normal and expected.)³² Aligning individuals who want to get pregnant but can't, whether for social or biomedical reasons, Aizley highlights the queerness of infertility and maternal desire.

It is the combination of such interiority and analysis of the external conflicts and obstacles in the way of family building that makes Aizley's memoir both delightful to read and also a site of significant reproductive education and cultural critique. For example, she reflects on the ways that the medical community, including doctors and insurance companies, is not neutral but instead uses what Foucault would characterize as "bio-power," conveying cultural prejudices through their policies and practices.³³ The clinic, as the memoir suggests, functions as what Tober describes as a "mechanism through which mainstream prejudices controlled the reproduction of individual, nonconforming bodies."³⁴ Consider, for example, the way that Aizley imagines her new doctor: "I fantasize that this new doctor will be a sensitive ally, willing to walk the steps with me before injectable hormone treatments. That she will attempt to remember my medical history, that she will not doubt whether Faith and I are capable of planning our own finances" (142). So much of the undercurrent of Aizley's book underscores the social, legal, and medical obstacles to family building that is already undertaken with a great deal of necessary deliberation and forethought. Beyond such logistical obstacles, Aizley addresses outright discrimination, including access to care: "The new doctor informs me that our repugnant fertility clinic is one of the few in town that has no problem treating 'single women,' that is where she would refer a client trying to get pregnant without a male partner" (146). This linguistic erasure of lesbian couples—by turning "queer" into

“single”—also makes clear the privileging of couples over single individuals who want to parent. As Aizley explains, “Apparently, women seeking to get pregnant without a husband or boyfriend are considered ‘single’ by the medical establishment. Because you can claim not to accept single women clients, but you cannot say you will not accept lesbians” (145–146).³⁵ Thus, some clinics use a culturally and legally permissible form of discrimination—singlism—to police family building efforts by those who seek to reproduce outside the heteronuclear family.

Even in situations without overt discrimination or even microaggression, the process of medicalized conception, whether for so-called social or biomedical infertility, involves significant investment in time, money, and emotional labor. Aizley writes, “I still feel worn out and depleted, tired of fitting my feet into stirrups every month, tired of living in fear of my period, tired of calculating ovulation like a chemist attempting to predict the exact moment a compound will turn from liquid to gas. I can’t even remember sometimes what we’re trying to achieve” (182–3). Aizley emphasizes the psychological and physical effects of reproductive labor; she is “worn out,” “depleted,” and “tired.” That is, although Aizley acknowledges implicit and explicit homophobia in the fertility industry, the memoir highlights the material, practical, and psychological challenges to queer family building. She asks, “What if it could be as easy for Faith and me to get pregnant as it was for our sisters and our mothers? What if we didn’t even go into months’ worth of discussion and just did it?” (189). She asks if it were possible to have a child without angst and planning and money—with all the advantages of straight fertile family building. In this regard, the fertility clinic is framed as both the antagonist here and also a practical necessity. The right clinic, as Aizley depicts it, is not just helpful but actually welcoming. As Harlyn declares, “It’s the new fertility clinic who will be the father of our child” (190). Aizley continues to characterize the supportive nature of the “new and improved fertility clinic”; not only do they “call you honey,” but “the thawed semen is a pretty shade of pink instead of the creamy yolky yellow” (193). Drawing an explicit comparison between clinics, Aizley shows that the clinic may be a useful partner—even family member—rather than antagonist, in queer family building.

In its focus on process, including the psychological, economic, relationship, and pragmatic obstacles that stand in the way of charmed conceptions like Moraga’s, Aizley’s memoir offers guidance to individuals trying to conceive. It is an important depiction that takes the shape of a largely

optimistic, overcoming-the-obstacles narrative, one that is also more representative of family building for queer mothers. Although it is not a “self-help” book, it certainly helped me when I was looking for support. As Aizley presents the obstacles that stand in the way of lesbian conception, she also educates her readers about reproductive health and processes, noting for example that “otherwise potent, fertile sperm cannot always stand up to being frozen for six months, thawed 3000 miles away from home, and then bathed in a chemical wash. It’s a lot for a gal to ask of a guy” (197). In passages such as this, queer mother memoirs such as Aizley’s do significant work toward education in reproductive health and justice, underscoring some of the statistics involved in fertility, counter to myths of elementary school sex education: “If statistically speaking, there is only a five percent chance that I’m pregnant, there’s still only a twenty percent chance that a healthy heterosexual woman copulating with her fresh sperm spouse each night will conceive. It’s incredible anyone gets pregnant” (198). Discussing the phenomenon of “miracle sex pregnancies,” Aizley explains “the urban myth that women who have not been able to get pregnant suddenly will conceive after they adopt a child might simply be a reflection of rule number one: It takes a long time to get pregnant, even in the best of circumstances” (199). The conception story, as told in queer memoir, can present the realities of human reproduction, as compared to the fairy tale of heteronarrative, in which babies are the logical end and rationale for binary gender and heterosexuality itself.

Aizley’s memoir self-consciously highlights the role of narrative in framing discussions of family building, looking to television and narratives that circulate in popular culture. Offering an extended plot synopsis from a popular 1990s TV show for example, Aizley breezily suggests that although she and Faith have had a fight, they’re okay: “thanks to an episode of *Mad About You*, I know that we are completely normal” (99). In moments such as these, the book is fairly self-conscious about not only the ways in which we understand our lives according to the narratives that circulate in culture, but more broadly the ways that her own memoir fulfills narrative expectations. Later on, for example, when Harlyn believes she might be pregnant and the day of her pregnancy test aligns with her fortieth birthday, she claims that “[t]he timing is akin to that of a film student’s first screenplay or a very schlocky romance novel” (203). Of course, she *is* pregnant after these ten months of IUIs, after having an “excessively fertile aunt” rub her and a cousin bless and task her with “carrying the genes of our family into the next generation” (207). She tests

over and over, confirming the pregnancy as well as narrative logic: “We do a fifth test. There it is again, the little faint pink line smiling back at us. I can almost hear it say, ‘Hello, Mommy. Mommies. Hello, *Mommies*.’ Blood tests be damned” (209). In the end, she says, learning she is pregnant on her fortieth birthday is “like a made-for-TV movie, just entirely tacky and melodramatic [...] I mean, of all things” (210). It’s implausible, as life often is: “it’s total schlock, entirely unbelievable” (211). Aizley continues, “Because this scene in the drama that is our lives apparently is not schlocky enough, the phone rings just as we leave behind children and fields and civilization and round one of the most beautiful bends in the river” (211). The framing, including the repetition of “schlock,” highlights the ways that queer mother memoirs such as Aizley’s lean on common narrative tropes, a move that works to normalize modern family forms at a historical moment anxious about the decline of the nuclear family. The pregnancy here is presented as inevitable, natural, with the picturesque landscape surrounding them as their conception, through reproductive science, is confirmed.

The relatively short second part of the book, “The Trip,” covers Harlyn’s pregnancy and continues to mobilize rhetoric that “normalizes” their situation. As she says at this point, “we no longer are gay, no longer alternative, no longer a minority. We are integral cogs in the reproductive machine, soldiers of evolution. We could be two zebras for all anyone cares. Because we are having a baby! We are going to become parents. We’re going to become ‘normal’ and identifiable. We’re not quite Ozzie and Harriet; still, Harriet and Harriet is suddenly okay as long as a baby’s in the forecast” (217–218). That is, the child takes away the threat of queerness; having a baby reframes Harlyn and Faith in the expected narrative of adulthood. Within this framing, it is not family building itself but infertility and maternal desire that is problematic and “queer.” Maternity, Aizley’s narrative suggests, makes everything okay.

The story of a family conceived by two women, *Buying Dad* is centrally about mothers and matrilineage, about the dying of Harlyn’s mother and Harlyn trying to become a mother with another co-mother. That is, the memoir is carefully framed to be not about gender-neutral parenting but lesbian maternity specifically. As her due date nears, the very fact of the sperm donor—who is foregrounded in the book’s title—recedes into the background: “It’s incredible how absent he has become—he served his purpose and now has about as much to do with our daily life as my second cousins once removed. He is there, certainly, in biology and from time to

time in thought, but the daily reality of parenthood and pregnancy have nothing to do with him or his semen. They have to do with us" (222). His role is pragmatic, genetic, but not social or familial. Until some future in which their daughter has grown up to ask questions, "we will live lives of blissful oblivion, believing our child is just some version of me and Faith rather than the product of me and some dude in California I might not even want to have coffee with" (281). That is, in sharp contrast to Moraga and other women who build family with a known donor, Aizley makes clear how necessary the anonymity of the donor is to their journey: "how intruded upon I would have felt by the presence of a known donor and his family. It is Faith and my and our family's baby" (222). In moments like these, as earlier when she dresses up the nitrogen tank in Faith's clothes, Aizley works hard to eclipse the donor's genetic contribution with Faith's social/ parental one.

As the book comes to an end, Aizley closes the frame set up by her mother's cancer diagnosis. They are of course paired together as events: "That I both gained a daughter and lost a mother during the same three months of my life, well, maybe that was luck. Bad luck and good luck wrapped in and around each other in some crazy earth-shattering double helix" (312). That she uses the double helix—stand in for DNA—suggests maternal genetics is as profound as sperm (if not more so) for the building of their family. The very last page/paragraph asserts, "Because there are miracles and magic in the world, Betsy's grandmother was able to hold her in her arms, to know her, and to love her during the first months of Betsy's life and the last few months of her own. And because there are babies and children in the world, even after loss and pain miracles and magic continue" (313). It is of course in this way a fairy tale happy ending, even with the undercurrent of loss.

* * *

Penned by a queer, Latinx "butch," Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's book *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* is a direct descendant of Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*. Building on narratives such as Aizley's, Jimenez's memoir pushes harder on the question of the relationship between queer conception and infertility stories, as well as the protracted quest for a sperm donor, as Jimenez has difficulty conceiving. Conception—not birth, not new parenthood—is the culmination of Jimenez's story; notably, it ends prior to full-term pregnancy and birth (although the last page gestures toward such closure). As such, it is situated between narratives of infertility (largely undertaken by straight, cisgender women) and queer memoir devoted to an explication of gender. As with *Buying Dad*, on the level of

narrative structure, it largely follows a chronologically driven “heteronarrative” arc, with the quest for a sperm donor standing in for what might be read as a romance narrative ending with marriage and, inevitably, reproduction. Or more, pointedly, if reproduction, in the form of the nuclear family, functions as an expected end of binary gender norms, heterosexuality, and heteronarrative, then narratives of queer reproduction such as Jimenez’s destabilize the binary to sketch new modes of eroticism and kinship.

Much as heterosexual sex is understood to be reproductive (or “reprosexual,” in Warner’s terminology), Jimenez frames her inseminations and attempts at reproduction in sexual terms that call attention to the reproductive rationale for binary gender and heterosexual sex, by miming it. The book opens with a scene taken chronologically out of order, in which Karleen is at a bar looking for a potential sperm donor. “How do I get sperm,” the first sentence of the memoir asks, “when I look like a dude?”³⁶ In a figurative turn that is the inverse of synecdoche, part for the whole, the man here stands in for the sperm that can’t be seen: “Assessing men for their sperm is difficult even for the most politically astute of lesbians. What is it exactly I should look for, or avoid, in a sperm donor?” (5). In this way, the opening scene sets up a kind of romance narrative, but rather than a prospective romantic partner to marry—and potentially bear children with—she is looking only for a reproductive one. Understanding reproductive success to be tied to binary gender norms, Karleen tries to align her outward performance of gender explicitly in terms of her reproductive goals, admitting “I have no idea how to look like someone who wants sperm” (5). Discussing her early desires to become a mother, she thinks her appearance, her “boyishness, would lead people to believe otherwise” (8). The book charts this quest to find sperm and conceive.

As she contextualizes her initial thoughts about a sperm donor within a lifelong desire to have a child, Karleen likewise wants “a Mexican baby” (15). Much as Moraga chooses her donor in order to preserve her matrilineal connection to Mexico, Karleen provides a page-long list of reasons both personal and political, notably including “because I’m mixed race, forever hungering to be whole” and “because the US stole California from Mexico” (15). For this reason, she asks first a friend, Mateo, whom Karleen has considered her first choice as sperm donor since college graduation. This desire for “familia,” in Moraga’s words, is part of its queerness, rather than oppositional to it. She frames her potential union with Mateo as “a postmodern partnership,” her butch appearance potentially attractive to

him, in lieu of a more “traditional image of what a mother should look like” (17). “Mother” in a way becomes an expression of queerness, both gender and sexuality; reproducing with a sperm donor, she hopes to make queer family. She chooses Mateo because she loves him, and she imagines a queer family with potentially four parents, biological and social.

Imagination is itself a key aspect of Karleen’s conception narrative, and she emphasizes the methodical nature of the process. Her family building is conceptualized, that is, before she can conceive. Considering her first request to a prospective known donor, she comments that he would understand that “a baby wouldn’t come easily or by mistake, that it would require careful planning, commitment, tons of desire” (16). When she writes a long letter to Mateo elaborating on her initial overture, she offers up several scenarios, imagining what their queer family might look like in practical terms: “Best case scenario, we end up getting professor jobs in the same city. We get to share time with the baby/kid. The kid gets to grow up having me, you, Amado, and Hilary loving/looking after him/her” (20). She imagines “the little baby of my dreams lifts his arms toward me. He shouts a little baby cheer. He wants me to pick him up. I tell him to wait for me. Wait just a little longer” (26). Imagination thus operates in tension with the methodical nature of the process that needs to be carefully considered and undertaken. It also becomes a means to theorize queer family.

As she continues to think through the possibilities for sperm donors, she reflects on the distinctions between lesbians and straight folks who “hook up all the time without a detailed background check. They can have babies with strangers, accidentally. In this scenario they are only asking for sex, and sex can be so good that a baby is an afterthought” (29). Sex is easy; reproduction for its own sake is complex, even as it is also a site of sexual fantasy. “Heterosexuals may or may not have to ask the question or make the decision; sometimes the sex just does it for them” (30). In other words, heterosexual conception is passive; queer conception is active. As with the opening passage, she assesses men she encounters as prospective sperm donors; at a Mexican restaurant, feeling like she’s home, she shares “the taste of food with him [a man at the restaurant] and wonder[s] about his sperm. It would be good, rich sperm.” She admits, “I wish I could have just a little bit of it” (37). Men’s “protectiveness” of their sperm is an obstacle for Karleen; they want to have sex, not reproduce: “It doesn’t matter what your sexuality is. They don’t want to have babies with straight women either” (39). The book emphasizes the concerted effort, both intellectual

and practical, to conceive. As Jimenez writes, "Getting pregnant via sperm banks requires coordination. I need to ovulate. I need to have enough money in the credit card account to buy the sperm. There must be enough sperm available for purchase. The delivery needs to be timely and accurate. The clinic must be open when I'm ready to transport the sperm home. The girlfriend needs to be home to put it in" (46). In this way, she describes the process as a "Rube Goldberg machine. Just to get sperm inside me" (46).

While Aizley and Jimenez's narratives foreground the mechanics of lesbian conception, and the biological as well as social challenges that stand in their way, Jimenez's book, published nearly a decade later, feels more queer in its politics, a result of its understandings of sexuality and gender, as well as its unabashed voice. The experience of Jimenez's first insemination, performed at home, calls attention to its queerness. If, in "straight" mother memoirs conception is taken for granted or elided, an easy on-ramp to parenting, for Jimenez and other lesbian-mothers-to-be, it must be carefully, artfully arranged. For her early attempts at conception, Jimenez uses frozen sperm, which minimizes the presence of the donor, who is here nothing more than some genes in a nitrogen shipping container. Straightening out misconceptions regarding inseminations (all puns intended!), Jimenez clarifies that medical catheters, not turkey basters, are the insemination tool of choice. Much like the moment in which Aizley dresses up their nitrogen tank, Hilary, Jimenez's girlfriend, takes pictures of Karleen with the "big grey box" (61). She notes that this may be the only time "the baby gets to see of its biological parents together." This is a lighthearted moment that gestures toward the complexity of emotions that arise in building family via third-party reproduction; it also underscores the utility of the sperm donor, rather than a familial relation. Yet in an attempt to close the emotional and practical gaps between sex and reproduction within lesbian partnership, Karleen and Hilary are sexually intimate immediately before and during their first insemination; Hilary touches Karleen while she is also holding the vial of sperm, to thaw it prior to insemination. Jimenez writes, "She cuts me off with her lips kissing mine, and then pulls back. She sits up on the bed and opens her hand. She unscrews the tiny capsule" (56). Their sexual encounter in this way literalizes the idea of "reprosexuality," turning it into something queer.

In sharp contrast to this tender moment, the long chapter that occurs exactly in the middle of the book (eight out of fifteen), titled "Fertility

Land,” considers medically assisted reproduction and sets up the complex relationship between queer and straight infertility and family building. The chapter details the series of inseminations that Karleen undertakes at the clinic. It circles round and round, as fertility treatment does, detailing the blood work that she has on cycle day 3, the ultrasound, the insemination, the negative pregnancy tests, eight in all. Through these cycles, there are, of course, minimal variations: the exact sperm count and motility, the size of the follicle, the levels of luteinizing hormone and estrogen that Karleen has in her blood, the ultrasound tech and the doctor, Karleen’s attitude. But mostly the chapter operates like the experience of fertility treatment itself, like blood in a centrifuge. Around and around it goes.

I am tempted to say that it is this circularity that performs the book’s queerness, as it also demonstrates the experience of trying to get pregnant queerly, which is to say something other than heterosexual sex in the comfort of one’s own home with one’s heterosexual partner. The experience of the fertility clinic is, I would argue, following Maria Novotny, queer.³⁷ Lesbians don’t make babies with their lovers. Infertile women don’t make babies with their lovers. The experiences of social and medical infertility collapse and align.

Yet despite the structural and situational alignment between queer and straight identified individuals who require medical intervention to conceive, Jimenez’s critique of the clinic involves her highlighting difference and reading the space as a fundamentally (hetero)sexual institution, a tension I take up further in Chapter Three. Moreover, much as she incorporates sex acts into her home inseminations, she also uses a sexual framework for interpreting her experiences at the clinic, queering it. Speaking of her doctor and ultrasound technician in relation to the type of women she is attracted to, she says that Dr. Meredith “reminds me of a girl I had a crush on when I was nineteen. I can open my legs to her” (65). In this way the fertility clinic becomes a sexualized as well as reproductive space. Describing an ultrasound, Jimenez writes “I feel guilty, almost ashamed. I don’t let anyone inside me, hardly ever, except Hilary. It feels like I’m betraying my girlfriend with this ultrasound technician” (69). Of her first insemination at the clinic, she explains “I offer myself up to two feminine women whom I would much rather pin down and make love to” (72). By contrast, when she has a new ultrasound technician, one who is not attractive to Karleen (she says she is “ugly”), Jimenez renders the experience in violent heterosexualized terms. She claims that the gynecological tool of the speculum is designed for straight women, whose vaginas are used to

penetrative sex and having “dicks inside them” (72). Describing the process of ultrasound monitoring for ovulation, Jimenez compares the action of being penetrated with a transvaginal ultrasound transducer (a necessarily phallic-shaped object covered in a condom) as being “fucked,” or even, as rape, writing “The hospital is raping me on days three, eight, ten, twelve with these strangers and their hard, white probe. I’m in a relationship with a technological apparatus, a cold and sterile machine” (86–87). To be sure, the experience of transvaginal ultrasound is unpleasant and, in its literal physicality, mimes vaginal sex. Yet I’d venture to say that no fertility patient, straight or otherwise, enjoys the process of transvaginal sonogram and insemination and experiences it as a sexual act (“being fucked”). It is highly intimate, uncomfortable, and invasive. However, there is something particularly sticky about characterizing this medical procedure (which she has *elected* and signed a consent form for) as “rape,” an action which is fundamentally about a *lack* of consent. Throughout these scenes, Jimenez mobilizes queerness as a language to characterize discomfort, the very oddity of what happens in the clinic in the name of making babies.

Jimenez’s language wrestles with the challenges to her sense of gender identity posed by medicalized conception attempts. Much as Moraga gradually reorients her identity around “mother,” rather than someone who has sex with mothers, Karleen asserts her butch identity and agency in a site she reads as straight. Describing an uncomfortable ultrasound procedure, Karleen thinks, “Don’t be such a straight girl! I want to grab the wand from her and push it inside me. I want to show her how to enter a woman” (86). From the introduction of this section, Karleen simultaneously notes that she is different from the other women in the waiting room; she assumes she is not, like them, infertile. Despite the book’s title, *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*, which emphasizes gender, Jimenez writes, “I’m not really a woman even. I’m a lesbian. I’m a butch” (64). Trying to differentiate the social infertility (the need for sperm) from biomedical infertility, she does not, at this moment, acknowledge that the women in the waiting room, like her, may feel their gender challenged by their need for medical assistance to reproduce; if our dominant binary system of gender is predicated on the idea that women have babies, infertile straight women and lesbians are more alike than different. As Maria Novotny explains, “to be infertile, especially as a woman, is to be perceived as less female,” as deficient and non-normative.³⁸ In this moment, Jimenez suggests that she is somehow both more and less “woman” than the other women at the clinic, even as she assumes the other women in the waiting

room are straight. She says again, "I feel queer in this office with feminine women, real women" (72). In this, Jimenez is typical of Tober's interview subjects "who may feel even more marginalized by infertility" when they identify as butch.³⁹ Yet, as any straight infertile woman would be quick to correct her, neither cisgender femininity nor heterosexuality is a guarantee of fertility. Karleen has bought into that assumption, even if she places herself on the outside. Against Jimenez, I would argue that the clinic is a space always already queer rather than a space that is necessarily straight.

One of the stranger (queerer?) moments in this narrative involves Karleen presenting herself as a straight woman to have sex with a man she met at a bar in order to try to conceive. Understanding heterosexuality for its reproductive possibilities, Karleen puts on a careful performance, essentially dressing up in drag, shaving her legs, contemplating her strategy to determine which man to seduce, and, most significantly, planning how she can save the sperm if he acts responsibly and uses a condom (which is to say, taking his sperm for conception without his consent). Karleen believes that in order to seduce a man at a bar, she needs to appear "feminine," in accordance with heteronormative assumptions that gender and sexuality should align (the fact that "the guy," as she calls him, is also inevitably performing, consciously or unconsciously, his gender presentation does not occur to her). During their sexual encounter, she fantasizes, imagining herself as someone else: "Sometimes she is a woman who is a wild animal, sometimes she is a tough butch, sometimes a gay man. I switch between these images of myself as he lunges for me" (108). Unlike her experience of the fertility clinic, she has agency in this encounter. She can do anything, she tells herself, for a baby, going so far as to perform oral sex on her partner who has not yet achieved an erection to penetrate. The sex "feels great," she explains. "It feels like my girlfriend inside me. It feels like a smooth, warm dildo. [...] It's thoroughly enjoyable, but nothing another woman can't do" (109). It was an experience, she says, "more human than another round of examinations at the fertility clinic. It was also a lot more fun" (112). Compared to the description of the clinic as "rape," she "planned carefully and entered into the engagement with free will" (112). Yet, in the end, the man ejaculates on the bed instead of in her body; here, at this critical moment when she is trying to conceive, sex is just sex, not a method of reproduction. In this description, Jimenez rewrites and reframes this sex act, between individuals of the so-called opposite sex as queer; in her characterization, it mimics the narrator's experience of lesbian sex, taking the latter as the norm, rather than the other way around. Whereas

Roof has argued that in heteronarrative, lesbian sexuality often acts as the “detour” on the way to the inevitable (straight, reproductive) end, this scene inverts the expected order of things, undertaking the actions of heterosexual sex in order to create queer family.⁴⁰ Although Karleen has at this point had enough negative pregnancy tests to warrant an infertility diagnosis, she continues to define her problem as a social one: a lack of access to sperm as a result of her sexual partnership. While her choice to go to a bar is in some ways practical and easier—it’s much cheaper than the roughly \$1000/month she was paying at the clinic—it is, more significantly, imbued with emotional significance within the narrative (105). By adopting a feminine persona, Karleen hopes to become pregnant, solidifying her beliefs that feminine=straight=fertile, as also seen in the waiting room scene.

While much of the book circles around itself, queerly, getting nowhere, the last few chapters move quickly. Karleen picks up a man at a bar again in France, conceives, and then miscarries early in the first trimester. Then three new possibilities of sperm donors arise in quick succession—Javier (a.k.a. Latinoqueer72), whom they meet through a listserv; Garry, the boyfriend of a longtime friend, Tammy; and another friend of a friend, who is described only as “the Ecuadoran.” This is, in traditional narrative sense, the crisis point. Karleen and Hilary debate mostly about selecting Garry or Javier; in the end, they choose Garry, whom they understand as “a gift” from the universe (162). In the end, she suggests a queer way of understanding the acquisition of donor gametes via “straight women who possess a bit of influence over the sperm. It’s the women who might make the friendly suggestion to share it” (149), in this case, Hilary’s friend Tammy proposing the idea to her partner Garry. When they accept the offer, they explore what their chosen family might look like; writing a letter, Karleen says, “I am open to a range of possibilities: as a known donor, as an uncle or godfather, or as some level of co-parent” (151). Much as the other conception attempts have involved literal sex acts, this insemination is also rendered as a sexual encounter between lesbian partners; after Garry and Tammy have provided the sperm, Hilary prepares the syringe for insemination, begins to kiss Karleen, undresses her, holds her between her legs. It is Hilary, in the end, who introduces the sperm that allows them to conceive. Jimenez writes, “I breathe out, abrupt, heavy, letting go of the weight of my body, the weight of nearly two years of doctors, five years of men, fifteen years of planning. I let go and give myself over to Hilary’s expert hands” (163).

Although the narrative proper ends here with this night of conception, underscoring the arc of the title—it is about “getting pregnant” rather than the experience of pregnancy or motherhood—Jimenez provides an additional page that functions as afterward, letting the reader know the night was successful: a baby born nine months later in Toronto. If the bulk of the narrative feels circular and stalled out by the uncertainties of infertility, by the end, of course, it has reached the proper end of its quest: the goal set up in the first line had been lesbian family building, and, of course at the end they have built their lesbian family. Yet suggesting this narrative is straight and boring and hetero, still, is to undermine its creativity and its work. Rewriting heteronarrative toward queer reproductive ends, Jimenez reconceives queer family.

* * *

While it seemed fraught and difficult at the time—months at the clinic, a long, drawn-out miscarriage—my first child’s conception now seems fantastical and faraway. The way I would drive to the clinic, hand my car keys to the valet, race up the elevator, check myself in. In the exam room, naked to the waist except for a paper sheet, I reviewed the vial with the nurse, double checking that the number matched that of the donor. She drew the sperm up with a syringe, threaded the catheter through my cervix. Fifteen minutes with my hips propped up and back on the road. I’d often stop for lunch at a café on the outskirts of the city and then go home. The day only took on significance not quite two weeks later when I was staring at two clear blue lines on the home pregnancy test.

* * *

Natalie Meisner’s *Double Pregnant: Two Lesbians Make a Family* (2014) begins with a proposal, highlighting the romance narrative that structures her reproductive story. The narrator’s partner Viviën “pops the question,” substituting “*Do you want to have a baby with me?*” for the marriage proposal the reader expects.⁴¹ The couple quickly decides that two is better than one, and each partner undertakes the quest toward pregnancy via donor insemination. Following the narrative pattern set up by Moraga, Meisner’s memoir begins largely as a story of logistical challenges: “Bringing children into the world isn’t a simple prospect even for a straight/fertile couple, but for us, a lesbian couple in our thirties, one quite practical impediment to pregnancy emerged immediately: We can’t just go off the pill and wait for nature to take its course” (4). Similar to Moraga’s infamous opening line, then, Meisner emphasizes that lesbian conception is actively chosen and requires agency; heterosexual conception, by contrast, can just happen through sexual activity, without forethought or even intent (it’s “natural”). Such agency is clear from

the verb in Meisner's subtitle: "two lesbians *make* a family" (emphasis mine). Toward this end, like both Aizley and Jimenez, Meisner foregrounds the process of selecting a sperm donor, ultimately conceiving via known donor at home.

Meisner's project highlights the conceptual work in building lesbian family—that there's a story before the story—and in that way begins to explore and unravel the advantages that fertile heterosexual couples have. Yet more so than her foremothers in queer memoir, Meisner acknowledges that straight does not actually (always) mean fertile; as any infertile straight individual would note, it is not their gender or sexuality but rather biomedical fertility itself that gives some heterosexual couples a conception advantage. These early pages in the book, and early times in their quest, shuttle between those practical realities and also the fantasy of motherhood, the desire that propels their quest. Following the familiar heterosexual plot—if not also the content—this narrative positions lack of sperm as the obstacle to be overcome on the path to family building. But before they can find a sperm donor, however, they need to imagine the kind of family they want to have. What they dream and want is not necessarily obtainable through choice and effort.

This narrative tension is presented early on here, as their first plan is to ask a friend who rejects the request to donate. Then they explore and reject the possibility of one conceiving with the other's brother, as a way to approximate genetic family and close the distance between "donor" and "relative": "I had, however, already begun to picture this little son or daughter that we might have conceived with her brother, and so when we close this door I can't help but feel a pang" (9). They next look to the internet, akin to "speed dating for sperm donors," as the chapter title proclaims. At this point in their quest, they are looking largely at known donors, willing to donate via sex (the oldest model for lesbian conception) and also for insemination. In this exploration, this book is largely distinct from the other books I discuss when consideration of known donors are actually family members or friends—"known" in the truest sense, rather than simply "non-anonymous." By contrast, Meisner and her partner explore sites like "[co-parent.net](#)" and "free sperm donations worldwide" as alternative possibilities. As these recent memoirs make clear, it is not just the technology of insemination and ART that leads to changes in queer family building in the early twenty-first century but also the internet, which connects individuals and makes it quite easy to search donor profiles, as well as meet prospective donors, as Andreassen explains.⁴² As they

use these technologies in their efforts to build family, they make an ad to advertise their own needs and try to connect with donors. This action foregrounds the similarity between the search for a donor and the search for a mate via dating profiles, as sites such as [Match.com](#) were becoming popular in this era.

As Meisner's memoir illustrates, the process of family building via donor insemination, whether known or anonymous, raises significant questions regarding genetics and eugenics. While this issue comes up as many women contemplate their priorities and desires for a donor, Meisner's analysis explores both the consumerism in current practices, as well as the history of and ideologies behind sperm banks. For example, Meisner discusses the recipient's desire for sperm from tall men, which "costs more than short sperm" (29). On the other side, some of these matching sites give more agency to the prospective donors; one that Meisner encounters "requires straight A's. While he considers the spreading of his gene pool to be his gift to humanity, he isn't interested in populating the world with dullards" (27). Likewise, in my own experience, donors with PhDs—proxy for intelligence—cost more than donors without. Consider this fact in a broader cultural context: one of the earlier sperm banks, The Repository for Germinal Choice (1980–1999), which gathered donations from Nobel laureates and other "gifted" men, required the women who tried to conceive with these donors to be from the top two percent in terms of IQ (Meisner, 29). That is, what is desirable for one's individual family building efforts becomes somewhat horrifying when reflected on a larger cultural scale. (And yet, one might ask, how is this practice different from PhDs dating and marrying other PhDs after graduate school and having kids without the assistance of a cryobank?).

Much of the remainder of Meisner's narrative involves their continued quests to find a viable sperm donor through the technologies available to them; they are in fact "dating" these donors, meeting them online in the way that one might use an internet dating service and exploring the ways in which they are and aren't compatible. There's a tragicomic element to their first attempts. They find a donor who seems too good to be true, a married man who has kids, who says he'd like to have more. But it turns out he's also cheated on his wife and he's losing his business; that attempt is cut short. They then find another known donor, a man from Cameroon; Viviën's pregnancy test is negative, the narrator's attempt initially succeeds, although she has a very early miscarriage/chemical pregnancy (it seems she loses the pregnancy almost immediately after finding out that

she's pregnant). Eventually they find a donor they like, and Meisner conceives quickly, while Viviën continues to try with the same donor. On the level of queer family conceptualization, their narrative is one of the more radical in this archive, as not one but both partners attempt to conceive, to maximize the likelihood that they will be able to build their family soon. Yet it is also the most low-tech in its exploration of conception, only a step removed from sex with a stranger.

Despite this approach to family building, *Double Pregnant* works to underscore the significant connections between queer mothers and infertile straight women, a subject taken up in more depth in Chapter Three; in this regard, it serves as counterpoint and corrective to *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*, which is overtly hostile toward not only the fertility industry writ large but infertility patients who happen to be straight. In doing so, *Double Pregnant* brings awareness to the privilege that fertile couples—rather than heterosexuals—have within the context of family building. (It is, in fact, entirely possible for a queer couple to conceive without the use of a third party, so long as egg, sperm, and uterus are present and functioning!) In this regard, I appreciate Meisner's careful framing that puts reproductive challenges at the center, rather than identity politics. As Meisner writes, "Now that we have joined the ranks of the infertile, the word 'choice' begins to slide around and change meaning. Of course we are different from the traditional couple with fertility issues, and yet our hearts will likely break along the same fault lines should we ultimately be unable to have a baby" (30). Whereas I remember thinking of the other women at the fertility clinic, irrationally, as my competition—as if somehow their getting pregnant would mean that I wouldn't get pregnant—Meisner highlights their commonality and connects with the other women in the waiting room.

In its focus on the process of conception, Meisner's book also emphasizes the extent to which family is conceptualized in the mind before and during literal attempts at conception. Queer memoirists like Meisner highlight the way that narrative itself functions as a technology of family building, as underscored through verb choices. The verb "imagine" is so central to many queer mother memoirs, including Meisner's, as illustrated in the following passage, structured through anaphoric repetition: "We imagine him [their known donor] telling our children the story of how he met us and decided to help us make them. We imagine him introducing our children to his own family. Perhaps a picnic or barbeque in the distant future" (37). As they come to grips with the reality of their family-building

process, they rewrite their story, wrestling with the loss of control inherent in infertility, whether for social or biomedical reasons: “We began with a utopian notion of how we could make a family but the deeper we waded into the experience the more we are realizing that we are going to have to be flexible. If we really and truly want to have a family then we might have to be very flexible; in fact we might have to let go of many or all of the ideas we had at the outset” (39). This could not be more true. The “IF” in the acronym for infertility represents such constant readjustment of expectations and rewriting the narrative which rewrites itself. If dominant cultural narratives suggest we have some control over our reproductive efforts—when and how to conceive—queer memoirists such as Meisner remind us that we ultimately have very little control even as we attempt to exercise reproductive choice. Yet we as writers wrest back some control through writing and authoring our families on the page, producing counternarratives that describe new, if not utopian, family forms.

Ultimately, queer families are conceptualized before they are conceived, and their subsequent narratives about conception serve as practical, rhetorical, and even political work toward redefining the nature of family. As Diane Tober says of anthropological studies, they “can lead to new insights into how family and kinship are defined, the significance of different kind of parenthood (genetic, social, gestational, and spatial), and how the use of new family forms contributes to broader changes to social, medical, and legal institutions.”⁴³ The same could be said for memoir. For queer memoirists such as those considered in this chapter, queer families are imagined and built, carefully, in a series of choices and steps. In this regard, Viviën’s work in the construction industry serves as a ready-made metaphor for their attempts to build family. A significant but understated thread in this book involves them renovating a house in Nova Scotia, with a foundation and roof that need to be redone (13). As the literal space their family will inhabit, this house is tied up with their dreams of domesticity: “We pound, hammer, saw, mud and paint until the inside of the house begins to look more and more like a home. Each evening, tired and covered with a light frosting of sawdust, we sit down and write to potential donors or hatch plans and schemes to make our little family bigger” (15). If it is a handy metaphor, it is also a good reminder that family building is both intellectual and creative and also material, requiring egg and sperm and uterus. In the end, of course, both women conceive and give birth, living in their dream house as a modern queer family of four.

My daughter was conceived over the phone—a call that only in retrospect became the conception of my narrative of single motherhood. I write and rewrite this story. The experiences of *Texas Girl* happened 2000–2004. I wrote a first draft in 2007–2008. It was published, finally, after my second child was born, in 2014. I am writing this now in 2025; the child I so desperately wanted is now a legal adult, away at college, living their own best life. All these selves are nested like Russian dolls, which, I suppose is always the case with memoir. No doubt if I wrote the book now it would be different, those years refracted back through the experience of conceiving my second child, through years of single parenting. But, still, now, as I remember those faraway days, before miscarriage and loss and angst, it was thrilling in the way that early relationships can be thrilling and intoxicating, taking up all mental dream space. I called the clinic, made an appointment with the reproductive endocrinologist. She reviewed my medical history, drew charts and diagrams, ordered tests. At night, after work, I reviewed donor profiles. I drank wine. I danced around my apartment. I stood in the doorway of my study, the room I’d already envisioned as a nursery. I read and reread the profiles. The filmmaker, the scientist, the one who loved dogs, the one whose favorite food was listed as meat. Who would I be most compatible with? Who was the child I imagined; how would I will her into being?

NOTES

1. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell University Press, 1981), 145.
2. Along these lines, considering families conceived through donor sperm, Andreassen suggests that “donor families represent a break with—or a new interpretation of—“chosen families”; that is, their families can be chosen but their choice is biologically driven,” in *Mediated Kinship*, 165. My own understanding of “choice” here is on the verbal form “to choose.”
3. Building on Rickie Solinger’s work, Katherine Mack’s book on elective single mothers (ESMs) foregrounds the rhetorical framework of legitimacy in the ways that ESMs discuss their families. Although my book was largely drafted before I read Mack’s, I am glad to be in her intellectual company. See Mack, *The Case for Single Motherhood*.
4. Diane Tober, *Romancing the Sperm: Shifting Biopolitics and the Making of Modern Families* (Rutgers University Press, 2019), 142.
5. Given my use of *Waiting in the Wings* as the beginning of this archive, unless otherwise noted, I refer to the original 1997 edition of Moraga’s

- memoir, rather than the 25th anniversary edition (which includes a new preface, as well as an afterword penned by Moraga's son Rafael Angel Moraga, along with some minor sentence-level edits and renaming of characters).
6. Per Hewett in "Motherhood Memoirs," the term "momoir" was first coined by Katie Allison Granju in a 2003 Salon article.
 7. Kate McCullough, "Of Woman (But Not Man or the Nuclear Family) Born: Motherhood Outside Institutionalized Heterosexuality," from *Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly (SUNY Press, 2004), 113.
 8. Even in Amber Musser's exceptional article that explores "the alignment of the maternal, desire, and lesbianism" in Moraga's work, there's not even a nod to *Waiting*. For example, see Amber Jamilla Musser, "All About Our Mothers: Race, Gender, and the Reparative," in *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*, eds. Teagan Bradway and E. L. McCallum (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 133. Significantly, in "Motherhood Memoirs," Hewett includes Moraga in her survey of early motherhood memoirs that address issues of "race, ethnicity, and sexuality" (193); however, given the limited nature of the "companion," there is no space for sustained analysis.
 9. Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 18.
 10. Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (Columbia University Press, 1996), 101.
 11. Mark Rifkin, "Beyond Family: Kinship's Past, Queer World-Making, and the Question of Governance," in *Beyond Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*, edited by Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman (Duke University Press, 2022), 149.
 12. Robyn Warhol and Susan Lanser, eds., *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions* (Ohio State University Press, 2015), 2.
 13. Diane Tober's book *Romancing the Sperm* as well as Jennifer Berney's *The Other Mothers* (discussed in Ch. 3) offer useful histories of lesbian insemination, including early "self-insemination" practices and the development of lesbian friendly sperm banks, such as The Sperm Bank of California, which, Tober notes, is the first to provide access to anyone, regardless of marital status.
 14. Moraga's framing of this issue is nuanced and less troubling to me than others that prioritize blood ties above other family formations, such as a fairly appalling statement in Rebecca Walker's *Baby Love: Choosing Motherhood after a Lifetime of Ambivalence*: "I don't care how close you are to your adopted son or beloved stepdaughter, the love you have for your non-biological child isn't the same as the love you have for your own

flesh and blood.” Additionally, Moraga’s discussion of the significance of blood ties *and also* social parenting is in keeping with the findings of theorist Laura Mamo in *Queering: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience* (Duke University Press, 2007). As she puts it, “the very meaning of social and biological ties are negotiated,” 231. Memoirs offer one such site of this negotiation.

15. Tober, *Romancing the Sperm*, 17.
16. Andreassen, *Mediated Kinship*, 101–2.
17. For the sake of comparison, the introduction to Dymond and Willey’s edited collection, published in 2013, yielded 461 results using the same basic search.
18. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides statistics that indicate unplanned pregnancies are declining but still above forty percent in 2019. See CDC, “Unintended Pregnancy,” <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductive-health/hcp/unintended-pregnancy/index.html>.
19. Although Tober suggests that the issues faced by single women and lesbian couples diverge in significant ways—for example, with single women mostly preferring to build families within marriage—overall her book makes abundantly clear, the stories of heterosexual infertile couples, lesbians, and single women who use donor sperm overlap in their use of reproductive technology and the implications on kinship. For example, they all express concerns about genetic and social ties—choosing the “right” donor for their families, as well as a concern about their family’s difference from the traditional nuclear family.
20. Judith Roof, *The Poetics of DNA* (Minnesota University Press, 2007), 124.
21. Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (New York University Press, 1996), 15, 16
22. Notoriously singling out Murphy Brown in a speech that was ostensibly in response to the acquittal of the police officers who had beaten Rodney King, Quayle said “It doesn’t help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown—a character who supposedly epitomizes today’s intelligent, high paid, professional woman—mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another ‘lifestyle choice’” (qtd. in Mack, *The Case for Single Motherhood*, 37). Judith Roof also offers a reading of this moment I find useful: “Although Quayle disavowed the more ideological aspects of his critique in favor of the singular truth of the paternalistic family, his reaction to the show’s daring assertion of a late twentieth-century single-parent fact of American life reveals how the paternal itself has come to stand in the place jeopardized cultural continuity” (*Reproductions*, 59).
23. Harlyn Aizley, *Buying Dad: One Woman’s Search for the Perfect Sperm Donor* (Alyson Books, 2003), 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

24. Tober's interviews with single women who have built families through insemination in particular note aging as the central impetus for attempts at conception. I do wonder how egg freezing technologies, which have improved in the twenty-first century, will influence women who are considering single and lesbian motherhood, if women will be inclined to wait longer to build families outside heterosexual partnerships.
25. See E. Wyverkens, et al., "Beyond Sperm Cells: A Qualitative Study on Constructed Meanings of the Sperm Donor in Lesbian Families," *Human Reproduction* 29, no. 6 (2014): 1248–54. The article explains that there are two patterns in the conceptualization of the sperm donor's relationship to the recipient family: one is to understand the donor as "instrumental" and the other considers him as a "person" more akin to a family member.
26. Tober notes that many women parallel the process of dating to choosing a sperm donor (*Romancing the Sperm*, 80).
27. Later in their journey, Harlyn and Faith select another donor who is not Jewish, which clearly creates some anxiety, joking: "I hope they're not anti-Semitic, these Catholic-Buddhist sperm. I hope they treat my egg with respect and roll back their foreskins before doing the deed" (194).
28. Andreassen's analysis suggests that many "lesbian donor families do not necessarily dismantle traditional ideals of families" but, rather, expand the notion of traditional two-parent nuclear family to include two-mother families. In this regard, she suggests in fact that single parent families are "more marginalized than lesbian couples" (*Mediated Kinship*, 85).
29. Aizley lives in a state, Massachusetts, that was one of the earliest to have an insurance mandate for infertility coverage, a benefit which, per some analyses including Elizabeth Britt, results in a "stratification" of the health care system: "While the mandate gives people in a broader socioeconomic spectrum access to medical treatment for infertility, it serves only those with employer-provided health insurance, excluding many of the working and nonworking poor and including more whites than nonwhites," in *Conceiving Normalcy: Rhetoric, Law, and the Double Binds of Infertility* (University of Alabama Press, 2001), 4. Writing now, after the reversal of *Roe v Wade*, conversations about access to all kinds of reproductive health-care are more critical than ever.
30. Mack, *The Case for Single Motherhood*.
31. Andreassen, *Mediated Kinship*, 86.
32. Citing Linda Layne's significant work on pregnancy loss, Kimball explains that "there is a double standard within feminism vis-a-vis maternal desire: 'the motivations of women who choose to bear children and do so without difficulty are not subject to the same feminist critique of those who try but fail.' In other words, only infertile women have maternal desire; they are not mothers but sites of effort, longing, and labor to reproduce. In con-

trast, the fertile woman is maternal, full stop. No desiring is needed: her maternity *just is*.” See Alexandra Kimball, *The Seed: Infertility Is a Feminist Issue* (Coach House, 2019), 79. In this formulation, I would suggest that the inability to conceive is rendered queer—outside gender/sexual normativity.

33. Tober, *Romancing the Sperm*, 133.
34. Ibid.
35. Andreassen notes that “Many countries that prohibit lesbians and single women from accessing fertility treatment do so in the belief that such prohibition serves the best interest of the child (drawing on arguments that it is best for children to have a mother *and* a father” (*Mediated Kinship*, 73). In my own experience living in Texas in 2002-2003, fertility coverage through my employer’s insurance was limited to procedures that involved the use of a husband’s own sperm (which not only discriminates against single women but also couples wrestling with male factor infertility); moreover, as Aizley’s analysis makes clear not all fertility specialists and medical facilities were willing to perform IVF on single individuals. As of 2006, however, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) called for access to reproductive care regardless of sexuality or marital status, claiming “There is no persuasive evidence that children raised by single parents or by gays and lesbians are harmed or disadvantaged” (qtd. in Tober, *Romancing the Sperm*, 158).
36. Karleen Pendleton Jimenez, *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (Zurita-Tightrope, 2011), 5. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
37. Maria Novotny, “Failing Infertility: A Case to Queer the Rhetoric of Infertility,” in *Interrogating Pregnancy Loss: Feminist Writings on Abortion, Miscarriage, and Stillbirth*, eds. Emily R. M. Lind and Angie Deveau (Demeter Press, 2017), 183–97. Novotny’s work usefully explores the stigma surrounding infertility, continued heteronormativity of its discourse, and its medicalization to suggest an alliance / allyship with queer studies. As she puts it, “Infertility advocacy organizations should take steps to reflect on the embedded rhetoric within their campaigns, and how language can often reinforce further stigmatization and marginalization” (194). She continues, “My hope in writing this piece, as someone who is infertile, is for queer theory to be seen as an ally to evolve the rhetoric of infertility” (194).
38. Novotny, “Failing Infertility,” 186.
39. Tober, *Romancing the Sperm*, 106.
40. A more positive framing of this argument is, as Roof says, “the lesbian is also a catalytic site of narrative disequilibrium” (*Come As You Are*, 98).
41. Natalie Meisner, *Double Pregnant: Two Lesbians Make a Family* (Roseway Publishing, 2014), 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

42. Andreassen's *Mediated Kinship* offers a more complete discussion. Her analysis considers new technologies, such as Facebook, that develop new understandings of kinship, such as those forged by online connections between donor families.
43. Tober, *Romancing the Sperm*, 156.



Queer Pregnancy: Maternal Eroticism

I was pregnant by myself. I was also pregnant with myself. In pregnancy I felt like myself, felt most in my body perhaps than I had ever been in my life. The body I inhabited was unquestionably a woman's body, but I did not feel particularly gendered. Rather, when I thought outside my body, I felt the disconnect between my experience of inhabiting my body and the cultural narratives that were told about it. In inhabiting a pregnant body, when I was pregnant in Texas in 2003, I was assumed to be heterosexual. I was assumed to be married.

When pregnant, I did not think a great deal about sex though I did think a great deal about my body. I thought about what to feed my body, how to give my body rest. I lay on the couch and rubbed my belly like a well-loved cat. I read books and websites that told me how to best take care of my body. The books told me to avoid foods like deli meat and unpasteurized cheese. The words in my medical file said, "high risk." I'd already had one long-drawn-out miscarriage and autoimmune testing which revealed antiphospholipid antibodies, which in pregnancy can spell doom. Miscarriage, stillbirth, elevated risk of stroke and maternal death. I took the blood thinner heparin via twice-daily injections from conception until just before delivery.

The reality of my pregnancy was different from what the books and websites and cultural narratives said it would be. It was something I would now describe as queer.

My favorite part of pregnancy was the early part, although I was terrified of another miscarriage. I relished the secret. The fact that I knew unquestionably that I was pregnant, but it was not legible from the outside, something to share when I wanted. The pregnancy was mine alone. In those days, I drove to the clinic for ultrasounds and then went out to eat and shopping for maternity clothes; I started wearing them early because they were comfortable, because I'm one of those women who gain a pound a week for the entire pregnancy in order to support breastfeeding later. I had wanted to be pregnant all my life, since childhood when I wore my mother's old negligees stuffed with pillows to pretend I was pregnant.

Years later, pregnant with the baby who became my second living child, I remember my body being read by others around me, my colleagues, the parents of my older child's friends, those who knew me but whom I had no obligation to tell about the secret trips to the fertility clinic. I brought the belly with me to faculty meetings, to events on campus, to the class I taught that summer where students wondered, they confessed later, if I were pregnant (Why would it matter? The part of me that knew how to read and teach literature was not located in the belly). Of course, the pregnant body is pregnant with meaning, as Parley Ann Boswell argues in *Pregnancy in Literature and Film*—all that we see and think when we look at a pregnant body, the technologies of viewing. When and how we read it. Because we think we know her story, we can leap to all kinds of assumptions and conclusions. As Boswell puts it: "Pregnancy seems so predictable that we can project the pregnancy story every time. And it is a story. For those of us on the outside, a pregnant woman becomes a story that we think we already know." She continues, "In many ways we read—we consume—pregnancy. A growing female body gives us a screen wide enough to image and project our own stories onto hers."¹ When I wanted to be pregnant, I could tell, more often than not, from the softest swell of an abdomen, the way a woman carried herself, if she was carrying a baby. Even in the thick of infertility I too assumed she was straight (unless I knew otherwise), assumed she was healthy/normative/able-bodied (unless I knew otherwise), assumed she was carrying her own genetic offspring (why?), assumed she was married (why?!). The queer pregnant body blows apart these assumptions, blows apart the assumed relations between gender, sex, reproduction, and familial roles. And once we have done that, blown apart all the assumptions, we can no longer look at a pregnant woman and assume cisgender female married fertile heterosexual. Queer pregnancy memoirs call attention to the queerness that always exists in pregnancy.

The year I conceived the idea to mother, which was years before my first pregnancy, I began reading books about pregnancy. The first mother memoir I read was Carole Maso's *The Room Lit by Roses*. It was Thanksgiving 2000. I was in my last year of graduate school, applying for tenure track jobs and thinking—serendipitously—about how I might have a baby when I didn't have a steady heterosexual partner. My best friend at the time was pregnant, the characters I loved on TV, and now the writer whose work shaped the bulk of my dissertation project. Single mothers by choice were everywhere in the news. A plan started to take shape.

I can still recall the embodied delight in reading *The Room Lit by Roses* on the short plane ride from Indianapolis to Chicago. I loved Maso's book. At the time it was for me as charming as Maso's novels, as delicious. The story, if it was to be believed, of conceiving on a trans-continental flight. The image of the pregnant writer commenting on student writing in the bathtub. I think I was perhaps the ideal reader of this book, which was at least as much about the life of the writer as it was about pregnancy. It was this narrative—this odd, poetic, fragmented narrative—that introduced me to what mother memoir might do, centered on and structured by pregnancy, from (pre)conception through the early postpartum period. It was in many ways unremarkable, because other than her age, the pregnancy was unremarkable. But her language, her framing, her own sense of the ordinary miracle of conception, made it magical.

Later, when I was struggling to conceive my first and then second child, the book represented everything I couldn't stand. Miraculous conceptions at forty-two. Laughable. Cherríe Moraga, too, as she tells it in *Waiting in the Wings*, conceiving at home with a known donor rather than at the doctor's office. Where was the book that told my story? Certainly not in these books by authors I respected so much. So I wrote my own infertility-miscarriage-high-risk-pregnancy-as-a-single-woman memoir, because stories like mine didn't seem to exist.

* * *

This project has taken as somewhat foundational this idea: If heterosexual reproduction has been used as a metaphor through which to understand narrative structure, queer reproduction inevitably queers narrative. While each of the chapters in this analysis addresses some part of such queering, there is a particular pressure—even a particular possibility—in narratives of queer pregnancy specifically. As my first chapter

on conception began to suggest, narratives of reproduction and gestation are arguably some of the most scripted of all narratives because biologically human reproduction is very predictable. (Egg + sperm + uterus + approx. 40 weeks= baby). Yet this basic narrative affords significant opportunity for rewriting dominant cultural scripts about reproduction. After all, “narrative as a way to organize meaning,” Roof explains, “also reproduces basic ideologies about life, behavior, motivation, values, proper gender roles, and the necessity for closure in meaning, knowledge, production, and reproduction.”² And so all queer pregnancy narratives are read against some imaginary normative narrative, the one that’s described in pregnancy manuals, such as *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*, for example, as well as “straight,” uncomplicated memoirs of pregnancy.

Whatever differences writers of pregnancy have—sexuality, class, ethnicity, race, and so on—the story they tell is largely the same. Such memoirs, including Moraga’s and Maso’s, often begin either with conception or with the positive pregnancy test before launching into a week-by-week or trimester-by-trimester account of bodily changes which climaxes in the delivery room. Then, the writer often offers a brief look into the fourth trimester, or the baby’s first months, though this is little more than the denouement, designed to bring the experience of maternity—not motherhood—to its rightful end.

In its focus on pregnancy, this chapter foregrounds the bodily experience of maternity and matrescence as experienced by queer women and nonbinary individuals.³ I use the term “maternity,” following Christina Mazzoni, to foreground the bodily experiences of pregnancy, birth, postpartum, and breastfeeding—that is the embodied biological (if not genetic) experience of motherhood.⁴ Via the range of texts I discuss in this chapter, I want to consider narratives of pregnancy in such a way that honors the embodied experience of gestation and birth without defaulting to either unquestioned essentialism or unchecked pronatalism. Rather, as Mazzoni reminds us, “the subjectivity to which the pregnant, birthing woman accedes is always specific. She is always *a* particular subject and not *the* subject.”⁵ In memoirs, then, queer mothers can claim subjectivity rather than be the object of critique. To look at memoirs of queer pregnancy is to consider the rhetorical and lived complexity of the experience; focusing on memoirs that take queer pregnancy as its subject, this chapter

foregrounds the ways that the body is narrativized and described within the larger heteropatriarchal culture in which it is read and received. It also considers the sex-gender-reproduction nexus within the context of pregnancy to unpack the ways that they are knit together in fertile heterosexual experiences and challenged by queer or non-normative bodies. The memoirs tell stories about the queer body; they describe the affect of the queer body. They present particular sites of tension, such as the medical community or the childbirth class. They consider the ways that their pregnant bodies are read within culture, and they provide counternarratives to reclaim experiences and write them back. They also offer maternal eroticism as a counter to a focus on heterosexual relationship, or even queer partnership. For some queer women, like Maso, pregnancy offers a time of relative normalcy (their “femininity” is assured); for others, like Moraga and Summers, not only is pregnancy more complicated but it affords the opportunity to explore sex and gender, as their body challenges their sense of being butch or masculine. For others, like Nelson, it becomes a space to think through the fundamentally queer nature of pregnancy itself, the body doubled, identity destabilized. Yet regardless of the particular identifications of the writer, I would argue that all these memoirs reveal both the way that heteronormative culture writes the script of pregnancy as an expression of “normalcy” even as they also reveal the lie of gender essentialism—which is also an invitation to reread it, to learn from it, to queer it. Queer pregnancy narratives are pregnant with themselves; that is, they reveal the ways that gestation is fundamentally about the mother-child dyad, not about marriage and heterosexual sex.

Queer memoirs affirm the embodied specificity of maternal experience, offering a narrative of pregnancy that both acknowledges and then deviates from the standard hetero-reproductive narrative, countering the essentialism in mainstream culture as well as the anti-natalism at the heart of so much queer theory, both of which risk erasing the mother in favor of an anticipated or hypothetical child. This is particularly evident in the focus on the maternal body and maternal eroticism in these texts. To borrow the framing of Joani Mortensen, they offer “a potent antidote to the patriarchal heteronormative backlash against marrying the terms ‘maternal’ and ‘erotic.’”⁶ Following Mortensen, I want to think through the maternal *as* an erotic site, rather than foreground erotic/sexual practices undertaken while pregnant or by pregnant people. Within both Moraga’s and Nelson’s, texts, eroticism surrounding gestation and early

motherhood is aligned, positively, with the rhetoric of queerness, not as oppositional to it.

Queer people get pregnant. That does not make them any less queer.

* * *

I begin this analysis of queer pregnancy memoirs with Carole Maso's *The Room Lit by Roses* because it was published early in the "momoir" boom at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as well as the first pregnancy memoir I read. Like Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*, it takes the shape of a journal, rather than a memoir per se, a framework that more explicitly marks time, as well as feigns closer approximation to the truth, less mediated by the creation of an overt narrator and editorial distance. As Maso writes, "A journal is interesting in that it records the instants of life as they pass. And an instant of thought and of writing as it takes shape, the words as they form. Fragile, evolving, and in motion. Continuous and discontinuous. Stated, erased, restated. Not made or shaped as fiction for the most part is. Not one invented thing. As much as is possible."⁷ "An instant of thought," as she says, the book provides a particular kind of interiority, focusing less on events and experiences (plot) than on what Maso thinks about them.

I came to *The Room Lit by Roses* as someone who adored Maso's fiction and authorial persona, and the book fulfilled my readerly expectations and desires, foregrounding the relationship between the writing life and the reproductive life—and the centrality of Maso's experimental approach to both, in content and form. As she describes her choice to conceive within queer partnership, her daughter was "created outside the usual constraints and enclosures, without the usual prescriptions, hierarchies, sentences leveled on her head" (30). She has a child on her own terms, much as she has written her books on her own terms, as an "experimental" woman writer. Maso's reference to "sentences" here seems particularly apt, as both a grammatical construct and also a legal and social prison. They don't feel distinct. Indeed, discussing the promotion of her book *Defiance*, Maso references a friend who has described the baby as Baby Defiance (76). Indeed. In both ways, she is defiant.

As I read her words, I contemplate following her lead. I am thinking about how I'm going to do this thing, have a baby on my own, have a baby when my sometimes partner does not want to have a baby. Maso's book makes it seem so easy. Charmed.

From the outset, Maso's narrative situates her desire for a child within a discussion of her life as a writer. These aspirations are presented as both parallel and antithetical, taking the same kind of creative energy and,

therefore, acting in tension. She says that teaching, parenting, and writing use the “same part” of the brain (37). She can’t do both well at the same time. So she comes later to motherhood, in her early forties. But beyond these observations about literary and reproductive forms of labor, it seems to me that both are centrally projects of (re)imagining queer life narratives. As early as her ground-breaking second book *The Art Lover*, Maso has imagined a child. She describes, in *Room*, the way that the child was always there, waving to her from the distance. If social change is dependent upon imagining the story differently, in book after book Maso writes to sketch a new future. The braiding of these two strands—Maso’s writing life and her reproductive life—move in concert throughout *Room*, as she describes the work of promoting her recently published book *Defiance*, drafting her Frida Kahlo book, and doing the work of teaching and directing the writing program at Brown. The book feels at times like it has literary in-jokes (seemingly tangential references to David Foster Wallace, say, and other writers of the 1990s US avant garde), and I had suggested in an earlier review that the book is meant, finally, for lovers of Maso’s work more than for those interested in pregnancy specifically. I would now say the pregnancy, the act of reproduction, may itself be understood as part of Maso’s queer/experimental narrative.

As with most of Maso’s books, there is very little plot here (even as she describes one of the most highly plotted of human experiences). Maso offers dated sections, some as short as a paragraph, some as long as a few pages, generally broken into fragments, similar to her practice in her most formally innovative novel, *AVA*. The use of a journal as a genre highlights the temporal movement of pregnancy. As she puts it, “I moved out of the blur of my life and was placed into the crucible of time” (16). The journal, then, focuses on “the explicit workings of time on the psyche and on the body. The dramatic workings of time: to be inside it—intimate with it like never before. To be able to feel its accomplishments” (17). Incorporating material from biology texts about embryonic development into her journal, Maso underscores how regulated and “normal” her pregnancy is, how easily it follows the pre-ordained script; there is a correct schedule for the formation of the human body during gestational development. While she moves chronologically through the pregnancy, she does, predictably, arc back and include background information and analeptic returns to life before.

As a queer pregnancy memoir, Maso’s book is situated within and against dominant narratives of gestation. Even as she reminds readers of

her pregnancy's normalcy, she also resists its reincorporation it within heteroideology. In depicting her first trimester, what she has to say is pretty much what every pregnant person has to say. She checks the toilet paper compulsively for blood. She reads up on and reports about fetal development. The heart beating in the fifth week. The arms budding. She is astonished at what the embryo/fetus (and her body) can do. Not a writer now, she is every woman. Her pregnancy is, if not unremarkable, largely uneventful. Throughout the book, she asserts its normalcy, and, in doing so, her own.

As she moves into her second trimester, she describes the key milestones that are similarly commonplace in both medical and narrative discussions of pregnancy, including the level 2 sonogram, at which she learns she is expecting a child who will be assigned the female sex; the amniocentesis; the first time she feels the baby move (she comments on the word "quickenings," hardly ever used these days, one that places Maso in a squarely maternal tradition). She bides her time, mostly carefree, going about her work as a writer, teacher, and program administrator. The second trimester, supposedly that calm between the early risks of miscarriage and the risk of everything that can go wrong later. The weeks when you're not exhausted, the weeks when you can sort of focus on work. I will be frank: there is not much here, as a pregnancy narrative, that marks this story as distinct from any other pregnancy narrative. Except that through Maso's perspective, the pregnancy is miraculous, charmed—which it is, at a moment in which there are few mother memoirs in general and fewer that are explicitly written by lesbians. These other facets of Maso's identity—her sexuality and her situation as feminist experimental writer—propel the two major strands of the book, beyond the purely chronological.

Much as she has discussed the gendered nature of her writing, its desire for a "feminine" shape, a la Hélène Cixous, she also notes that the things she "love[s] to do most"—including writing, gardening, and pregnancy—are "women's work" (103).⁸ It is also, in her terms, "miraculous work" (110), elevating it from the mundane to the exceptional. In pregnancy, and in particular in the act of giving birth, she emphasizes the "connection through pain with all the women who are alive—who have ever been alive" (148). She presents the maternity ward, a space of "women and babies and babies to be" as a refuge from heteropatriarchy. It would be easy to criticize Maso for gender essentialism, but I feel it more appropriate to understand these observations as arguments for claiming space within heteropatriarchy. That is, although she asserts and embraces gender

normativity surrounding pregnancy (in contrast to the other writers I consider in this chapter), her journal productively disimbricates pregnancy and reproduction from heterosexuality and marriage, foregrounding the embodied experience outside dominant cultural narratives. She reports, for example, on the reactions of her young niece and nephew, noting that her niece proudly states “my aunt is having a baby and she didn’t even have to get married” (107). This comment stands in for both familial and cultural acceptance, as well as a reminder of the context in which Maso’s pregnancy is taking place, in the late 1990s. In moments such as this, the book dramatizes the rhetorical and experiential difficulty of making space for queer pregnancy. Throughout *Room*, then, Maso both presents the pregnancy as “normal”—the one time she has fulfilled the expectations for normative femininity—and also tries to preserve its queerness, and her own, when “heterosexual breeding sorts try to invite [her] into their club” (85).

While the majority of Maso’s memoir makes an argument—both implicit and sometimes explicit—about the normalcy of her pregnancy, this thread is set against acknowledgment of her relationship with her partner Helen and the larger discussions of the nature of family formations and LGBTQ+ rights in the late 1990s. These references to their queer partnership are few but strategic. The context of LGBTQ+ experience, if understated, is critical to the political work of Maso’s book—and clarifies the importance of reading the book *as* queer mother memoir. For instance, although it is brief in length, the discussion of getting their domestic partnership certificate is a significant move that contextualizes Maso’s pregnancy within broader discussions of gay rights. Her concerns are legal and practical. For example, she writes: “If we don’t do this they could, in the event of Helen’s death, take the apartment away from me. She wishes I were more romantic. But I have always distrusted such conventions—the ceremonies and sanctions. The buying into a pre-fabricated value system. The assumptions. The burdens. It’s stifling” (115).⁹ That is, even as Maso remarks on the bodily experience of pregnancy as femininizing and the ways that she gets “normal person credits,” she remains skeptical of the larger institution of heteronuclear romance and marriage with its “stifling” conventions. Her pregnancy affords a moment of “passing” within a more complicated project of building queer family, not merely a capitulation to homonormativity but also an affront to both homophobia and queer death.

In the book’s references to Maso’s friend Gary, whose death of AIDS-related causes is the central subject of her second novel *The Art Lover*,

Maso situates lesbian pregnancy within the context and backdrop of the AIDS pandemic. Speaking of his death, she writes, “Since that day, 1 October 1986, I have lived a free person” (66). His death, and the death of those she loved, are explicitly connected to her pregnancy, as an “attempt to keep the deaths of those one loves at bay” (67). Maso continues to situate her pregnancy within the context of Gary’s death in writing about her medical care at the same hospital, St. Vincents, that features heavily in *The Art Lover*: “I’m in the same place he was. What shall be the proximity of our rooms” (123). Although this moment is not discussed at length—it’s a reference to a hospital, little more—it is significant in its suggestion that we might think about the turn toward queer family building alongside an epidemic of queer death. In Moraga’s book, written around the same time (they were both pregnant in the 1990s), there is a similar gesture. That is, it is important to read Maso’s pregnancy—and queer pregnancy more broadly—within the broader context of LGBTQ+ experience instead of dismissing it as a capitulation to heteronormativity.¹⁰ Rather, in writing queer pregnancy, Maso theorizes reproduction as a fundamental part of queer kinship and choosing family. Although Maso invokes a personal loss, and a personal decision to bear a child, it is worth noting the broader implication that choosing *life* is in radical opposition to the death drive and the loss of queer life due to AIDS. Within the context of Maso’s narrative, queer reproduction is a radical reclamation of queer life.

Partly because Maso writes a “journal,” rather than a “memoir,” she creates space to meditate on the particular nature of the narrative persona she adopts—a metanarrative move that she often makes in her fiction as well. On the one hand, she is aware that she doesn’t have a character’s name to hide behind, the way she does within fiction. If she suggests that the turn to the journal form is liberating, she also raises the question of how much information she reveals. She asks, “Why, I also wonder, do I find myself protecting my privacy far more in this journal than in my fictions? I create a slightly pristine version of myself here. I need to consider the ordinary assumptions again about fiction and nonfiction” (42). One might ask, of course, in what way is it “pristine”? What is cleaned up or elided? How is this particular version of Maso constructed? While she keeps many details of her life private, particularly her relationship with Helen, she is effusive about the nature of pregnancy itself, imbuing the experience with wonder and delight. She revels in the changes in her body, ones that mark her outwardly as “normal” and give her a point of

connection with those she has been alienated from, such as the secretaries at Brown. In Maso's sentences, pregnancy is mystical, miraculous, all encompassing. She wonders, for instance, how it is possible to gestate a human being and also work for pay. Maso positions her ability as pregnant person alongside her ability as a writer: "My genuine physical aptitude for making and carrying children—the ease in my body, a certain animal trust—I feel a genius of sorts at it. I am happy and well, and without nervousness. Looking forward to the birth" (111). If this bravado risks grating on a reader (me!), I will also suggest that Maso's recognition of the constructed nature of persona is also significant in terms of the book's larger role in helping establish queer mother memoir as a genre and, in particular, a reminder of the function of queer mother memoirs as a technology of representation that does social and political work. As Maso writes the experience, gestation becomes an instance of intellectual and creative labor—"genius"—and the *making* of queer theory.

In this way, Maso's discussion of the birth both fulfills the generic expectations of reproductive narratives and also underscores the difficulty of writing embodied female experience outside heteropatriarchal constraints. While the thematic focus on pregnancy and birth is new terrain for Maso, *Room* is in many ways the logical extension of her exploration of the limits of language and consideration of "écriture féminine," particularly in *AVA* and her so-called "erotic etudes" of *Aureole*. I will suggest here it is the attempt, as well as the recognition that preconceived forms don't hold, that makes Maso's journal a vital contribution to queer mother memoir as a nascent genre. Queer stories, that is, require rethinking genre. Attempting to capture the experience of labor, she writes, "Time collapsed now. That is later though. This is all being told afterward now, recalled here, as I could not, did not want to write through this. I just wanted to be there. Attentive to all that was happening" (137). As Maso's work has long resisted plotted narratives, substituting lyric and other anti-narrative forms, the sounds made by the birthing writer hover at the edge of language: "Vocalese—a song without words—only vowels, moans, and cries, and much sighing and begging—but not in words—no words for this. At last, to be at last, at the center of that speechless place. To have waited this long—my whole life—to get here" (140.)

Centrally, I take this comment to be not only about language and its loss, but also the lifelong goal to "get here," to birth the child she has always wanted. As Mazzoni writes, "Pregnancy and childbirth bring both language and the body to their limits, where they paradoxically encounter

one another at the same time as they face their ultimate incompatibility” (174). Since publishing *Room*, Maso has written only one novel, *Mother and Child* (2012), an imaginative novel that is almost impossible to piece together on the level of plot, and raised her daughter Rose now to adulthood. It’s as if, living-writing motherhood after all this time, she has nothing left to say.

* * *

What I want to say, I think, is that Maso’s book remains important to me as a woman, fertility patient, literary critic, and memoirist because it contributes to a conversation begun by Virginia Woolf in “Professions for Women” and *A Room of One’s Own*, her plea to tell the truth about the body, about female experience, in all its complexity. Maso’s book is not perfect. But it is brave. That word I will think of so often when I try to write my own story in *Texas Girl*, that word uttered by my doctor when she talked me into trying injectable fertility drugs. Brave, she said. Bold. But, I have to say, dear Carole, dear Maso, that I suck at being pregnant. I have to say your bravado is almost embarrassing.

Much later, after I have had not one but multiple miscarriages, not one but several failed IVFs and more IUIs than I want to count, *The Room Lit by Roses* is the book I can’t bring myself to read, even as I’m trying, desperately, to draft a book about Maso’s work. After I am finally pregnant with the baby who will become my son, after I have been “released,” as they say, to the OB, I sit in the waiting area of the University of Michigan hospital, waiting to see the perinatologist who will consider, again, my critically low amniotic fluid level, see what it is possible to see of fetal kidneys at twelve weeks gestation; the usual measurement of the nuchal fold, a predictor for Down syndrome often used by women over thirty-five, in place of or before an amniocentesis.

How, the doctor asked me, *how did Dr. G finally get you pregnant*, understanding all too well how precious this baby. Three years of treatment, donor gametes. And then he told me that pregnancies that looked like mine—the gestational sac running almost two weeks behind the fetus in size—usually ended before the tenth week. But when I see the baby moving, I do not need to be a perinatologist to know for now, at least, things are okay.

* * *

If Maso writes a narrative of an easy, typically plotted pregnancy, Moraga’s is anything but. After a similarly charmed conception, Moraga gives birth to her son three months early. With her narrative of pregnancy cut short, the months of what would have been her third trimester frame her son’s

NICU story. As self-described “butch,” she is also more explicitly marked as queer. Moraga’s memoir is thus instructive for (1) its depiction of a pregnancy that goes awry, (2) its description of maternal eroticism, (3) its focus on female support and kin, beyond queer romantic partnership. In these ways, Moraga’s memoir is multiply queer, and it sets up many of the issues that are explored in later writers of queer mother memoir.

Waiting offers a provocative discussion of pregnancy as a butch lesbian; as Moraga finds herself “female,” even feminine, during her pregnancy, she worries about the loss of her butch identity and accompanying effects on her relationship. At one point she contrasts herself from her femme-identified lover: “I go to sleep wallowing in my queer sense of isolation/alienation even from my lesbian lover. She’s a femme, I think. She doesn’t really understand.” (45). Moraga notes the physical changes of pregnancy on her body and her response to them, writing, “Ella tells me daily how much more feminine I look. I see it too—my hair longer than it’s been in fifteen years, my hips and thighs and breasts rounding from this pregnancy, the softening taking place throughout my body, the tears. I like it and yet in bed feel a strong urge to reassert my butchness, my self as a love-maker” (45). In this framing, Moraga’s gender identity (butch) is linked to understanding herself as subject rather than object of sexual desire (“a love-maker”), which is challenged by the feminization she experiences during her pregnancy.

In this regard, some of the book’s more interesting passages depict pregnancy as a sexualized site, which confronts heteronormative assumptions about the status of pregnancy itself. In a particularly overblown passage Moraga writes, “I cry for this life, this miracle, this sexuality that is happening to me unlike any I have experienced. The slightest contact evokes a response. Touching myself, remembering Ella touching me” (34). While the very act of thinking about pregnancy outside heterosexuality as erotic site is itself queer, in the sense of out of the expected, it is also an important reminder of the disjuncture between Moraga’s experience and that of a straight, fertile cisgender woman. Within heteropatriarchal culture, a pregnant body is read as “evidence” of woman’s sexuality; she has had sex, therefore she is pregnant (or, more accurately, pregnancy is proof that she has already had heterosexual sex). In cases of both social and biological infertility, reproduction is divorced from sexual encounters, though this fact is not legible on the body, which is often assumed to be fertile and straight. As suggested in the passage above, for Moraga, pregnancy affords a new sexuality, one that is autoerotic, self-contained, and

explicitly tied to maternity. A partner did not make her pregnant, and her partner exists here in the mind, not within the bodily experience of the sexual encounter, which is essentially between Moraga and herself, or even Moraga and her unborn child. Moraga is the “object of [her] own desirous, lesbian, woman-hungry eyes. I, a mama too, like all the mamas I have loved” (19).

As this passage provocatively suggests, the very state of maternity functions as the object of her desire. This reading is largely a continuation of Moraga’s positioning as butch, as “love-maker” (45), the one who desires and takes “woman-lovers” who were those who could have babies. Moraga not only desires women here, but specifically “mamas,” arguably including herself. Within pregnancy, Moraga finds the “woman-lovers” that she has desired in others (20). Alone in New York, masturbating, Moraga says “I am female essence relieved of all burden. There is nothing else required of me but to dwell here, pregnant. I make love to it, the life” (34–35). Moraga’s language here is slippery and evocative, using the pronoun “it” to characterize the entire experience of being pregnant, “the life” of simply being, dwelling in this moment pregnant, but also the life growing within her. What is the burden she is relieved of? Having heterosexual sex in order to reproduce both the species and gender norms? The burden of cultural gender norms? Capitalist notions of work? Even after Rafael’s birth, looking back, Moraga remarks on how she felt pregnant, “the round in my belly making me feel more woman, more lush, more fine and female” (98). That is, this instance of autoeroticism is not simply a moment of sexuality, or even sex, but of gender—of claiming a particular butch maternal identity in distinction to the butch identity she occupies, arguably, both before and after birth. As Chris Roulston puts it discussing other work on queer maternity, understanding the pregnant butch as a particular sexual identity “restores sexuality to motherhood as a productive entanglement between the queer body and the pregnant body.”¹¹ In its focus on maternal autoeroticism, Moraga’s memoir theorizes such a productive entanglement.

The moment of Rafael’s delivery—despite the urgency of his prematurity, surrounded by NICU staff—is also rendered in explicitly erotic terms. As she gives birth to him, she says “my body is engulfed in a pleasure—an animal pleasure, a pulsing, an aliveness like nothing I’ve known. I am a girl and a woman and an animal, and estoy templando like the best of sex” (53). Here, pregnancy is the foreplay; delivery the sexual act; and now she has been “thoroughly entered and spent” (53). In this moment, her

pleasure is defined in keenly bodily (animal) terms and also explicitly gendered not only female but “girl.” The slipperiness between these terms—girl, woman, animal—is suggestive. Maternity and mothering in Moraga’s text are very much woman-centered, centrally Rafael’s birth, with the women of Moraga’s family in attendance. “This,” Moraga writes, “is how a woman should always give birth, surrounded by women. “And how lucky I was to be a lesbian, to have it all—mother, sister, lover—that family of women to see me into motherhood” (54). This moment in the text—arguably the foundational act in Moraga’s motherhood—serves also as the birth of the queer mother memoir. If birth is typically seen as the ultimate expression of heterosexual union and also the peak of heteronarratives, in the description of giving birth, Moraga highlights her lesbian sexuality, not as a space of exclusion but rather inclusion, gratitude, and generosity. That is, in giving birth surrounded by women, Moraga situates maternity at the center of her queer experience rather than separate from, or opposed to, it.

The entanglement of motherhood and lesbian sexuality is again raised following Rafael’s birth, in the description of his smell. Not, she clarifies, that usual baby milk and Johnson’s baby shampoo smell but something deeper: “birth-smell, the thick-membraned blood-smell passing out between a woman’s legs at birth” (67). It’s the same, she explains as “a lesbian-sex smell. A mother-smell. A mother-lover, mother-fucked smell” (68). Here again in this moment identities collapse (mother, lesbian, subject and object of desire), and Moraga links pregnancy and birth to lesbian sexuality rather than as the outcome of heterosexual sex. Where earlier in the book Moraga suggests that she is the subject (“fucker”) rather than object of desire (“fucked”), here she is both. The mother here is the lover and the beloved, the physicality of motherhood is the physicality of sexuality but not just any sex, rather specifically lesbian sex. Lesbians don’t make babies with their lovers, but having a baby is making love. Both maternity and mothering are rendered in erotic terms; later, describing breastfeeding in this vein, Moraga says the baby’s mouth is “a kiss that lasted” (99).

In its characterizations of pregnancy, birth, and baby care, then, Moraga’s book reclaims and redefines reproductive labor outside heterosexuality and the heteronuclear family and situates it within/as queer sexuality. This reframing occurs both in Moraga’s insistence on recognizing the embodied nature of maternity, as well as the gendering of carework. In this regard, I am struck by the repeated use of the term “animal” both during pregnancy and birth to characterize the experience that is also

“female.” It is what some would dismiss as an essentialist gesture but in the contexts in which Moraga uses this word, I think actually it marks an attempt to define a bodily experience outside of heteropatriarchal culture. It’s a celebration of innate bodiliness, that is, not a dismissal of the queer body as a social problem. Her own body is described as animal and Rafael’s body is described as animal: “He is pure animal, nothing human about these sensations. They are the animal I am when I make love, am hungry, move my bowels, fall into a deep unconscious sleep” (43). These are human beings outside culture—as much as that is possible—surviving.

Moraga’s “queer motherhood,” as I take up further in the last chapter, is foremost a woman-centered culture of carework. Born three months premature, Rafael’s early months are spent largely in the care of the NICU nurses, the womb externalized. Describing his hospital stay, Moraga notes that she is grateful to the neonatal surgeon who saved his life, but she is careful to explain that it is really the nurses to whom she owes the most gratitude for the day-in, day-out work of caring for her premature son when her own body could not. She writes, “Although I am ever grateful to Dr. Azick, the soft-spoken pediatric surgeon from UCSF who saved my baby’s life on that operating table, the nurses have been the real healers. [...] They are the ones who, around the clock, have tended to my son with a woman’s love, a mother’s love, who have made the difference, fundamentally, in his survival” (78–79). Here, Moraga locates *familia* in these nurses, prioritizing the round-the-clock care of women and their “maternal” approach. Her language and syntax, the slipperiness of her commas, continue to align “woman” and “mother.” In this way, Moraga describes not gender-neutral caregiving but work specifically undertaken by women; she gives credit where credit is due. Yet this passage also notes the limitations and fundamental distinctions; this is a woman-centered space, yes, but it is not by definition lesbian. (As Ella reminds her, it might well be that straight women are caring for Rafael.) Still, Moraga speculates on whether the nurses are “butch,” a move that seems to claim them as hers, part of *la familia*. Regardless of the particular sexuality of the nurses, the queerness of this moment lies in its historical connection to a time when birth and mothering were indeed woman-centered experiences, not medicalized and overseen by male doctors. What used to be the norm is now queered, at least insofar as it pushes back against a male, cisgender, heteronormative experience. As arguably *the* foundational text in the contemporary genre of queer mother memoir, *Waiting in the Wings* embraces and celebrates the embodied, as well as gendered, nature of reproductive labor beginning with gestation.

My child too was welcomed into the world by women: the reproductive endocrinologist who oversaw my care and called me at home to advise; the nurse who inseminated me, who was there in the room to see the first flickers of cardiac activity on the monitor; the obstetrician who rode the line between proactive and unnecessarily aggressive; my mother, who stayed and changed diapers and rocked while I rested; friends who went with me to childbirth classes, who stocked my fridge with arroz con pollo and soup, who filled my home with flowers, who held the baby when I was harried and in desperate need of a break. If I could write my life as a feminist utopia, this would be it, all of us tied together by affinity with this baby who needed care, to come into being and thrive. I was a single mother, but in these moments, I was far from alone.

* * *

Published more than fifteen years after *Waiting in the Wings*, A.K. Summers's graphic memoir *Pregnant Butch* (2014) highlights difference and discomfort, as the subtitle "in drag" suggests. From its opening image, which presents protagonist Teek standing in a subway—positioned physically between spaces and in the process of becoming—readers see Teek struggle with what a "masculine pregnancy" might mean. Teek references women's magazines in this frame, highlighting the precarious relation between her own gender identity and that of cisgender straight women: "As a butch dyke I am accustomed to feeling exempt from most things covered in your glossy women's magazine...as a pregnant butch dyke, however, this heretofore irrelevant world came to include me."¹² As the subway groans along, Teek, who is positioned sideways to show off her obviously pregnant frame, stares out at the audience with hands on hips; she is wearing sneakers, baggy pants, and a button-down shirt, visually marking her as both pregnant and masculine. From this opening image, we see that Teek desperately wants the experience of pregnancy separate from assumptions of feminine gender norms, and the graphic memoir ("autography," as Christa Baiada notes) sketches new contours for masculine maternity. In these ways, Summers's graphic memoir works hard to disimbricate sex, gender, and reproduction and presses back against the feminization that writers such as Maso more readily embrace.

Predating the movement toward gender-neutral language for gestation and birth by nearly a decade, even the word "pregnancy" upsets Teek, and she considers various alternatives, including "chockfull o' kitties," "in a pickle," in a state of "uterine glut," or even "fetal corpulence" (3). In this

way, forecasting the eventual call for inclusive terminology, Teek wishes the terms “birth giver” and “birth partners” could be used, for example, during a childbirth education class. Throughout the graphic memoir, Teek struggles to retain her gender identity and worries that pregnancy might undermine her masculinity; as Teek explores the possibility of building a family, her friend Pansy remarks that “there’s a lot more to yourself than being butch” (13). Yet the term “butch” remains central to Teek’s identity, as she thinks through not only her relation to and distance from cisgender pregnant women but also to a younger generation of transmen; Teek’s butch queerness operates as a liminal space imagistically, linguistically, and temporally.¹³ As with the opening subway image, Teek finds herself operating in the uncertain space of between; she highlights, for example, the linguistic turn toward “trans” and “boi” and away from her preferred term of “butch dyke.” In asserting an older brand of queerness (one that dates from Moraga), Teek marks herself as gender and generational outlaw. One moment that highlights this difference depicts Teek on a beach with her partner, Vee, domesticated, in comparison to the single transman across from her, young and muscled. Whereas this trans youth seemingly wants to pass, Teek operates in a space between, particularly during pregnancy.

In this way, the book makes use of its graphic form in order to highlight issues of bodily difference and gender, to queer the pregnancy narrative.¹⁴ From the beginning, the book offers numerous peeks at Teek’s body, including the shot of her knees at the gynecologist’s office as she is undergoing a vaginal exam, the doctor’s hand (complete with arm hair) palpating her breasts, and the moment when she pulls up her shirt to bare her nipples as evidence that she’ll eventually be able to breastfeed. “Oh,” her new gynecologist admits, “no baby is going to have a problem finding those” (34). In this frame, the contrast between the stereotypically feminine large breasts and the stereotypically masculine short hair and toned physique is striking, as Summers uses the form memoir to illustrate the unlikely image of Teek as a pregnant woman over and over again. While the pregnancy is desired, appearing pregnant is not; thinking about gestational fashion, for example, early in the book Teek wants to wear pants and suspenders, adopting the costume of a fat man rather than maternity wear.¹⁵ As Christa Baiada notes, “She is a woman, a butch lesbian, and a mother. Since these identities do not line up in terms we are culturally habituated to accept, *Pregnant Butch* destabilizes assumed continuity between gender and sex and also between gender and maternity by

requiring us to see them incorporated into a unified body. In doing so, Summers works against visual traditions of women's bodies in comics and visual traditions of pregnant bodies in mainstream culture."¹⁶

Much as the book uses visual imagery in order to provide representation of gay and lesbian families, on a broader level the memoir does the significant work of political representation. That is, if Moraga reminds us that lesbians don't make babies with their lovers, Summers goes a step further; as Teek discusses the methods by which she might build her family, her gynecologist, whom she calls "Dr. Gay," suggests that they might use in vitro fertilization in order to transfer an embryo created with Vee's eggs and donor sperm into Teek's uterus, assuring that the legal system would not question either of their parentage (18). Although Teek, who was herself adopted, remarks that she'd like a "biological" (or more accurately, genetic) connection to their child, she also situates her family within a larger conversation about family building outside the context of heterosexual marriage. Referencing lesbian guides to pregnancy, written by the "wise crones," for example, Teek contemplates the issues involved in non-traditional family building, including the future offspring's self-esteem. Like other memoirs in this archive, although not an overt "how-to guide," *Pregnant Butch* also notably provides significant detail about the practical matters involved in lesbian conception, including questions about their known donor's sperm count. While the actual act of conception is set, like Moraga's, in the bedroom, it is anything but romantic; Teek remarks that she felt like a "veterinary subject" who had been inseminated via catheter with "prize bull semen" (28). In its depiction of multiple visits to Dr. Gay's office, both to discuss the possibilities of family building and later, early obstetrical appointments, Summers's book foregrounds the extent to which lesbian pregnancy for many is a medicalized—if not "artificial"—event and highlights logistical and legal obstacles to care. In this way, even more so than Maso and Moraga, the book explores the lived realities of queer pregnant people in the contemporary US in the early twenty-first century.

Throughout the memoir, Summers uses graphic elements as means of externalizing issues surrounding queer pregnancy and gender. In this regard, one of the most striking aspects of the visual elements of Summers's text is the focus on the scenery of New York cityscapes more than domestic interiors. As with the opening image, we often see Teek outside, on the subway, standing next to cars, garbage cans, and construction workers. This cityscape serves as backdrop for Teek's exploration of what it means

to be a “pregnant butch”—it is less the biology that worries Teek, it seems, than the performance of gender in public spaces. How is her body read and by whom? How does pregnancy undermine and conflict with her chosen gender expression as “butch dyke”? Pregnancy is of course always public. Yet the sharp contrast between cultural expectations and Teek’s presentation offers a site for both her and the reader to trouble our assumptions about gestation. Summers highlights the public visibility of Teek’s pregnancy through the comics form, as with the image of Teek vomiting outside the apartment that sets up the second section. “My privacy was gone,” Teek notes, having confessed to her landlord that she was in fact pregnant, not simply gaining weight (41). Self-consciously reflecting on the public nature of her pregnancy, Teek wonders if her readers have ever had these sorts of conversations with their landlords (40). In this vein, Summers devotes an entire chapter to “Coming Out,” which rhetorically equates the announcement of being gay to being pregnant; as this rhetorical parallel suggests, pregnancy is in fact not only an issue of a biological condition but also an experience of gender and sexual orientation. That is, Teek comes out not only as pregnant but, in doing so, a person who is a biological female or AFAB even as she identifies and presents predominantly as butch. “Pregnancy,” Teek comments, “was mostly disruptive to a set of hard-won, casual relationships” (42). As Teek navigates the streets of New York City, she does so within a pregnant body, one that has a different relationship to the city and its inhabitants, for example, seeking out places to urinate to accommodate the biological needs of pregnancy. It is impossible to separate Summers’s embodied experience of pregnancy from its social context, yet Summers works hard to redefine pregnancy as a *masculine* experience.

Throughout the memoir, Teek struggles with the expectations placed on her by outsiders and continues to question normative gender roles and the rhetoric surrounding gestation. For instance, the occasion of learning their child’s sex during a routine second-trimester ultrasound opens up a meditation on gender, sex, and the redefinition of queerness in the twenty-first century. Using a graphic that depicts herself as a dinosaur, Teek takes a generational approach to thinking about questions of gender. It’s not just that Teek is older and doesn’t want to be labeled as “genderqueer” or “trans” but “butch,” but for Teek there remains a practical issue of her relationship to her body; hormones and surgery will not allow for child-bearing, for one, but more critically, as Teek says “if I’m trapped, it’s not by being stuck in the wrong body” (55). Rather, she insists it is cultural

expectations and gendered assumptions surrounding the pregnant body that need to change, much as Rachel Epstein has argued that it may be “possible to reconfigure ‘butch’ to include the maternal, without loss of butch identity.” “Butch mothers,” Epstein claims, “might represent a possibility for a ‘queer maternal narrative,’ a narrative that refuses the separation of motherhood from sexuality, or queerness from the feminine and the family.”¹⁷ Summers memoir theorizes one version of such a queer/butch maternity. As Teek wrestles with being pregnant butch, she also queers the domestic space and household labor. For instance, she does home repair projects when their landlord isn’t able, even as girlfriend Vee encourages her to rest and adopt a more traditionally “feminine” role. She considers the problem that she is both “husband and wife” when Vee wants to study and watch *American Idol*, not have sex with her. She works hard to assert her masculinity as pregnancy challenges it, both biologically and socially, much as Epstein invites us to think about the gender dynamics of butch/femme households; these “roles take place in the context of and are enabled by the hegemonic categories of heterosexuality, but their significance is the internally dissonant and complex way they refigure these categories.”¹⁸

Describing pregnancy, labor, and the immediate postpartum period, Summers highlights the ways in which female biology and feminine gender types are too often unnecessarily conflated. The sequence devoted to their childbirth class, for example, foregrounds the work of Ina May Gaskin, 1970s childbirth educator known for spiritual midwifery; beyond its touchy-feely, groovy 1970s vibe, Teek comments on the division of labor on The Farm, where Gaskin lives, where women’s work primarily involves pregnancy and childcare (62). In an imaginative sequence, Teek imagines what an alternative birth class might be, one that includes at least one other pregnant butch as well as other genderqueer individuals. But much as she wants to retain a butch identity, Teek feels masculinity falling away, as the purchasing of a nursing bra and supplies that Vee places in her underwear drawer, signaling impending birth, instead marks her as “eternal woman.” “I am not myself,” Teek says, “I am not Tintin. I am not the Incredible Hulk. I am tears and I am snot. I am anemic and I am purple veins. I am boobies. I am done” (81). For all her humor about footwear and suspenders, Teek feels reduced to the body and its (feminine) excesses—tears, snot, purple veins, boobies. She worries that giving birth will emasculate her, so she refuses her mother’s request to be present for the event. Yet the act of birth—in which Teek is empowered in her

biological capacity—depicts her strength, through an image in which she appears to push apart two mountains with her arms. Experienced in a body commonly understood to be female, her strength here is rendered in masculine terms. It is this final act that ends Teek’s stint as “pregnant butch” and instead opens the question of the way that she will parent her son. We see this transition in the pair of images that immediately follow their son’s birth. On the left side of the page, we see postpartum Teek, looking completely battered, through the visual of a boxer who has taken a beating; she says “that’s mister tiddy mama to you, bub,” again showing her attempt to reclaim her breastfeeding body through a visual image and text that underscores masculine gender performance (10). On the right, by contrast, we see Vee, the more feminine partner, snuggled up in bed peacefully with the swaddled newborn and two cats. This moment then appears to synthesize the tension between the biological experience of pregnancy and birth with Teek’s gender identity. Finally, in the graphic epilogue, situated when their son is ten, Teek comments, “My pregnancy was challenging inside and out. [...] And incidentally I felt like my masculinity got stretched along with my whatchamacallit. I’m a more flexible and resilient butch now” (115).¹⁹ In this way, pregnancy served as an occasion for growth and exploration of masculinity. In focusing so heavily on physicality and the uneasy fit between the pregnant body and butch identity, masculinity and femininity, *Pregnant Butch* productively disimbricates sex(uality), gender, and reproduction to rewrite dominant narratives of motherhood and family.

* * *

I did not, in 2003, understand my choice to become an elective single mother as queer, because I wasn’t having sex with women—but, really, how else to understand the immaculate conception that happens in a lab by a woman desiring to build family outside heteropatriarchy, not by chance but by choice? Chosen single pregnancy queerly disrupts what Ela Pryzbylo calls “sexusociety” while still reproducing asexually, courtesy of the clinic.²⁰ It teases apart sex, romance, and reproduction and also positions maternal desire as its own thing, separate from coupling. As Milks and Cerankowski put it, speaking of the queerness inherent in asexuality: “making sense of the social marginalization and pathologization of bodies based on the preference to not have sex, along with exploring new possibilities of intimacy, desire, and kinship structures—how could that not be queer.”²¹ Elective single motherhood is too such a new possibility of desire, intimacy, and kinship. If, as Elizabeth Hanson explains, “compulsory *sexuality* is embedded in compulsory heterosexuality,” I also want to

suggest that we can understand maternal eroticism as an asexual eroticism, separate from sex and sexual partnership.²² Borrowing the expansive framework of Audre Lorde, Angela Chen reminds us that “the erotic is an inner resource, a vitality”; it is “not limited to the realm of sexuality” but “a feeling that can suffuse many areas of life” (181). Pregnancy and motherhood is one such area.

* * *

Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*, which is the most widely discussed example in this archive, refuses easy genre categorization; although it won the 2015 National Book Critics Circle award for criticism, it begs to be situated within and against the context of queer mother memoir, even as (especially because?) Nelson repudiates the categories of identity and genre, describing herself “in drag” as both a pregnant woman and also a memoirist.²³ The book is memoir and poetry, criticism and personal essay, series of fragments and book-length work. Its subject is and is not Nelson’s relationship with her partner, Harry, who also lives outside easy gender categorization, as does their marriage and their family. *The Argonauts* thus is and is not a memoir of queer motherhood. Or, perhaps more precisely, as an autotheoretical and intellectually-savvy project, it is a *queer memoir* of motherhood, its challenges to genre aligned with its challenges to repro/domestinatority. *The Argonauts*, Fournier says, “is a meeting space for different lineages and practices of what has come to be called ‘queer theory’—lineages that Nelson positions beside her own decidedly queer life.”²⁴ To put a sharper point on it, as an autotheoretical project, Nelson’s book uses her experiences of queer maternity to “do” or perform queer theory.

There is much to say about Nelson’s book, but in this particular chapter, I’d like to focus on issues of embodiment and maternal eroticism in her exploration of pregnancy and birth. What’s fascinating to me about the extant criticism on Nelson’s book is the extent to which it focuses on sexuality and sexual practices—picking up on her borrowing of the term “sodomitical mother”—and ignores or downplays her pregnancy with Iggy, which is one of the central narrative threads (the other, the parallel and chronological intersection, involves Harry’s top surgery). Such critical disavowal of the maternal is itself a central consideration of Nelson’s project. From the first pages, it is clear that exploration of pregnancy and the domestic space serves as a vital site of theorization in *The Argonauts*. Pregnancy, as Nelson reveals, is not the ultimate expression of normative cisgender femininity and heterosexual reproduction but a queer experience that complicates any easy gender-sex-reproduction triad. “Nelson’s

examination of the incoherent self in queer pregnancy characterizes the pregnant body as the unknown argo, a constant state of creative production,” Rebekah Galbraith claims.²⁵

Putting an experience we think we know in a new light, Nelson’s book provides a new narrative of pregnancy, moving, in Boswell’s words, “from a familiar pregnancy tale to ideas, conflicts, and problems that the narrative may or may not resolve for us.”²⁶ Or, as Mazzoni asks, “Can we distinguish between women’s concerns and those that society imposes on us, between our corporeal bodies and the culturally inscribed bodies of social representation?”²⁷ In this way, Nelson asks us to reread pregnancy, not as normative and expected but unsettling and queer; in doing so, the maternal body functions as a site of intellectual labor and queer theory, asking us to consider whether mother is in fact its own gender. Toward an analysis of queer pregnancy in Nelson’s book, I want to focus in this chapter on three major instances in which Nelson complicates an easy heteronormative reading of pregnancy: a holiday card image, Nelson’s description of maternal eroticism, and labor/birth. Significantly, these moments also underwrite the intellectual and theoretical work of reproductive experience.

Whereas Maso and Moraga, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, rhetorically shore up the “normalcy” of their pregnancies, and Summers is more concerned about issues of gender, Nelson takes this work further to theorize maternity *as* queer rather than oppositional to it. As Teagan Bradway succinctly states, “At a moment when queer belonging seems increasingly assimilated into heteronormative kinship, narrative enables Nelson to formalize the queerness of sustained attachment, which is easily misread as capitulation to the status quo.”²⁸ Although I take up this issue further in the final chapter, I want to briefly set it up here. Resisting all binaries—critical and creative, male and female, straight and queer—Nelson suggests that “it’s the binary of normative/transgressive that’s unsustainable, along with the demand that anyone live a life that’s all one thing.”²⁹ The complexity of queer pregnancy as a site that disavows this binary is illustrated clearly in an often-discussed passage in which Nelson describes a holiday photo captured on a gift mug, featuring herself while pregnant, along with Harry and his son from a previous relationship, also dressed up.³⁰ Significantly, the mug is a gift from Nelson’s mother, she explains, that she was initially “horrified” upon receiving (12); yet recounting the experience within the context of a discussion in which Nelson’s friend declares the mug “heteronormative,” Nelson seizes upon the occasion to reread the mug as something else, to explore the complexity within

the apparently normative. This moment is simultaneously read by others as a gesture toward normativity—it mimes the stock hetero family holiday card—and also suggests something much more interesting and complex.

This is what I think of as a classic Nelson move, pushing back against easy pronouncements about normativity to argue for the queerness implicit within. The normative/transgressive binary is too easy and not interesting to Nelson as a theorist. Nelson asks,

what about it is the essence of heteronormativity? That my mother made a mug on a boogie service like Snapfish? That we're clearly participating, or acquiescing into participating, in a long tradition of families being photographed at holiday time in their holiday best? That my mother made me the mug, in part to indicate that she recognizes and accepts my tribe as family? What about my pregnancy—is that inherently heteronormative? Or is the presumed opposition of queerness and procreation (or, to put a finer edge on it, maternity) more a reactionary embrace of how things have shaken down for queers than the mark of some ontological truth? (13)

Nelson of course says this better than I ever can, reading the moment like nested dolls—the reality of her pregnancy via assisted reproductive technology, the costuming of her family during a holiday celebration, captured in a photograph, which is then rendered on a mug offered as a gift, to be received and “read” by others, both in the moment and now within the context of the book. In this passage, Nelson tries to pry apart which element, or elements, mark the mug as “normative.” To state the blatantly obvious, Harry is not a straight white dude. Maggie is not a straight pregnant person. The child with them is not the result of their combined DNA, and neither is the child within Maggie’s uterus.

This slippage points to the potentially radical nature of queer family and narratives about it. It might *look* heteronormative, but it actually serves to reinvent kinship structures from the inside out. Reading this moment, Jennifer Cooke writes, “This is one of many times that Nelson will return to the problem of what looks normative about her family from the outside and what from the inside, to her, feels by contrast queer, and indeed would be deemed non-normative by most.”³¹ This moment thus might be understood within the framework of drag, pointing out the extent to which the heteronuclear family is always already a performance. Moreover, displayed proudly as part of holiday festivities at Nelson’s mother’s house, the image is a celebration of queer family. Yet, while both the photo and the gifting of the mug demonstrate Nelson’s mother’s stamp of approval, their family is devoid of the privileges bestowed upon heteronuclear families and,

more critically, exists in a legally precarious position—Prop 8 having put their marriage (undertaken the day before its passage) in limbo, and their rights to both unborn Iggy and Nelson's stepson similarly in question in the absence of a second-parent adoption. Even as this is true, Nelson also invites her readers to (re)consider "the presumed opposition of queerness and procreation" (13), asking "is this [the assumption of heteronormativity] just another disqualification of anything tied too closely to the female animal from the privileged term (in this case, nonconformity, or radicality)?" (14).

In this way, throughout the book, Nelson asks her reader to reconceptualize pregnancy not as the known quantity, the assumed result of straight heterosexual sex, the ultimate expression of normativity, but rather something more inherently complex, unknown, or "wild" that destabilizes gender identity. Describing these months of becoming, Nelson writes, "You pass as a guy; I, as pregnant. [...] On the inside, we were two human animals undergoing transformations beside each other, bearing each other loose witness" (83). Of course, Maggie *is* pregnant, even as her use of the word "pass" calls attention to the slippage between one's gender identity and one's performance of it. The way it appears is not what is experienced "on the inside" which is something more innate and "animal." This is, as Boswell reminds us, always true of pregnancy, though arguably more so in instances of queer kinship.

Beyond providing a new context in which to read the pregnant body—the result of assisted reproductive technology, within queer relationship and blended family situation—Nelson highlights the excessive nature of the pregnant body, as well as auto/maternal eroticism. Within a culture that celebrates Mother's Day with Hallmark cards and heart necklaces, Nelson's book refuses easy sentimentality and disembodied heteronormative/patriarchal "Motherhood" in favor of a fully-embodied maternity and mothering practices. The book is excessive, in some ways grotesque; she mentions, for example, gaining fifty-four pounds during her pregnancy. (To be clear, I could not love it more.) As Nelson writes, "the pregnant body in public is also obscene. It radiates a kind of smug auto-eroticism" (90). If its obscenity lies in its overt sexuality and largesse, Nelson's maternal body is also anti-heteronormative. Like Irigaray's "sex which is not one," which Nelson cites, the pregnant body is not one but also not two (62). Pregnancy might be positioned as sexy, but it is not the result of having had sex; that is, when a trip to the doctor's office and a vial of sperm are required, sex, reproduction, and gender are, in this space,

deliciously troubled. Smug. Yes. Daring to have sex for pleasure, not for babies. Daring to have babies for themselves, not to codify heterosexuality. This should not come as a surprise to Nelson's reader; after all, the first page of the book references anal sex—not the sort of vanilla missionary position sex that can sometimes lead to a baby. That is, with this beginning, Nelson's book offers a queer opening into—or an opening into queer—questions of identity, domesticity, the maternal body, and eroticism.

Here I want to reclaim Nelson's discussion of maternal eroticism from critical analyses of her work which too often take the maternal out of the erotic, choosing instead to focus on Nelson's acts of sodomy, rather than her actual description of pregnancy and maternity *as* an erotic experience. Even as she acknowledges that Nelson explores "motherhood and the erotic not as antithetical, but deeply entwined realms of experience," M. A. Kervick, for example, "underscore[s] moments in *The Argonauts* in which Nelson explores the erotic depth of her experiences *that do not specifically derive from an experience of maternity* in order to suggest that maternal bodies can and do experience sexual pleasure."³² Akin to the verbal tic wherein a heterosexual dude might say "we're pregnant," instead of what is literally true—as a couple they are expecting a child and his wife is pregnant—pregnancy too often is read as a symbol of heterosexual activity rather than a real, corporeal experience, a state in and of itself. Pregnancy is not only pregnant with meaning. Nelson's description of the "hormonal soup" that arises during gestation and breastfeeding suggests as much; she clearly indicates that any eroticism that emerges in maternity is not a simile. "It isn't *like* a love affair. It *is* a love affair," she tells us: "romantic, erotic, and consuming—but without tentacles" (44)—which is to say, an eroticism without sex. That does not make it identical to the experience of eroticism one has in the context of a partnership, but eroticism nonetheless. Much as Moraga sets up in her description of masturbation during pregnancy, Nelson's work reveals the maternal as its own mode of asexual eroticism, one "without tentacles." This is provocatively clear in the description of A. L. Steiner's art installation *Puppies and Babies*, which includes "two pregnant women hold[ing] up their sundresses to rub their naked bellies together" in an "orgy of 'adoration'" (71–72). Or, when Nelson claims that she thought birth would make her feel "invincible and ample, like fisting" (86). While Galbraith reads this moment as one that characterizes "queer sex as reproductive," I would argue alternatively that it positions reproduction (or rather maternal eroticism) like and as queer

sex. That I feel the need to reclaim these passages for the maternal is both mind-boggling but also par for the course in a world that continues to strip the maternal out of maternity.

My insistence on maternal as maternal is not merely defensive but, as I will dig in deeper in the last chapter, a pushing back against heteropatriarchy, which coopts all reproductive labors, including, of course, pregnancy and breastfeeding, for its own sake, while, on the other side, queer theory discounts the maternal as categorically heteronormative. Nelson's work in this book generally, and these passages specifically, reclaims pregnancy and recontextualizes it within the contexts of feminist and queer—that is, nonhetero, nonpatriarchal—desire and kinship formation. It is not *like* queer theory; it *is* queer theory. In fact, much as Nelson asks, “If queerness is about disturbing normative sexual assumptions and practices, isn’t one of these that sex is the be-all and end-all?” (111), I will suggest that maternal eroticism is quite queer. Nelson's work, in troubling and disimbricating reproduction, heterosexual sex acts, and the broader institutions of heteronormative gender roles, does much to highlight the queer possibilities of maternity. Thus, single or lesbian motherhood in particular, Nelson says, quoting Julia Kristeva, “can be seen as [one] of the most violent forms taken by the rejection of the symbolic...as well as one of the most fervent divinations of maternal power—all of which cannot help but trouble an entire legal and moral order” (78). While Nelson critiques Kristeva in various turns, I want to suggest there's also something valuable in this quotation: if the entire binary system of gender is predicated on sex for heterosexual reproduction, reproduction without heterosexual sex (or any sex!) would seem to pull out the proverbial rug from under the metaphorical table.³³ That is, in a heteronormative culture wherein sexuality is assumed to be reproductive, using assisted reproductive technology to have a baby outside the heterosexual couple does in fact “troubl[e] the legal and moral order.” From preconception on, then, Nelson—in contradistinction to Maso, Moraga, and Summers—highlights and revels in the fundamental queerness of pregnancy as a biological and erotic phenomenon. She makes clear that, rather than indelibly essentialist, pronatalist, or repronormative, pregnancy might simply be queer.

In this regard, I am particularly interested in Nelson's reclaiming of the maternal, by way of Jane Gallop, as a theoretical mode.³⁴ Discussing a lecture Gallop had given while Nelson was in graduate school, a lecture that included images of Gallop and her son naked, Nelson explains that another in attendance, the art historian Rosalind Krauss, “dismembered”

Gallop. Gallop's crime was "taking her own personal situation as subject matter" (41). Even as that is precisely Gallop's point—that the mother, who had been the object of writing, is also sometimes the writer (40). In Nelson's reading of the moment, in which she aligns with Gallop despite describing herself as not "a baby person," she says "the tacit undercurrent of her [Krauss's] argument, as I felt it, was that Gallop's maternity had rotted her mind—besotted it with the narcissism that makes one think that an utterly ordinary experience shared by countless others is somehow unique, or uniquely interesting" (41). That is, of course, a fairly apt description of autotheory in the first place—using personal experience as site of theoretical knowledge production—as Nelson creates this origin story with Gallop as the intellectual (and literal) foremother. Gallop, Nelson explains, "had been perfecting" the work of incorporating (or, "contaminating") the personal and the maternal in the academic "for years" (41). "In the face of such shaming," Nelson says, "I felt no choice. I stood with Gallop" (42). (And of course, I stand with Nelson.)

The Argonauts, in Gallop's own autotheoretical tradition, insists upon thinking of the maternal as a vital site of intellectual (theoretical) knowledge. In this way, the description of Nelson's labor and birth, which occurs toward the end of the book, is suggestive of the implications and importance of *The Argonauts* for queer narratives of pregnancy as a site of autotheoretical encounter. During her labor, Nelson says, she and Harry arrange their bookshelves. What might be understood within heteronormative traditions as a kind of "nesting," this moment also seems rich with metaphor, given Nelson's self-conscious framing of writing a book *about* her pregnancy and birth. She writes, "I keep sitting down to rest amid the books on the floor, arranging them into piles by genre, then by country. More pains. All these beautiful pages" (125). Nelson's rearranging here, I would suggest, operates as synecdoche for the project of *The Argonauts*, which worries about "arranging" and genre, which is to say, also identity and easy categorization. Which pile of books does Nelson's fit into? Where does she position herself among these piles on the floor, in which reproductive labor and intellectual labor meet in the most literal of ways? At another moment, Nelson describes herself at work on the book: "I labor grimly on these sentences, wondering all the while if prose is but the gravestone marking the forsaking of wildness" (52). Nelson labors among sentences. Nelson labors on sentences. Nelson's birth is a site of intellectual as well as physical labor. In giving birth, in writing about giving birth, Nelson is also doing queer theory. After all, "a crucial lesson of queer is

that thinking—which might seem to be disembodied—is inherently a bodily practice.”³⁵

Her word *labor*, not work, here invokes maternity and life as she worries about whether the end result will be stuffed into predetermined dead categories. Nelson puts it this way, speaking of her’s and Harry’s inclinations as readers: “That’s what we both hate about fiction, or at least crappy fiction—it purports to provide occasions for thinking through complex issues, but really it has predetermined the positions, stuffed a narrative full of false choices, and hooked you on them, rendering you less about to see out, to *get out*.” (82). If Nelson troubles the relationship between queerness and maternity, she also describes a space wherein the bodily, the domestic, and the intellectual converge, like Nelson’s laboring body seated amidst her books. Rather than a dead text, in writing *The Argonauts* Nelson helps birth something radical and new, queer mother memoir—something without those “false choices.” As she puts it, “I didn’t have a domestic, and I liked it that way” (12), even as she undertakes a project of queer domestic life. Nelson, Bradway suggests, “repositions queer theory as a practice of everyday life,” and, I would argue, also repositions maternity as a practice of queer theory and vital site of queer narrative.³⁶

NOTES

1. Parley Ann Boswell, *Pregnancy in Literature and Film* (McFarland, 2014), 11.
2. Roof, *The Poetics of DNA*, 117.
3. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to qualify that I have deliberately chosen not to use the terms “pregnant people” or “birthing people,” as my word choice reflects the diction of the memoirs themselves, as they wrestle with the confluence of gender and pregnancy in various ways. Krys Malcolm Belc’s *The Natural Mother of the Child*, which I discuss in my last chapter, engages with the issues surrounding trans-inclusive language more overtly, and in that context I follow Belc’s lead.
4. Christina Mazzoni, *Maternal Impressions: Pregnancy and Childbirth in Literature and Theory* (Cornell University Press, 2002), 2.
5. *Ibid.*, 4.
6. Joani Mortensen and Luke Mortensen, “Borders, Bodies, and Kindred Pleasures: Queering the Politics of Maternal Eroticism,” in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, eds. Margaret Gibson (Demeter Press, 2014), 187. Mortensen explains, “Where mothers have been socially constructed as self-sacrificing, maternal eroticism suggests

that mothers and their children are freer to enjoy a wider range of physical, emotional, spiritual and social relationships that are based in the attainment of nourishing, pleasurable, and enhanced consciousness within the geography of their shared and overlapping experiences of mothering and being mothered" (196).

7. Carole Maso, *The Room Lit by Roses: A Journal of Pregnancy and Birth* (Counterpoint, 2000), 49. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
8. Maso's novel *AVA*, in particular, invokes Hélène Cixous work on *écriture féminine* as does her collection of essays *Break Every Rule*, which was published the same year as *The Room Lit by Roses*. Although this may merely be coincidental, the timing is auspicious.
9. It is worth noting she does not explicitly mention the precarity of Helen's relationship to their child, as a non-gestational parent, in the absence of a second-parent adoption.
10. Chris Roulston provides an important analysis of the anti-reproductive strain of queer theory, arguing "by defining queer parenting families primarily through a homonormative lens, certain dominant strands of queer theory have been missing something, both in terms of queer parenting families' ability to disrupt the landscape of the nuclear family, and in terms of their capacity to interrogate the essentializing of reproduction and parenting." In Roulston, "Queer Parenting and the Challenge to Queer Theory," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 46, no. 1 (2021): 118.
11. *Ibid.*, 123
12. A. K. Summers, *Pregnant Butch: Nine Long Months Spent in Drag* (Soft Skull Press, 2014), 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
13. Summers's discussion of these issues dovetails with Rachel Epstein's interviews conducted with butch identified mothers, which problematizes the binary discussions about lesbian/butch motherhood. Epstein writes: "My hope is that these musings on how some butch-identified lesbians negotiate the terrain of motherhood will be taken as a contribution towards a deconstruction of the dualisms of masculine/feminine, sexual/maternal and queer gender outlaw/attached female and towards a widening of the range of both maternal and butch subjectivities." In Epstein, "Butches with Babies," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002): 42.
14. Hillary Chute explains "a comics autobiography calls out attention to key issues of perspective and positionality: the location of bodies in space, within frames: the view frames take, the kinds of bodies that are located within them (often, powerfully, in recent work, the author's own child body." See Hillary Chute, "The Space of Graphic Narrative: Mapping Bodies, Feminism, and Form," in *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions*, eds. Robin Warhol and Susan S. Lanser (Ohio State University Press, 2015), 201.

15. In this regard the book aligns with recent social science research that explores the experiences of transmasculine gestational parents during pregnancy, as they live in what Nadyne Stritzke and Elisa Scaramuzza describe as a “cultural impossibility” and therefore present as either fat men or pregnant women; either their pregnancy or their sex is erased. See their “Trans*, Intersex, and the Question of Pregnancy: Beyond Repronormative Reproduction,” in *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives*, eds. Stefan Horlacher (Palgrave, 2016), 141–63. Memoirs such as Summers’s do significant work to give image and narrative to the complexity of their lived experience.
16. Christa Baiada, “Making Masculine Maternity Visible in A. K. Summers’s *Pregnant Butch*,” in *The Missing Mother*, eds. Andrea O’Reilly and Martina Mullaney (Demeter Press, 2024), 255–56.
17. Epstein, “Butches with Babies,” 42.
18. *Ibid.*, 43.
19. Krys Belc likewise discusses pregnancy as a critical turning point in his transition, leading up to the decision to take testosterone.
20. Quoted in KJ Cerankowski and Megan Milks, eds., *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives* (Routledge, 2014), 111.
21. *Ibid.*, 3.
22. Elizabeth Hanna Hanson, “Toward an Asexual Narrative Structure,” in *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*, eds. KJ Cerankowski and Megan Milks (Routledge, 2014), 345.
23. Lauren Fournier discusses Nelson’s dismissal of memoir in the introduction to *Autotheory*. Yet both scholars set up a false dichotomy between psychological and aesthetic or political motivations, which ultimately relies on and advances a limited reading of memoir as a genre. To my mind, *The Argonauts* is unquestionably memoir, albeit a highly theorized one.
24. Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 140.
25. Rebekah Galbraith, “Inappropriate Objects: On Gender, Self, and Parenthood in Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* and Krys Malcolm Belc’s *The Natural Mother of the Child: A Memoir of Nonbinary Parenthood*,” *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 42, no. 3. (Dec 2021): 222.
26. Boswell, *Pregnancy in Literature and Film*, 11.
27. Mazzoni, *Maternal Impressions*, 8.
28. Bradway, “Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form,” 714.
29. Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Graywolf, 2015), 74. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
30. Roulston offers a brief but useful discussion of Nelson’s work as a means of discussing this issue: “Rather than reinforcing the normative/non-normative binary, the queer reimagining of pregnancy, reproduction, and

- parenting is breaking down much of queer theory's positioning of these experiences within a normative framework" ("Queer Parenting," 121).
31. Jennifer Cooke, *Contemporary Feminist Life-Writing: The New Audacity* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 140.
 32. Mollie Ann Kervick, "Embracing Maternal Eroticism: Queer Experiences of Pleasure in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 3, no. 1–2 (2019): 1, 6, emphasis mine.
 33. As Roof says, "The possibility of a 'fatherless' child begotten at the will of the mother disrupts kinship Law and the paternal metaphor, at least on the level of human reproduction (*Reproductions*, 117).
 34. *The Argonauts* engages in a complex book-length conversation with many "revered philosophers"—in turns deeply critical and snarky and, in others, prescient and adoring (79). Quoting Elizabeth Ward for example Nelson claims "it astonishes and shames me to think that I spent years finding such questions not only comprehensible, but compelling" (20). She continues, "In the face of such phallocentric gravitas, I find myself drifting into a delinquent, anti-interpretive mood" (20). More pointedly she eviscerates their perspectives on reproduction (i.e. "pontificating on how we might save ourselves from the humanity-annihilating threat of the turkey baster"), which she says is "more embarrassing than enraging" (79).
 35. Bradway and McCallum, eds., *After Queer Studies*, 3
 36. Bradway, "Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form," 717.



Queer Narrative: Reproductive Loss

I spent years in a place of grief that narrative could not hold, years of smashed glass uncertainty and rage, years of clothes that did not fit, of hypodermic needles in plastic cartons under my bathroom sink, thimble-sized vials of injectable drugs. I was pregnant and not pregnant all at once, an embryo who never grew becoming larger than life. He was to me like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the incarnation of my desire and loss.

* * *

Begin again. Before I was a mother, I was a fertility patient. Before I was a fertility patient, I was a woman who wanted to mother. Like all people who want to conceive and aren't having regular heterosexual sex, that desire could not lead to a baby without forethought and planning—that is, without a narrative.

I first stepped foot in the fertility specialist's office on a spring day when I was twenty-nine, after a mad dash down the highway after my last class of the day, more certain than I'd ever been certain of anything that I wanted to have a baby, and this consult with the RE seemed to be the best way to go about it. I had been thinking about this hypothetical baby for more than a year, as I completed my PhD, interviewed for my first job and moved across country to begin it. I'd briefly considered trying to conceive with my on-again, off-again or with a gay friend (this was, after all, the era of *Will and Grace*) but both ideas seemed complicated at best.

The fertility specialist parsed her words very carefully: “So you’ve NEVER tried to get pregnant?” With her emphasis, it was clear that she wanted me to say something, anything, that would allow her to check the box on the form for the insurance company that meant all the testing she was about to do would be covered. She was looking for something wrong with my body, because she was a doctor, working within a medical system designed to find things wrong with women’s bodies. I was twenty-nine, presumed fertile, just without regular access to sperm; some doctors would understand this situation as “male factor infertility,” insurance code for lesbian/single without sperm, as Jennifer Berney critically notes. Eventually my own doctor settled on 629.8: Infertility, female, unknown, which turned out to be prophetic enough.

At the time, I thought about all of this pragmatically, without a great deal of angst or soul searching or even critical analysis (all that would come later). I needed a place to store frozen vials of sperm, needed someone to inseminate me at the right time of the month. I wanted to work with a female doctor; this one had come recommended, and I liked her well enough to be sure (when I settled on pseudonyms, I gave her the name Dr. Cathexis in my book). At some point—around the time of so-you’ve-done-this-six-times conversation and the long-drawn-out miscarriage that coincided with my thirtieth birthday—as my chart at her office grew thicker with test results—I began to understand myself to be a fertility patient, not just a woman who wanted to get pregnant. The shift was monumental and life-altering.

* * *

Begin again. Reproductive loss is a story that refuses to be told. It is the truth about the body, the truth that must remain covered over. It is the story that no one wants to hear. So when it is told, when a writer dares to face her body’s refusal to obey the narrative of human reproduction, the narrative of narrative itself, what words does she have?

I am interested as a writer of nonfiction, as a woman who has experienced infertility and recurrent miscarriage, in how to give voices to these fissures and ellipses. In the work that narratives of reproductive loss can do to undo stigma and shame, to speak back.

This chapter focuses on queer memoirs about infertility and reproductive loss, the stories that don’t offer the easy happily-ever-after. Although I use the term “reproductive loss”¹ in a broad sense to discuss infertility, miscarriage, and other losses that occur in the context of family building, my main focus in this chapter is on queer memoirists’ relationship to the dominant (re: straight) infertility narrative, which, as indicated in Cherrie Moraga’s and Karleen Jimenez’s memoirs discussed earlier, is complex. Here I draw both on sociological/ethnographic research about queer

individuals who have experienced reproductive loss and explore the ways that writers discuss their reproductive loss in rhetorical terms as well as consider their formal choices, as they struggle to shape an experience that lies outside both traditional narrative and family-building norms. The memoirs testify to this complexity, combining memoir with research, comic and graphic elements, and disrupting expected narrative ends (reproduction, redemption). As public-facing documents, book-length memoirs work to educate the broader public about the complex emotional, financial, legal, and medical situation of the loss of a much-desired chosen family. This work is particularly significant given the relative lack of meaningful representation of *both* infertility and queer experience, much less when they converge. Christa Craven rightly describes the “double invisibility” of queer reproductive loss; as she puts it, “First, most research and autobiographical writing on LGBTQ family formation has focused on ‘successful’ narratives, which contributes to minimizing the importance of reproductive challenges that LGBTQ people face. Second, most research on pregnancy loss, infertility, and adoption focuses exclusively on heterosexual experiences.”² Although I single them out in this chapter, the memoirs referenced throughout this book are broadly suggestive of the range of losses experienced during LGBTQ reproduction—costly months at the fertility clinic, miscarriage, the use of donor eggs, failed ART cycles, ectopic pregnancy, breakup, and divorce, to name a few. Loss is the knot at the center of queer reproductive narratives.

Infertility is commonly defined as the inability to conceive after one year of unprotected sex, a definition that centers heterosexual behaviors rather than biomedical conditions.³ This narrow definition has practical and financial implications, including limited access to medical care, for individuals trying to conceive outside a heterosexual partnership, such as gay and lesbian couples, asexual individuals, and single parents by choice; historically some insurance policies and fertility clinics will not cover treatment for those outside heterosexual marriages or for what my own insurance policy described as “non-coital” reproductive technologies such as IVF. For those individuals who have reasonable medical insurance (rare enough in the US!), an infertility diagnosis is still necessary to underwrite the costs of medication and treatment, which creates significant logistical, conceptual, and emotional challenges. There is no diagnostic code to capture the nature of “social” infertility and associated experiences of reproductive loss. Consequently, family-building efforts are medicalized, and power to govern and narrate those efforts turned over to the doctor and

the clinic. That is, to build queer family with the assistance of a doctor, which is often the most expedient way, one must be made, performatively if not physiologically, infertile, a determination that has undeniable emotional and material effects. And the experience of queer reproductive loss is more expansive than that term can possibly convey.

If many insurance policies create a practical need for this linguistic collapse, it is more generally a reflection of heteropatriarchal norms for family building. As Alexandra Kimball's analysis *The Seed* makes clear, "Infertility is a direct defilement of the patriarchal proposition that women are to 'bear fruit'; all childless women, in some sense, join the other archetypal 'bad women' of history: the lesbian, the prostitute, and the criminal."⁴ To put it slightly differently, all these "bad women" either have sex for non-reproductive reasons and/or have babies without sex with men, which is to say, without supporting heteropatriarchy. Thus, Kimball pointedly states, "the infertile woman makes visible the lie of gender essentialism"; in this way, the infertile woman is positionally queer, and the queer individual is practically, if not also medically, infertile.⁵ Although these experiences are not identical or coterminous, their alliance is strategic and useful, particularly at this time of increased attacks on reproductive rights.⁶

That is, the relationship between infertility and queerness is both obvious and straightforward and, in other ways, complex and situational. Regardless of one's biological capacity to conceive, there are immediate obstacles to queer family building that cannot be overcome with sheer will. As explored in this analysis, contemporary queer memoirs provide a range of perspectives on infertility diagnosis and treatment that do significant work to communicate the various truths of the experience, against stereotypes and unsympathetic portrayals in popular culture.⁷ Given the paucity of nuanced depictions of infertile individuals that Kimball and Belle Boggs describe, the turn to memoir (and creative nonfiction more broadly)—that is, to true stories—offers a critical corrective that has psychological, social/cultural, and political implications. In short, writing and talking about infertility is an act of consciousness raising with educational and political value.

While most queer family-building narratives wrestle with the writer's relationship to infertility, not all embrace the diagnosis or the clinic, particularly those that understand infertility—in a limited and problematic sense—as a condition experienced by older straight women who have delayed childbearing. In this vein, many early writers of queer mother memoirs, such as Moraga and Jimenez, do not identify as infertile but,

rather, go out of their way to distance themselves from infertility experiences and infertility clinics, conceiving at home and proving their “fertility” despite their queerness. More recent texts—possibly due to advances in reproductive technology and increased openness to alternative family forms—wrestle more overtly with biomedical infertility and make use of, if not also embrace, medically assisted reproduction. And some, such as Jennifer Berney’s *The Other Mothers*, offer an important critique of the infertility industry by depicting the complex experience of having a diagnosis that renders invisible the real experiences of queer folk who are trying to conceive. Taken together, these memoirs both reflect and also theorize the vexed relationships between the experiences of queer family building and infertility, making clear there is not one but many infertilities.

To explore the complex relationships between queer experience, reproductive loss, and representation, this chapter focuses on four memoirs, published 2013–2022. In their content focus, rhetorical framing, and overarching narrative structure, they take distinct approaches and reveal the complex intersections of these key terms and challenges surrounding family building for queer-identified individuals. Although there is some necessary overlap in topical focus with the memoirs explored in other chapters, particularly the first, the texts I explore in this chapter explicitly consider reproductive loss from the vantage point of queer experience, overtly foreground the use of assisted reproductive technology and fertility clinics, and/or discuss queer family-building efforts that do not result in what those in the infertility community refer to as “take home babies.” That is, I focus here not on writers whose infertility is purely situational or logistical (i.e., access to donor gametes), but whose work includes considerable focus on advanced forms of ART, such as IVF and gestational surrogacy, and engagement with the infertility industry. Significantly, they do not take a unified approach; their memoirs testify to the complex intersectionality and unique personal experiences of reproductive loss and infertility treatment. Despite confronting both blatant and tacit heterosexism and homophobia, the memoirs I consider in this chapter in various ways and degrees acknowledge the value of reproductive science for family building outside heterosexual partnerships.⁸ To put a sharper point on it, for individuals who are infertile, whether socially or biomedically, and want to have the experience of pregnancy and/or a child with biological or genetic ties, there is no “easier” or better alternative; moreover, adoption is often, falsely and problematically, sold by fertile individuals as a

quick, cheap fix that infertile individuals should pursue, when in actuality it is difficult and costly. In sketching first-person accounts, memoirs explore and give narrative to the complexity of these issues.

Beyond this content focus, the memoirs discussed in this chapter reveal the ways that traditional narrative approaches and structures break down, both macro and micro, when maternal desire is thwarted by miscarriage and recurrent reproductive loss. In lieu of the legitimizing or normalizing narratives seen in earlier chapters, infertility memoirs demonstrate a loss or disruption of heteronarrative; such “perverse” narratives, as Roof puts it, are “about narrative dissolution, a narrative that continually short-circuits, that frustrates and winks at the looming demagogue of reproduction.”⁹ Mobilizing what might be understood to be queer or anti-narrative strategies, then, the memoirs I consider here—most centrally, Ariel Levy’s stunning *The Rules Do Not Apply*—dramatize the ways that narratives of loss are underwritten by such loss of narrative.¹⁰ And against the redemptive “success narrative” of infertility solved by IVF so often sold in mainstream media and popular culture, they demonstrate what Maria Novotny has argued that the experience of infertility is emotional recursive and contingent; she explains, “Infertility is constantly transforming oneself, requiring individuals to self-process and assess what their diagnosis means in a particular setting, audience, and given purpose. It is, then, best understood as a kairotic identity.”¹¹

Thus, if standard narratives of grief take an approach we might understand as mourning, in Freudian terms, these queer narratives are by contrast melancholic.¹² They come to an end, to be sure, but don’t necessarily arrive at comfortable resolution or closure, neither productive nor reproductive. In their recursive grief, unmourned and unmournable, they enact a loss of narrative to underscore their narratives of loss. Around and around they go.

* * *

Begin again. I started writing *Texas Girl*, my memoir of single motherhood, in spring 2007. My first child was three; things seemed easier than they had during their infancy, years of food allergies and childhood illnesses. I had always wanted two children, I thought, about five years apart. As I was on the verge of thirty-five—that fertility cutoff akin to Cinderella making it home from the ball on time—I went to my ob/gyn to have my hormone levels checked; she assured me everything was fine. I was full of optimism, and even writing my years of angst, there was a happy narrative I could tell, one that ended, as so many queer motherhood books do, with a baby. I was sure it would be easier to conceive a second time around.

I remember after the first insemination (round two!) I sat on my screen porch with friends while my child slept upstairs. We shared berry cobbler and glasses of wine. I was flush with estrogen and possibility, the slippery fluid between my legs was evidence, I thought, that it would work, that I would have another child, that my life would, happily, take the shape of the story I had already written. I bought into the narrative of happily-ever-after. My life simply had to follow suit.

* * *

One of the more recent queer mother memoirs in this archive, Jennifer Berney's *The Other Mothers* (2021) spans the entirety of the queer family-building journey, from conceptualization/preconception through mothering. Like the memoirs I explore in Chapter One, Berney's book foregrounds maternal desire, from childhood on, and imagines family even before puberty. As discussed earlier, "imagine" serves as a central verb in the creation of queer family, appearing frequently in Berney's book. Before she became a mother, Berney wanted to be a mother; she imagined her family into being.

The story she tells is familiar. It adopts in many ways a conventional plot that encompasses a desire to build her family, wrestles with a prolonged timetable and unexpected detours (through the fertility industry), finally landing on the birth of two children with assistance from a known donor. Created in this way, Berney's family extends beyond the nuclear, modeling a new version of queer kinship that combines biological and chosen family forms. In Berney's narrative, family is both imagined and novel, both "normal" and ordinary and also very much its own invented thing outside heteronarrative/heteronormativity. While it leans heavily on chronology to tell the story of her conception attempts, such forward motion is stalled through her incorporation of research, a choice that performatively underscores her broader critique of the infertility industry.

Although in the end Berney does not require advanced assisted reproductive technology—she ultimately conceives at home—I cover Berney's book in this chapter because it overtly theorizes the relationship between queer family building and the (in)fertility industry, built on Berney's own experiences as well as substantial research. Through her astute analysis, Berney reveals the extent to which heterosexism undergirds the fertility clinic, in both large and small ways, even as ART, ironically, enables queer family building. As Berney shows, the experiences of infertility and queerness are not identical, to be sure, but in the inability to procreate "naturally" via sex with one's own partner and to build a family based on heterosexual norms, there are significant overlaps. The infertile body, as

Novotny suggests, is in many respects a queer body in that it lies outside gender norms and expectations; by extension, if heterosexuality is understood as normative gender leading to romance leading to reproduction, then the failure to reproduce is by definition queer.¹³

Opening with a prologue that features Berney's elementary school sex ed class, a discussion that included reference to Louise Brown, the first "test tube baby," Berney sets up the desire for queer family and the need for assisted reproductive technology: "The science of fertility, as I'd imagined it, was benevolent and magic. It was a kind of magic I thought I might eventually need."¹⁴ Unlike Moraga and other queer writers who assumed that they wouldn't have children because of their sexual orientation, Berney's maternal desire is framed from early childhood as a desire separate from sexuality, gender, and partnership, when she thrilled upon her brother's birth at age eight. It is maternal desire in the purest sense. As Berney describes, it is the foundation for, not deterrent from, queer adulthood: "What if I led with the thing I wanted? What if I treated parenthood not as the end point of the journey to adulthood, but the beginning?" (27). Toward this end, reproductive medicine is "magic"—the key to the fairy tale castle.

From this early sex ed class, Berney understands the complexity and the science behind lesbian conception, taking reproductive technology to be supportive of rather than adversarial to queer family. Even as a young child, then, Berney recognizes the need to disimbricate sex, gender, and reproduction both conceptually and practically. She emphasizes the intentionality with which queer individuals necessarily enter parenthood:

For most lesbian couples, a baby can't 'just happen.' Nearly all of the babies born to lesbian parents sit at the *planned* end of the baby lineup. I say *nearly* because there are sapphic couples where one partner is trans and has sperm to offer or couples that are non-monogamous where one or both partners sleep with men on occasion. And I'm sure that somewhere out there, there are lesbian couples with willing male friends who got pregnant on a whim, a lark at the end of joyful or raucous evening. But, for the most part, lesbians as a group must approach parenthood with intention and caution. (24–25)

That choice, that intentionality, is the driving desire and plot of Berney's book and, as I have argued throughout, foundational to queer reproduction. Berney knows what she wants; how will she, as a lesbian woman without easy access to sperm, attain it? In its careful discussion of the fertility industry and the complexity of her family building, the work of Berney's book, and the work of queer mother memoirs more broadly, is

largely to make queer family visible. As she succinctly puts it, “Queer families may be everywhere, but they are often unseen” (25).

Unlike Moraga who had initially assumed she couldn’t/wouldn’t have a baby because of her sexual orientation but found herself easily pregnant despite the warnings of fertility specialists, Berney believed that the only issue she’d have is a lack of sperm: “I assumed I had a fertile body, that the desire I felt to bear a child was a chemical that traveled through my bloodstream, that it informed my eggs, my ovaries, my uterus. I assumed that in those dark places, everything was ripening, opening, preparing. I assumed that the moment semen entered my body, I would be instantly, irrevocably pregnant” (42). Berney’s repetition of “assumed” underscores the distinction between her choice, led by both emotion and desire, and the reality that for queer individuals conception rarely comes easily. The remainder of Berney’s book shows how wrong her initial assumptions were, and how complicated the situation can be for individuals trying to conceive without having regularly timed heterosexual intercourse, the place where situational and biomedical infertility converge. This difficulty aligns with the dominant heteronormative definition of infertility.

Moreso than the earlier generation of books of lesbian conception, Berney’s memoir offers a keen analysis of the fertility industry, revealing it to be an essential yet problematic part of the social, medical, and legal systems that challenge lesbian family-building efforts. Berney’s book is astute about the ways queer conception disimbricates sexual partnership from maternal desire and reproductive capacity: “Culturally, we tend to conflate three disparate things: sexual desire, the impulse to nurture, and the ability to conceive and bear a child. We act as if a woman’s longing is proportionate to her fertility. I longed deeply, and therefore I was fertile—or so my logic went” (43–44). This cultural conflation, which amounts to gender essentialism and heteropatriarchal motherhood, is so pervasive it extends to Berney’s assumptions about her own body. Beginning with her memories of childhood sex ed class, Berney recognizes an implicit use of the fertility clinic for queer folks: “I assumed that the fertility industry wanted to help me, that sperm banks had been designed with lesbians in mind” (75). Of course, she admits, she “was wrong about this” (75). While the use of ART for lesbians seems obvious, Berney acknowledges the heteronormative aims and ideological underpinnings of the reproductive medicine: “Commercial sperm banks adapted to help propagate more traditional families—to replace one man’s nonviable semen with another man’s viable semen, and in doing so, fulfill the promise of the norm: a

husband, a wife, and children—the American nuclear family” (77). Indeed, historically many families problematically opted to keep the use of a sperm donor secret to preserve the apparent tie between father and offspring. But before the evolution of the fertility clinic, Berney explains that outside the doctor’s office and the sperm bank were networks of women helping other women conceive, either in couples or as single mothers. This possibility works outside capitalism and heteropatriarchy, providing an important alternative to medicalized conception, one that Berney ultimately uses.

Through careful analysis, Berney’s book highlights the heteronormativity of the clinic, as detailed in Laura Mamo’s analysis *Queering Reproduction*. Mamo explains that the various processes of “normalization” at fertility clinics “privilege heterosexuality, the biological family, and specific notions of gender and sexuality.”¹⁵ In this way, a central chapter in *The Other Mothers* details the heterosexist biases of the clinic they use, where Kellie is taken to be Berney’s mother rather than partner. The grave consequence of this heteronormative treatment is that the particularity of Berney’s experience is not considered; beyond the resulting emotional trauma, Berney and Kellie lose valuable time and money, as their family-building journey becomes more rather than less complicated. Diagnosed by Dr. Norman with “male factor infertility”—a fairly standard diagnosis used for all individuals who lack access to viable sperm, including single women—the possibility that Jennifer herself may have a medical condition that renders her infertile is not considered. (My own doctors, to their credit, recognized that donor sperm is expensive and ruled out problems with *me* first.) The problem Berney runs into lies in the traditional definition of infertility that clinics and insurance companies rely on, which is tied to heterosexual practice (failing to conceive after six months or a year of “trying” through sexual intercourse). As Berney puts it “a year of heterosexual intercourse—sometimes casual and always free—was different from my situation, my months of charts and ovulation predictor kits, the sperm that had been examined for motility each month under a microscope, the thousands of dollars we had already spent” (130). The consequences of such heteronormativity are financial, emotional, and temporal, as Berney’s memoir painfully reveals.

Using her own situation as one case study among larger trends, Berney offers critical commentary about the structural social forces that complicate queer family building. As she puts it, “To this day, there still aren’t any widespread protocols specific to lesbians and other queer folks who are trying to conceive. We show up at sperm banks or fertility clinics and are

treated like anomalies in spite of the fact that we are our own demographic with specific needs, needs that might be easily studied, assessed, and responded to” (131). While Berney risks overstating her case—a quick PubMed search, for example, includes articles discussing access to care and specific needs for single women and lesbians—there is a useful cautionary tale here, in the character of Dr. Norman, whose thoughtlessness has emotional and material consequences for Jennifer and Kellie. Berney highlights her doctor’s critical oversight: “I had trusted Dr. Norman to manage my case accordingly, to decide at some point that it made sense to give me the same workup he gave to any straight, married woman who came into his office after trying for a year” (151). Indeed, he should have. As Berney’s situation ultimately reveals, it is of course entirely possible to experience both situational and biomedical infertility. But unlike heterosexual women or couples who sometimes conceive while undergoing fertility treatment, conception is impossible without access to sperm, egg, and uterus.

A critical turn in Berney’s narrative occurs when she experiences an early miscarriage under Dr. Norman’s care. It is shocking for Berney, as she hadn’t realized she was pregnant but assumed she was experiencing a heavy period; at this point, there is nothing to be done about it. In the wake of the experience, including a phone call with a less-than-sympathetic Dr. Norman, Berney decides to pursue conception on her own, away from the clinic. Over these months, her losses have been compounded—emotional, conceptual, physical, financial; in this regard, Berney’s experience supports the more general arguments by Christa Craven in her interviews with LGBTQ+ individuals who had experienced reproductive loss. Craven’s analysis reveals the compounded traumas of reproductive loss, both blatant and subtle, at all levels of care; as she explains, “In addition to encounters with blatant homophobia and transphobia—in the form of discriminatory laws and institutional policies, as well as the insensitive responses of some medical and adoption professionals, family, friends, and co-workers—heteronormative assumptions about who should form families and how have significant impacts on the experiences of LGBTQ people who suffer reproductive loss.”¹⁶ Both Berney and Craven’s analyses make clear that although not all queer individuals trying to conceive experience miscarriage or biomedical infertility, loss is very much at the center of their family-building efforts; that is, although I single them out in this chapter, the memoirs explored in this book are more broadly suggestive of the range of losses experienced during LGBTQ family building—months

at the clinic, miscarriages, use of donor eggs and sperm, failed ART cycles, ectopic pregnancies, divorce, and more. Those losses serve as the obstacles and narrative deterrents on quests propelled by maternal desire.

Ultimately, much like Moraga and Jimenez before them, Jennifer and Kellie reject the fertility clinic, returning to the home and known donor as the space for family building. That choice, as well as Berney's rhetoric, serves as a means of reclaiming agency and rewriting her story: "I had no logical reason to believe that home inseminations would yield different results than clinical inseminations. But still, I allowed the flame to burn. I felt free of Dr. Norman, and that freedom felt enough" (185). Situating Dr. Norman within the history of male doctors who invented the speculum, the episiotomy, and "mastered" (189) women's bodies, Berney ultimately reclaims and de-medicalizes her family-building experience. Like Moraga and the other memoirists I cover in the first chapter, Berney attempts to build her family in the bedroom the way that fertile straight women conceive in their own bedrooms, privately with their partners. Consider the warmth of this passage: "Sperm no longer came in a tiny vial; it came in a canning jar, like one of the many that lined the shelves in my pantry. Sperm was no longer thawed, spun, and placed under a microscope—instead it was kept warm against my partner's belly as she transported it from one side of town to another" (192). Rejecting the technology and heterosexism of the clinic—and emphasizing contrast with the syntactical repetition of "no longer"—Berney's wish is that she is fertile: "I wanted to believe it was possible that I could get pregnant without any further intervention, that Rebecca and Daniel's generosity would be enough to right whatever was broken in me. I wanted to believe that, but I didn't" (197). In this way, friends and family can correct the wrong done to her by the experience of medicalizing her family-building efforts.

Berney does, of course, conceive with the help of her friend Daniel, fulfilling the dream she has had since early childhood to become a mother. As she writes this counternarrative to medicalized conception, her story emphasizes queer family built within her partnership and her community, ultimately disconnected from the cryobank and the clinic. In this way, Berney's memoir both illuminates the difficulty of queer conception—even now, thirty years after Moraga—but also reminds us of the critical distinctions between social and biomedical experiences of infertility. Berney is lucky, in the end, that she is indeed able to conceive the family she wants, on her own terms, as she has wanted since childhood. Infertility is the knot at the center of her queer motherhood story.

But I have to wonder: is there a better word than “infertile” to describe it?¹⁷

* * *

As months passed, my desire for a second child began to take over my days. I worked on my memoir. I called the sperm bank and had samples shipped to the gynecologist’s office. I taught my classes. I took my child to the public library, to swimming lessons. I had my first insemination, the second. I started a pseudonymous blog where I recorded thoughts and feelings about this desire, which became all consuming. After three or four failed cycles—it is hard to remember now—I found myself again at the fertility clinic fifty minutes away, with the real specialist, the one who took me seriously. The one who prescribed progesterone and pills, the one who said, okay this isn’t working, let’s try IVF.

I don’t know that it was so obvious to me at the time but that year, after yet another miscarriage, after I responded so poorly to ovarian stimulation that my IVF cycle was “converted” to an insemination (which also failed), I became an infertility patient in the truest sense, an experience that profoundly reshaped my identity. The file that held my medical chart grew thick and broke; it was held together with rubberbands and then overtook a second folder. After one early morning ultrasound, as I sat on the examination table and wept, my doctor, in her kind way, said, “I can see your pain.” Month after month, she witnessed my loss, urged me forward.

* * *

Although published chronologically earlier than *The Other Mothers*, Suzy Becker’s *One Good Egg: An Illustrated Memoir* (2013) extends the argument of Berney’s book to explore queer family building through assisted reproductive technologies. Similar to Berney’s childhood optimism about reproductive technology, Becker emphasizes collaboration and the utility of medical science for queer family building. Although Becker’s desire for a child is initially a bit more complicated than Berney’s—at the outset, Becker possesses some ambivalence, illustrated through a pro-con list in her graphic memoir—ultimately her book is less concerned about the institution of the fertility industrial complex writ large than her own story of conceiving at the clinic, using the advances of reproductive medicine to support her family-building endeavors. To be clear, I am not suggesting that one of these approaches is better than the other—these memoirs testify to individual circumstances, individual choices, individual narrative conceptualizations—but, rather, taken together, the range of examples in this chapter are intended to offer a panoramic exploration of the intersection of “queer” and “infertile” in the early twenty-first century, within the context of particular memoirist’s

narratives. Neither infertility nor queer family building are singular experiences but unique, multivalent, and intersectional. To borrow Foucault's infamous line about silence, there is not one but many infertilities.

After contemplating the possibility of single motherhood—highlighting the asexual underpinnings of maternal desire—Becker falls in love with her good friend, Lorene, a development depicted in the book's opening pages. Becker approaches another gay friend, who lives in Australia, to be her known sperm donor. As is fairly conventional in queer family-building narratives, Becker points out the difference between social/situational and biomedical experiences of infertility, assuming that any issue she has with conception will be due to lack of sperm rather than a physiological problem. (In this regard, lesbians are no different from most heterosexual couples who assume they are fertile until proven otherwise; mainstream sexual education, in its focus on abstinence methods and the avoidance of pregnancy, does not generally raise the specter that getting pregnant could be difficult, despite the relative prevalence of infertility.) As Becker declares, "My infertility, if you want to call it that, is circumstantial, not biological."¹⁸ The phrasing here—"if you want to call it that"—underscores the continued lack of useful terminology for the experience of queer individuals who require assistance in order to conceive. As a term, infertility is proximate, rather than exact.

Initially repudiating that diagnostic language, Becker comes to understand the practical value of an infertility diagnosis, after she undergoes multiple failed inseminations and has a consult with a reproductive endocrinologist. That is, if the word "infertility" is initially off-putting to Becker, she accepts its use value in terms of providing insurance coverage for medication, including expensive injectable fertility drugs and procedures. As she puts it, "Now I *wanted* the infertility diagnosis" (86). Because Becker's response to ovarian stimulation medication (Gonal F) is so good, her planned insemination cycle is converted to IVF in order to minimize the likelihood of higher-order multiple birth. As Becker becomes a fertility patient, both rhetorically and practically, her memoir proceeds to chart her experiences with the infertility industry. In contrast to Berney, Moraga, and others who are ultimately able to conceive via low-tech insemination at home, Becker's use of reproductive technology enables her to have a more nuanced understanding of the experience of medicalized infertility, the treatment of which is not the "magic" Berney imagined, but can in fact be "art" to draw new family forms.

Throughout her dealings with the clinic, Becker acknowledges her sexual orientation but does not dwell on overtly homophobic encounters, the way that Berney's memoir does; her approach is pragmatic rather than emotional. (To be sure, this choice partly reflects Becker having a more genuinely positive experience, and also a more forgiving point of view and tone.) Tipping toward comedic rather than critical, for example, Becker uses an illustration to critique the assumption that she has a husband providing sperm. Depicted as a two-panel phone call from the nurse in advance of her egg retrieval, Becker says "I don't know if I can find a husband on such short notice. Please use my friend Steve's sperm" (105). This moment, sketched by another writer, might overtly criticize the heteronormativity of the clinic; Becker's approach makes that point more subtly and obliquely. In this set of experiences surrounding IVF, Becker highlights a definitive shift, in which she comes to understand herself as infertile not only in a technical sense, as someone who has used fertility treatment, but as a more complicated internalized sense of identity. Becker's IVF cycle nets fourteen fertilized eggs but only two embryos continue to develop, which is a poor response by clinic standards; she ultimately does become pregnant after the embryo transfer but has concerning low hormone levels and bleeding, which turns out to be symptomatic of an ectopic pregnancy, a condition that is always life-threatening and nonviable. Becker contemplates the difference between her reality and her fantasy, and the limits of one's desire for conception: "as any infertile person will tell you, wishing won't make it so" (116). Arguably, this experience of reproductive loss and emotional setback crystalizes her newfound understanding of herself as infertile.

With the ups and downs of treatment, Becker begins to fantasize about an alternate life, one in which she doesn't ultimately conceive and carry to term. Similar to A.K. Summers's graphic memoir, Becker's use of illustration, which appears on nearly every two-page spread of the book, disrupts and complicates the forward trajectory of the narrative even as it also adds an emotional counterpoint and comic relief. For example, at the moment Suzy is trying to get comfortable with the idea of never having a child, she "pulls out one last fertility stop"—which is to begin meditation practice. Depicted first as a series of open bottles labeled with different infertility remedies and aids—such as egg whites, cough syrup, and meditation, as well as fertility drugs and IVF—she then presents a cartoon speculum saying, "You go, girl!" (125) along the side of the page. If our reading of narrative proceeds in a linear if not chronological fashion, moving from

beginning to end, Ramzi Fawaz reminds us that “comics disjoint and fragment narrative unfolding, allow the viewer to read in a nonlinear way, and accentuate points of potential contradiction between clashing visual and verbal elements.”¹⁹ To put a sharper point on it: the graphic elements of Becker’s book effectively serve as means of queering the straight reproductive narrative.

These depictions of real and imagined loss ultimately serve as complications in the reproductive narrative quest and afford the imaginative possibilities of queer family. Ultimately, Becker’s second IVF results in a successful pregnancy and live birth. With its detailed focus on assisted reproductive technology—methods as well as outcomes—Becker’s is arguably first and foremost an infertility narrative and second a queer narrative; or, more accurately, it is an infertility narrative written by a queer woman, rather than a queer critique of infertile individuals and the industry as a whole. Notably, even the book’s paratext works to situate the book this way, as LGBTQ family is not listed as one of the subjects on the copyright page.²⁰ Consequently, in contrast to other queer mother memoirs in this analysis, Becker provides much more detail about the process and practices of working with a clinic: medical tests and procedures, medications taken, etc.; its audience could equally be individuals wanting to learn about IVF experiences as those exploring queer family. And unlike Berney’s scathing indictment of Dr. Norman and the clinic, Becker seems to have a positive relationship with her doctor. After her successful cycle, Becker remarks, “He came out from behind his desk to congratulate us. We were graduating to normal-people ob-gyn care” (136). In this way, Becker’s book uses the space of the fertility clinic to create community around reproductive efforts, across sexual orientation.

The last third of Becker’s memoir covers her pregnancy, scripting the standard success narrative commonly described in infertility as well as queer conception memoirs.²¹ Both the content and tone indicate that she has the expected concerns for a person in her early forties, who has experienced an ectopic pregnancy and has had brain cancer (a fact that the book mentions at several points but does not dwell on); as narrator, she is comedic and not overly dramatic. For example, she describes the embryo as “blinky” (referring to the blink of the heartbeat on ultrasound) and says they made the deal “You nap, I don’t fall out” (139). After some minor concerns with the fetus’s size (declared “small for gestational age”), Becker gives birth to a healthy baby girl: “After all the years of dithering, wishing, waiting, it is unremarkable as far as birth stories go. I labored a very

average eleven hours. There were no complications” (195). Becker’s statement, which emphasizes the “unremarkable” nature of this outcome, positions her story as a triumphant narrative of success, in which infertility is an obstacle to be overcome with the help of medical technology.

Becker’s queerness, a quiet undercurrent that runs through the text, features prominently in the end. Outside the frame of the infertility narrative, Becker turns to the larger questions about the nature of queer family, gesturing toward the inescapable heteropatriarchal context of the contemporary United States. Ultimately, she and Lorene do marry, formalizing their family that began with the desire for a child; however, while Becker doesn’t belabor any heterosexism, it’s quietly there, as the officiant says during the ceremony, “I now pronounce you man—married—a couple” (154), his verbal stutter underscoring a lack of readily available language to characterize queer partnerships, the relative novelty of queer family, and the persistence of heteronormativity. The baby’s birth certificate, which is designed with fertile heterosexual couples in mind, raises similar legal and rhetorical problems: there is no way to capture their family form, with both women listed as parents, without also effectively erasing Steve, the known donor. In the end, however, Becker includes an image of the birth certificate, to visually underscore their legal family with two moms and to solidify the nature of the family they have created.

In this regard, one of the significant final scenes describes a naming ceremony in which “the village that would help [them] raise [their] child—gathered” (201). As Becker tells it, the thought of this extended kinship network, as well as “the sun, looking into all the faces, made [her] well up” (201). This positively framed moment, with the warmth of the sun and her gathered village, reframes and underscores the strength of queer families, chosen and assembled, conveying the importance of alternative modes of contemporary family building created with *joy* rather than on a foundation of loss. It also indicates that chosen family is not in opposition to biological family but one among many viable avenues for family building in the twenty-first century. In contrast to the overt and tacit homophobia experienced by Berney and others, Becker highlights acceptance and joy surrounding chosen family. Taken together, the naming ceremony and wedding speak to the acceptance of the family that they have built, two mothers, a known donor father, and a tribe or “village” of extended family and friends. Becker’s language underscores the way her community and chosen family have embraced her reproductive efforts; arguably they serve as stand-ins for the reader. She writes, “There are so

many things I didn't know to factor into the baby decision back when I was making it, like this connection to neighbors, strangers, other mothers everywhere. The fear of other people's disapproval has no basis in my reality. If anything, people have expressed a little envy of Loraine's and my shared parenting. We each have a wife" (208). Through assisted reproductive technology, then, they have built a remarkably normal queer family; Becker's memoir of doing so complicates both the all-too-easy dismissal of reproductive technology as inherently heteropatriarchal and also suggests that there is still much work to do to rewrite larger cultural scripts about queer kinship.

* * *

What is there left to say about my own infertility narrative that I haven't already said, over the phone to friends, in blog posts, in essays, in poems? Infertility changed me in ways I never imagined, and now it is the subject I write about compulsively, reclaiming my narrative, making sense of it, making it visible for others. After the inseminations (twenty-one, twenty-two? I've lost count) and failed IVF cycles, after the consults with nationally recognized specialists for second opinions, after discussion after discussion with my own doctor, on the phone, in the office, she asked me point-blank what was most important to me—time, money, or genetics. I did not need to think about it. This was more than two years in. I was thirty-eight. Time. I wanted it done. IVF with an egg donor was her response. I gave birth to my child within a year of making that decision. That's one version of this story.

Here is another: I keep two calendars for February 2011: the black Moleskine with my appointments and to-do lists, the meetings with job candidates that never seem to stop. I take it in and out of my backpack. I make lists and more lists. I am split, always; I am professor, mother, infertility patient. In the calendar, my medical appointments are written in pink, my household duties in green, my academic work in black and blue. Every moment of every day is accounted for. In the bathroom, taped inside the medicine cabinet, my calendar and list of medications, the little blue estrogen pills, the yellow globes of progesterone. I take Medrol, a steroid, to control inflammation. I take shots of Lupron that shut down my own hormone production. I go to the clinic. I go to the acupuncturist. I go to class. I go to meetings, job talks, poetry readings. I take my child to gymnastics class, to Burger King, which, they inform me in seven-year-old seriousness, is good for kids and grown-ups; they play on the play structure while I frantically comment on the never-ending stream of student work. I make Zhu Zhu Pet cupcakes for their birthday, though I

don't eat wheat anymore (one of the many small things I'm doing to optimize my cycle). On the craziest of the crazy days, I see my kid off to school, drive to the clinic for blood work and ultrasound, drive home to gather my things and head six hours in the other direction for a professional conference. I'll go in for monitoring again the morning after I get home. I've told myself this is the last cycle. I have reached the end of my emotional, physical, and financial resources. But what if it doesn't work? I can't fathom failure.

* * *

Michelle Tea's *Knocking Myself Up: A Memoir of My (In)fertility* (2022) is in its conceptualization of family perhaps the "queerest" of the fertility memoirs I consider in its rhetoric and family formation. It is also very "straight" in its chronological, neatly plotted narrative form, propelled by the desire for a child. In this shape, it adopts the familiar heteronarrative pattern that comes to productive, if not literally reproductive, ends and rewrites it from within. Given what Roof describes as "the stubborn pairing of narrative and sexuality," the disconnect and tensions between the structure and content of Tea's book constitute some of its great pleasures, to be sure.²² The memoir takes the shape of a book in four chronologically ordered sections that move from a stated desire to have a baby solo to conception within the context of queer marriage (and then, ultimately, parenting after divorce, as referenced in the book's afterword). In this pattern, then, it is not significantly different from the memoirs I consider in the conception chapter, all of which have "successful" outcomes with take-home babies. But because Tea requires in vitro fertilization to conceive, using her partner's egg and known donor sperm, the book functions both as a true infertility narrative—as indicated in the book's subtitle—as well as a radical reconsideration of the value of the fertility clinic for queer family building; using egg, sperm, and uterus from three different individuals, Tea's family, as well as the book about it, productively disimbricates genetic, social, and biological motherhood. Moreover, like Becker's, Tea's memoir productively engages the infertility industry and pushes readers to consider the intersection between "queer" and "infertile" in more complex ways than either synonymous or antagonistic. The book makes an implicit argument that at its best, assisted reproductive technology can be used as a viable tool in the creation of queer family, one unteathered from traditional constraints of gender norms, genetics, and heterosexist essentialism and pronatalism.

As we have seen elsewhere in queer mother memoirs in this archive, Tea offers a quick rundown of her initial ambivalence toward having a child,

singling out Ariel Gore's *Hip Mama Survival Guide* as inspirational, and, in doing so, immediately placing her approach to motherhood on the more radical side. As Aizley's memoir also outlines, the need to make a conscious decision to have a baby and plan how to do it is part of the problem for Tea. She is too conflicted to make a deliberate choice to build a family: "It seemed that if I had a healthy partner who wanted a baby, then maybe *I* would want a baby, too. I began to lament the impossibility of getting *accidentally* knocked up. [...] I couldn't allow a broken condom to make the decision for me."²³ (8).

In this and other moments, Tea highlights the queer framing of her narrative and the queer identities of the participants. The book opens, for example, on a "cold summer night in San Francisco" (the first chapter title) when Michelle begins to tell friends about her plans; as in the books considered in my initial conception chapter, such overt narration about the desire to conceive is a critical part of queer family-building narratives. In response to her declaration, Tea's friend Tali makes a snide comment about Michelle's sex life, intimating that parents can't have sex, or, minimally, that queer sexuality and (solo) parenting are at odds. Although Tali's comment is narrow-minded, problematically falling into the heteronormative trap of de-sexualizing mothers, within the context of this analysis, I would argue, it also functions as a means to highlight the disimbrication and distinction between sexuality and reproduction; that is, unlike some first-generation queer mother memoir writers, such as Aizley, who mobilize a normalizing rhetoric and downplay sexuality, Tea is not simply a lesbian who wants to create family, in a predictable, domestinnormative situation. Rather, as with Nelson's *The Argonauts*, queer sexuality and queer subcultures are very much centered for Tea, as the diction throughout the memoir makes clear, and the book highlights the way that ART can be used in service of queer reproduction and a radical reconceptualization of kinship.

Tea's book charts a journey from ambivalence to certainty, from making a plan to conceive, putting that plan into place, overcoming obstacles, and eventually bringing home a baby. In the end, it is the success narrative so often privileged in infertility literature, which obscures the reality that IVF doesn't work as quickly or easily as mainstream media would have us believe.²⁴ Yet the temporal framing of Tea's book—each of the four main sections covers a full year—provides a more complex presentation of infertility experience, as well as reproductive education, for those who assume IVF is a quick fix. The infertility memoir, that is, acts as a technology of

truth telling and reproductive knowledge production. Thus, at the memoir's opening, Tea herself is optimistic and unaware of the turns her journey will take.

Like the memoirs I cover in the conception chapter, Tea considers the way a sperm donor will figure into her understandings of family and prioritizes queer relations. She writes,

My preferred choice was bumming sperm off one of the hot gay boys I was acquainted—but not *too* well acquainted—with. I wasn't looking for a co-parent. I just wanted a nice, casual transfer of fluids and a willingness to meet the kid when they turn fourteen and start asking who their dad is. Or I could just have sex with some guy and get myself knocked up. (15)

This statement, which echoes the book's title, highlights Tea's agency in reimagining and then creating queer family. It is also worth noting that Tea keeps her conception within "family," highlighting the queer kin she looks to for donor gametes and adopting/reclaiming otherwise homophobic slang for her own pro-queer purposes, as in this unabashed declaration about her search for sperm: "I started sending really awkward emails to fags" (16). Ultimately she asks a younger friend, Quentin, a.k.a. the drag queen Miss Super Extra Deluxe Pandemonium, to provide the needed gametes explaining that "he would basically pleasure himself somewhere in my house, deposit his man-magic in a warm bowl, and that one of my dear friends would bring it to where I lay, with my feet in the air, awaiting impregnation" (18). Against the strands of queer theory that dismiss all reproductive efforts as problematically normative, moments like this one underscore Tea's approach to family building as something more radical and grounded in queer identity and experience. To offer a delightful example, Tea begs to be inseminated by Quentin in drag as Pandemonium, who provides the necessary "Pyrex of drag queen sperm" (25). (OMG!)

Whereas a typical romance plot generally proceeds linearly from dating to marriage to reproduction (as in the kid's rhyme *first comes love then comes marriage, then comes X with the baby carriage*), Tea's romantic and reproductive storylines converge in queer temporality. After wondering if partnership is in her future—she starts to believe "that love, romantic love, *didn't actually exist*, that it was but an amalgamation of codependence and sexual urge, festooned with delusions fostered by a culture hell-bent on shoving idealized notions of coupledness down our throats" (21–22)—she meets and begins dating Orson, who readily embraces the baby plan. Although Michelle explores the potential conflicts between the dating plan and the baby plan—"What thirty-two-year-old queer wants to learn

that the lady they're hooking up with is about to morph into a forty-year-old *mom*?" (27)—in actuality Orson actually thinks the plan is "awesome"! (29). Although they cannot conceive via sex, as Orson, like Michelle, is AFAB, they can, and do, make a baby together with the help of caring doctors and assisted reproductive technology.

Thus, this early part of the book continues to foreground and illuminate the logistical complexities of queer conception, as well as the nature of family that can be made when sperm, egg, and uterus are detached from normative narratives of body and gender. As with many who are trying to conceive, particularly those without heterosexual partners, Michelle arranges her life around the narrow window of ovulation each month. Time, as Robin Jensen's analysis of the term infertility makes clear, is a defining rhetorical trope, and Michelle doesn't want to lose any more of it, no matter how complex and at odds with the other parts of her life. To wit, when her ovulation window coincides with some travel, she considers conception through sex rather than missing a month:

I arrange for Quentin to visit the night before I fly north, so he can provide me with some premium drag queen ejaculate. But, just in case it doesn't work, Gertrude arranges for a cis guy in her zine-making club to knock me up the old-fashioned way while I'm visiting. Old-fashioned—like, heterosexual sexual intercourse—is the optimum way to go, and I had made a pledge to myself that I wouldn't let any dating scenarios get in the way of my baby-making plans, so, even though I was probably falling in love with Orson, I was determined to get it on with this hopefully virile stranger while in Portland if all else failed. (31–32)

In these efforts to conceive, Tea notes, "We were together in a bright and special plot" (34).

Indeed. In rewriting the very standard conception plot—the plot of human development—Tea highlights the queer, the camp, the raucous pleasure that can go into creating a baby—far from both a reductively repro-heteronormative sex of the marital bedroom and the sterile environment of the fertility clinic. In contrast, Tea's book highlights the demonstrably queer approach to making family, including an insemination party (!), with best friend Rhonda, sperm donor Quentin, and partner Orson, who is on call to help out with an orgasm. Framed in this way, Tea's family is built from maternal desire as well as queer attraction: "I felt myself developing an interesting crush on him. The crush a presently lezzed-out mother might get on her adorable fag sperm donor" (33). Tea rewrites the family

romance, enlisting chosen family to help make a baby; inverting heteronormative paradigms, here sexual desire is secondary to reproduction.

As months pass without success—as with Becker before her—Tea’s book reconsiders the relationships between the experiences of infertility and queer conception and closes the gap between herself and straight women trying to conceive. Positioning herself within a larger community of women, Tea corrects her previous misconceptions about infertility; she writes,

I used to think fertility clinics were for desperate yuppies who needed to accept that they are barren women and move on with their lives, perhaps traveling the world and buying couture—something I always thought was a fine substitute for a baby. But that was before I was part of the TTC community. Once you set your mind on having a baby, an Alexander Wang bag is a cold consolation. (66)

This moment is critical for speaking back to vocal assumptions in the queer community (i.e., family building is not queer!), mainstream misconceptions about infertility, as well as feminist scholars who dismiss the radical possibilities of ART for building chosen family and redefining the nature of kinship.²⁵

The drama of the book, like most TTC memoirs, arises from the IFs of infertility, the back and forth of the middle, the uncertainty of how it will all end. As Tea comes to realize, there is the narrative in which she conceives, and the narrative in which she doesn’t; the book itself occupies the Schrödinger’s experiment of the middle. The temporal and emotional difficulty of infertility, Belle Boggs notes, “is that it is not a patient, serene kind of waiting, not a simple delay in your plans; it happens for many of us in the context of consuming struggle, staggering expense, devastating loss.”²⁶ In this regard, reconsidering and recommitting to her plans, Tea asks, “At what point do I throw in the towel and revert back to my other life plans—continue being a wild and eccentric, childless female, traveling and having affairs and splurging on avant-garde fashion?” She continues, “this whole process—taking a chance, finding myself bonded with Quentin, falling in love with Orson, and seeing that I didn’t have to do it alone, I could have a partner, a family—it’s changed me” (68).

It’s not just that Tea wants a family; she has maternal desire or baby lust: “the urge to actually be pregnant, to feel a baby growing inside me, watch my body morph and shift, the urge to *breastfeed*—these are all real urges” (80). Here, Tea’s statement cements the distinctions between wanting to have a child as part of a heterosexual family-building endeavor,

wanting to engage in acts of caregiving, and the distinct biological compulsion of many women and AFAB humans to gestate, to give birth, to engage in embodied forms of reproductive labor. Against Tea's earlier assumptions, she comes to understand getting pregnant is not going to come easily, that she may in fact be biomedically infertile (not simply lacking sperm), and pursues her quest for family at a fertility specialist. She chooses, again and again, to try to build her family. In a wonderfully symbolic scene, Michelle and Orson climb redwood trees, while Tea contemplates overcoming obstacles to creating family: "Looking at the redwood trees, which grow in families, little rings of giant, ancient families, life seems like our world's default setting. I *can't* call the pregnancy plan off, not now, not with Orson involved, not with Quentin so dedicated, and not with my new understanding that it can take a long, long time for a person to get pregnant" (96).

As an unabashedly queer-identified person with a legitimate infertility diagnosis and biological challenges to conception, Tea's depiction of the fertility clinic used to build her family is more nuanced and complex than the others in this archive; although Tea expresses concerns about the potential for homophobia inherent in clinic practices and attitudes (as Berney's memoir highlights), she also makes clear that her fears do not match the reality of being a queer person at the clinics she goes to. Confronted with practices that raise the specter of homophobia, such as a required psych consult, Tea remarks, "I'm so *ready* to be gaybashed in this process!" while the staff assures her that "psych consults are required for all 'fertilized embryo transfers'" (132). It is the procedure, that is, not the sexuality of the patient, that warrants psychological and social support. Unlike Berney's memoir, then, which highlights the blatant homophobia and lack of care she and Kellie receive as a lesbian couple, Tea's memoir offers a counterpoint, underscoring that individual doctors and clinics have the capacity to view their patients as whole beings and to facilitate access to care in the specific forms required *because of*, not despite, their sexual orientation. As Tea shows, queer conception is not as simple as checking the box for "male factor infertility" but rather the process can open up novel family forms and kinship relations, including egg donation and gestational surrogacy. When she first seeks out the clinic, Tea remarks on the ways that her assumptions do not come to fruition: "Is this bougie doctors' office actually as nonjudgmental as my queer free clinic? This is too good to be true!" (110). That is, as she writes her story, she is pleasantly surprised by her actual experience: "I realize this PTSD has been a

big part of my aversion to going to a fertility doctor. It didn't occur to me that I could have a positive health care experience" (111). No doubt this helps their experience overall; they adore their doctor, Dr. Waller, whom they are sure "loves" them as well. After all, Michelle says to Orson, "We're his quirky lesbian patients!" (147). The positive experience is significant, affirming rather than presenting an obstacle to family-building efforts and their emotional well-being: "Orson is on cloud nine for the rest of the day. Not even the specter of a homophobic counseling session can ruin the joy of learning that their ovaries rule and that our doctor is rad" (147).

Beyond her individual experience, Tea's insistence on the support of the clinic and doctor is significant to a larger cultural counternarrative about family that queer mother memoirs provide. Tea's positive experience, of course, does not negate the failure of Berney's doctors to treat her with patient-centered care and respect, and, as Christa Craven's analysis reveals, both the threat and lived experience of homophobia at the fertility clinic add a layer of emotional complexity (and in some cases trauma) on top of the many other reproductive losses at the center of queer family-building experience. Given the breadth of Craven's analysis, it may be that Tea's experience is the exception rather than the rule. Yet that possibility does not render Tea's memoir insignificant; rather, it serves as a reminder of the way that at its best, the fertility clinic can support queer reproduction, whether a patient experiences biomedical or situational infertility. As Tea tells it, reproductive medicine is not *inherently* heteronormative or homophobic but can be a viable, and valuable, technology for twenty-first-century family building within distinct intersectional contexts.

Like Becker, whose memoir traces an arc from situational to biomedical infertility, who undergoes IVF initially due to good response to ovarian stimulation, Tea ultimately faces a complicated medical situation, beyond her "advanced" age that renders her infertile. As would be expected due to age, she has diminished ovarian reserve, but also large uterine fibroids that will make conception a significant biological challenge rather than merely a logistical obstacle to overcome. However, as the memoir reveals, this challenge ultimately opens up possibilities for rewriting their family narrative, including ways to involve Orson. Tea's memoir explores the complexity of her infertility and the many novel options to reconceive family; rhetorically she emphasizes her partnership with Orson as central: "We think of adoption, as do many others. We may not relate to the baby-mad straight ladies who post about their yearnings on the internet, but *we*

now have far more in common with them than I ever thought we would. I feel paralyzed with how many routes are seemingly available to us, yet how impossible they all feel at the moment” (121, emphasis mine). I highlight this moment to show Tea’s shift in thinking of herself as infertile and, as a result, allyship with other infertile individuals, regardless of sexuality, in contrast to others (like Jimenez) who struggle to disassociate gender and sexuality from reproductive success—a linking which is itself heteronormative and essentialist.

The experience of infertility, as Tea reveals, is actually quite queer, regardless of one’s sexual proclivities. That is, Tea’s memoir theorizes the radical redefinition of family that arises when one requires medical assistance—and donor gametes—to conceive. In Tea’s memoir this occurs not as a moment of deep sorrow, but, rather, infinite possibility and joy; “Suddenly a whole new option occurs to me: What about fertilizing one of Orson’s ‘infinitely healthier’ eggs—and then *I* carry it? Unlike the horror that grips Orson when they imagine their own egg being fertilized within them, the thought of transferring one of their youthful eggs into *me* fills them with purpose and excitement” (130). In this regard, their queer partnership presents an exciting possibility for building family, available to them not despite their sexual orientation but *because* they are queer. If, for heterosexual couples, gestational surrogacy or donor eggs are extrafamilial options, for Orson and Tea, this possibility rather allows for both of them to have biological connections to their child. Moreover, as Tea explores this new possibility for family building, she becomes more invested in Quentin as their original sperm donor, Quentin’s own queerness notably being part of the draw: “I guess I am really drawn to the less traditional, queer, and community-centric mode of making a family, and less interested in the type of fortress a normal nuclear family tends to be. [...] How were we going to replace the truly irreplaceable Quentin with some boring straight dude?” (141). Here and elsewhere, then, Tea’s memoir reconceptualizes ART as a technology that supports queer family, even as she uses memoir as a technology to theorize queer kinship.

From the beginning of the memoir, the dating narrative and the family-building narrative have operated in tandem; at the moment they decide to use Orson as egg donor, they become inextricably entwined. Halfway through the memoir, Orson and Tea become engaged, and Orson undergoes ovarian stimulation and egg retrieval. The retrieval, as Tea remarks, “happens over gay pride weekend, which is extra proud this year given the good news around Prop 8 and DOMA. Our marriage will be *legal!* Now

I won't have to legally adopt my fucking baby when I give birth to it someday, Goddess willing. [...] If I get pregnant from *any* of the eggs we get today, the conception day will be Gay Day. [...] I can't help but feel this is auspicious" (199). As revealed in this pivotal scene, Tea's narration continues to foreground queerness in their family building—not as a source of doubt, shame, or confusion, as some of the first-generation memoirs discussed—but pride, joy, and choice. That is, unlike some of the earlier memoirs of queer motherhood, which wrestle with internalized homophobia and the specter of the family values rhetoric of the turn of the century, Tea writes a truly twenty-first century narrative of queer family. Following a miscarriage that coincides with their wedding, their third embryo transfer results in a successful pregnancy and, ultimately, live birth. Rather than dwelling on trauma, Tea's narrator defaults to optimism: "In spite of the specter of that last miscarriage, in spite of traumatic memoirs and googled medical studies. I'm giddy with this bean in my belly, and it seems dumb to try to talk myself out of it by imagining worst-case scenarios. I decide to be happy and enjoy being pregnant" (242).

More in line with the success stories sold by fertility clinics and in the majority of infertility memoirs, then, Tea's story hinges on the standard "overcoming obstacles" plot formula, one that both in tone and in structure celebrates the possibilities that can emerge from an infertility diagnosis and radical reconceptualization of family. Tea experiences her ultimately successful efforts at queer family building as "radically helpful" at overcoming trauma more broadly: "I hadn't consciously had my baby as a way to release ancestral trauma. But in my postpartum state, which, even without the pain-killers is a deeply psychedelic one, it seems that birthing a baby and working with it to heal epigenetic trauma, placing a consciously birthed and nurtured human onto the planet, can possibly be a radically helpful act" (270). Here, Tea again highlights intentionality and reproductive choice—her child is "consciously birthed and nurtured"—as healing. This is entirely separate from the narrative's romance plot, which is undone in the book's afterword. If Tea and Orson come together early in the memoir to fulfill Michelle's maternal desire and build family outside the constraints of the heteronuclear family, it is perhaps an equally expected turn in the narrative that they break up shortly after the baby's birth, disentangling the reproductive and romance plots. As Tea writes it, theirs is a queer love story that results in a truly modern family.

* * *

The body remembers. The body remembers.

I have been carrying this line with me as I walk across campus, actively now remembering in my mind what my body has felt. The spaces I have inhabited, the paths I have walked, seem indelibly marked with grief.

Recently I walked into a classroom building I hadn't stepped in since 2011, when I was newly pregnant and threatening to miscarry. That semester I taught in the basement of an old building, the "garden level" or what the students then called "the dungeon"; you needed to swipe an ID card to enter. More than a decade later, I still avoid the bathroom in the building because of what, somehow, my body recalls: the unsettled feeling in my abdomen as I was undergoing round after round of inseminations and then IVF with donor eggs, early pregnancy, spotting, the loss of a twin. In retrospect, I don't know how I managed to go to class in those days and to meet my students and talk about words on a page.

The child who came from that hard-won pregnancy is now a seventh-grader; looking at him you would never know how rocky those months of pregnancy were, how his life began. The day he was born, I sobbed through the physician-mandated c-section, sure that he'd never take an independent breath. It's been fourteen years now since I "graduated" from the clinic. On a day-to-day basis, I don't think about infertility much, at least not in an immediate way, but as a more detached observer. But, somehow, walking around, if the air hits my skin a certain way, or there's a certain slant of light, or I retrace the steps where I received a phone call, or something *happened*, my body calls it up with a force that hits me in the gut. The body remembers what the brain shoves down hard. (Yes, as psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk famously says, *the body keeps score*).

The narrative of infertility is not a straight line but something that curves and collapses in on itself. Infertility carries on, even after birth.

* * *

Let me be clear: I did not want to read Ariel Levy's *The Rules Do Not Apply*. I'd read the shorter essay upon which it is based several years ago and bawled my eyes out. In it, Levy recounts the experience of traveling to Mongolia at nineteen weeks pregnant; at dinner early in the trip, she feels unsettled, goes back to her hotel room, and delivers her still-living, soon-to-be-dead, son, weeks before fetal viability. (Even if she had been at a hospital when this event took place, the fetus would not have survived.)

But, once I started, I read *The Rules Do Not Apply* in a single day, hungrily, in a chaise at the pool and then later in bed after my son, my own version of happily-ever-after, was asleep in his bed. I'd expected to read a story of desire for motherhood, of trying to get pregnant, desperately, outside the confines of a heterosexual relationship, and then the brutal

loss that I already knew. What I read was something completely otherwise. It is not, in the most obvious ways, a queer mother memoir.

Indeed, most of the book takes place long before Levy's pregnancy. While there are a few references to contemplating maternity—and initially choosing against it—this isn't the baby-yearning I anticipated, that the other books in this archive prepared me for. Mostly the book centers on Levy's early career, building a life as a journalist, of getting drunk with her girlfriend-turned-spouse, of bisexuality. Rather than propelled by the plot, I was enraptured by Levy's voice, which is, I suppose, the major reason I read memoir anyway.

I kept waiting for something to happen. Nothing did. Or perhaps because I already knew the climax, it didn't knock me down, as it had the first time. Or maybe the distillation of the essay form heightens it, whereas the longer book inevitably fizzles out.²⁷ This very fact, of the nothing happening, of the book's refusal to abide by narrative's rules (remember the title), makes *The Rules Do Not Apply* both compelling and positively queer. If we understand narrative, in the traditional sense, as a causal series of events situated in time, Levy's memoir undoubtedly fails to produce a narrative. It is either, or maybe both, anti- or non-narrative, or alter-narrative. For readers who look for cause and effect, who read for the "moral of the story," it suggests, at best, that maybe she shouldn't have gone to Mongolia, even though the doctors all say that it was a freak thing, placental abruption, that would have likely happened had she stayed in New York. Neither is it a loss-recovery narrative, its own version of a triumphant arc, which is what we as readers have come to expect from memoir. No. It's a shitty-thing-happens-to-people narrative. It's not redemptive. It begins and ends no place. It spends a lot of time thinking about her spouse's alcoholism, which has really nothing at all to do with the narrative of the loss of her child. The book is diffuse. What holds the book together is its raw grief, its melancholic smoldering.

In this regard, the book offers an example of what queer narrative might look like. As E. L. McCallum puts it: "Where there is order, and specifically the kind of dynamic ordering practice that is what stories do, there is queer possibility to pervert order's normativity. That possibility may erupt through failure (infelicitous iteration that provides an opportunistic breach), or through turning or torquing of the order (perversion, aversion, subversion), or it may serve as the deathly obverse of the social (as the sinthomosexual)—there are many modes of queer."²⁸ More specifically, in its melancholic refusal of closure, *Rules* aligns with a mode of

queer narrative that Elizabeth Hannah Hanson characterizes as asexual, as it is not “a misdirection or an excess of narrative movement, but the cessation of movement” (351). It is a narrative, that is, “in which nothing happens” (353).

I am tempted to say what makes Levy’s book a queer memoir of motherhood is that it’s not exactly either of those things. Queerly, it thwarts both queerness and motherhood.

* * *

When I wrote *Texas Girl*, I struggled most with the middle, the gaping maw of getting pregnant and having what I used to refer to, hyperbolically, as the longest miscarriage in human history. Levy’s came on fast, an unexpected moment in a hotel bathroom. Mine began with a few drops of blood before I’d even taken a home pregnancy test, and then more, a trickling down my leg onto the bathroom tile, then the black hole on the sonogram, a shot of methotrexate, eventually a D&C. The whole thing went on until the end of the first trimester, which is to say about eight weeks after I’d learned I was pregnant and started worrying about loss. When it came time to write this experience, years later even, I didn’t know how. What was there to say? I bled a lot. I cried. Nothing really *happened*. I thought of the “Time Passes” section of Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*. There is a different sort of time that passes during sustained grief. It is horribly aching slow. It wipes out everything else. That winter I lost a child. I cried. I smashed glass on my porch. I drank, rum and coke mostly, because I could. My doctor said my body had been through a lot. It needed to heal. She forced me to take months off from the forward arc of trying to conceive. She forced me to stop, to wallow in my grief. Melancholia thwarts the forward movement of narrative.

Once, when I was actively trying to conceive, I lived by the calendar, the hormonal circularity of women’s lives, FSH, LH, E2, P4, around and around we go. Each month contained two parts, separated by the moment of possibility, the moment with my legs in stirrups and a vial of sperm spun in a lab. Then nothing. Months of nothing but blood and deep sorrow. The narrative of reproduction is the narrative of narrative; the narrative of loss simply isn’t. It only makes sense as a stopping point, a complication within a larger narrative; but what if it comes to nothing? What if, at the end, there is no marriage, no baby, no lesson learned other than sometimes life is absofuckinglutely horrible? What if *The Rules Do Not Apply*?

* * *

If my analysis seeks to carve out space for an emergent genre of the queer mother memoir, I do so with awareness of the pragmatic, as well as political, need to do so. What work does it do to treat a group of texts *as* queer

mother memoir? To understand infertility as queer experience? How does this framework help us better understand the work of these texts as well as help reach the individuals who are best served by and most interested in them? That is, I situate Levy's book in the context of this archive because it reflects on its own relation to motherhood, reproductive loss, queerness, and narrative, but I do want to be clear that it is worth being self-conscious about the question of what happens when we read Levy's work *as* queer mother memoir, particularly as it is not largely "about" queer motherhood, or even queer conception and maternity. In fact, the sections devoted to Levy's pregnancy take up very few pages of the book, though it is centrally about reproductive loss on a larger scale. One might ask if the queerest queer mother memoirs are not in fact mother memoirs at all.

If, as I've suggested through this analysis most queer mother memoirs are structured in a way that mimes hetero memoirs, others—like Levy's—blow it apart. A queer infertility/baby loss memoir is doubly, if not triply, queer. It fails at baby making; it fails at proper narrative ends. I'm interested in this narrative breakdown as performance of loss, the expression of maternal desire. To put a sharper point on it, Levy's memoir is a melancholic text, one that never arrives at closure, that smolders in meaningless loss, that evades language and narrative.

From the outset, Levy explores the ways in which her own story is atypical (as the title proclaims, "the rules do not apply"); she is not interested in domesticity or traditional women's roles. She writes, "I was writing about an unconventional kind of female life. What does it mean to be a woman? What are the rules? What are your options and encumbrances? I wanted to tell stories that answered, or at least asked, those questions."²⁹ She connects these questions to ambivalence about motherhood and marriage (even gay marriage). As she puts it, "I cared about marriage being too normal, too American, too confining for my fantasy of a life" (62). Early on Levy addresses her ambivalence about becoming a mother as well as sets up the potential conflict between adventure and motherhood, between endless possibility and foreclosed options: "To become a mother, I feared, was to relinquish your status as the protagonist of your own life. Your questions were answered, your freedom was gone, your path would calcify in front of you. And yet it still pulled at me. Being a professional explorer would become largely impossible if I had a child, but having a kid seemed in many ways like the wildest possible trip" (9). She continues to worry about the sort of mother she might be, and what motherhood

would do to her: “I was afraid would be an awful mother. And I was afraid of being grounded, sessile—stuck in one spot for twenty years of oboe lessons and math homework” (11). Here, motherhood is imagined as stifling and cloistered, rendered as a child’s punishment (“grounded”). Beyond the typical concerns of individuals who contemplate parenthood, Levy’s orientation toward normative domesticity and gender is rendered as atypical and queer, at least within the rhetoric of the book.

While Levy explicitly dismisses the term “heteronormative” as “a made-up word from the land of academic absurdity” (62) (ahem), she highlights the ways that her story departs from the normative structures of stories, most centrally their endings, which, as Valerie Rohy explains, function as “sites for the consolidation or recuperation of the story’s original or hoped-for social and political equilibrium in which the characters’ desires can be shown to accommodate the needs of society.”³⁰ Such endings include “orgasm, death, marriage, victory, salvation, the production of something.”³¹ More specifically, as Leigh Gilmore and other scholars of autobiographical texts have noted, trauma memoirs often end with something redemptive.³² Hope. Optimism. They are productive, if not also reproductive. It is within these trends of narrative writ large that the trajectory of Levy’s book takes on significance. What happens in it? How is it structured? And how does its structure connect to its queerness? How does it *end*?

On the level of content as well as structure, Levy struggles with questions of agency and privilege, assuming that “Nothing really bad could happen to me in my movie, because I was the protagonist” (47). Through statements such as this one, Levy positions herself as the author of both her life and life narrative. And, as with other memoirs I have explored in this book, the act of narrating—either aloud or on the page—is fundamentally connected to considering, and then building, a life with children. In short, can Levy imagine life differently from dominant narrative and cultural scripts? She continues, “Women of my generation were given the lavish gift of our own agency by feminism—a belief that we could decide for ourselves how to live, what would become of us. Writers may be particularly susceptible to this outlook, because we are accustomed to the power of authorship. (Even if you write nonfiction, you still control how the story unfolds.) Life was complying with my story” (69). The past tense here is significant. Life *was complying* with the story that Levy had told herself; the trauma at the center of the book, beyond the death of

Levy's son, is her loss of agency as narrator and author. In this way, Levy drafts a narrative of undoing. Of unparalleled loss.

Fast forward through the first hundred fifty pages of the book: Levy marries a woman who, it turns out, is an alcoholic. They undertake a project to stop drinking, or at least Levy does, and they decide to have a baby. Situating her story as distinct from that of friends who have used IVF and struggled with infertility, Levy chooses a friend as a sperm donor and gets pregnant quickly and easily. She travels to Mongolia on assignment, a last adventure, at nineteen weeks. Others question her decision. She goes anyway, with her doctor's blessing. Naturally in Mongolia, everything falls apart. This is the central turn of the book.

I'm going quickly through the plot, but I do not mean to be glib. In this critical chapter, which elaborates on her award-winning essay "Thanksgiving in Mongolia," Levy suffers a placental abruption midway through her second trimester and gives birth to her son, still weeks away from the earliest threshold for fetal viability. When she returns from the trip, already devastated by loss, her spouse enters rehab; then they break up, and she loses her home in the process. It is not an overstatement to say she has nothing left. Her life has been undone and, with it, an understandable narrative.

In the wake of this experience, Levy struggles, centrally, with language. What happened in Mongolia? Was she a mother? Did she lose a baby? What language accurately encapsulates her experience of having a miscarriage, in her second trimester, the experience of giving birth alone on a bathroom floor at a hotel in Mongolia? When she talks to others about the experience, her language is jarring. "Of course, I was not supposed to say *the baby*. I wasn't supposed to even think it. He was not someone who slept and played; we did not have routines; he had not established preferences or facial expressions. But the statement *I had a miscarriage* did not feel like the truth" (151). She asks, "Was it not a statement of fact that I had given birth on the bathroom floor of the Blue Sky Hotel in Mongolia and watched my son live and die?" (151). Much as the writer Marly Swick asks in her story "A Hole in the Language," "Why was there no word like widow for the mother of a dead child," we lack adequate language for experiences like Levy's. We lack adequate narrative structures. In many ways, Levy's is a bad book, violating our expectations of what narrative should do. I read it like one might watch a car wreck.

Memoir often, though not always, takes the form of something redemptive; mother memoirs often end with conception or pregnancy, with

babies. Every other memoir discussed in this book comes to a legible “happy ending.” Levy’s opens into question marks. What is the story of reproductive loss, of wanting and waiting to be a mother, but not yet becoming one? What is the shape of the (queer) infertility narrative? Is it a narrative at all? It looks, I think, a great deal like Levy’s.

As the book explores and performs, Levy finds herself outside narrative and life norms. In the wake of incalculable loss, she needs to author a new life story: “For the first time in my life, I have no plan” (204). There is no forward motion, only stasis. “Also,” she writes, “*I want my son*. I want to feel his mouth on my breast. I want to teach him. [...] I will never know another day when he isn’t missing, missed. I want my son. But I can’t have him” (204). “I want to be fertile,” she says (205). I want. I want. Levy’s verbs mark her desire, but they do not plot a clear course for her future. The narrative goes nowhere, stalls out. It is a narrative of melancholia, rather than mourning, that puts pressure on our very understandings of what narrative should do. “If,” as Judith Roof writes, “there is no end we normally identify as an end—orgasm, death, marriage, victory, salvation, the production of something (insight, a child, another story), the story itself, knowledge, identity)—we ask ‘Is that all there is’ and regard the apparently truncated story as ironic, as an unsatisfying failure, as metanarrative commentary on narrative, or no story at all.”³³ Or, more precisely, according to Dana Seitler, “How do we account for narratives that function to disorganize the life narrative and its imperative for order and sequentiality.”³⁴

In the book’s final chapter, Levy leaves for Africa to meet the South African doctor who took care of her the night of her son’s birth and death (what writer Monica LeMoine has aptly called “dearth” to describe her own stillbirth), who serves as witness to the experience. Contrary to the typical order of things, Levy does not marry and then get pregnant, give birth, and live happily ever after. She gets pregnant, her son dies, her marriage falls apart, she connects with the one person who does not need her explanatory narrative to know what happened that night. The ending is uncertain but also rooted in her trauma. “Maybe. Maybe I would get a great story from this trip—the best I’d ever written. Maybe not. Maybe I would fall in love again, and I would still get to be a mother. Or maybe it was too late, and I had already chosen, inadvertently and incrementally, to be something else. In writing you can always change the ending or delete a chapter that isn’t working. Life is uncooperative, impartial, incontestable” (206). The knowledge produced in the book is that life is not in fact

an easily controllable, neatly ordered narrative. She cannot in fact change her story; she has lost agency as protagonist. Her story doesn't make sense within available models of narrative closure. But such "questions about closure" that Levy's book asks "are, themselves, queer questions," Seidler explains, "if we understand dominant heterosexualized forms as the limiting norm for what gets to count as a livable life story in the first place."³⁵ Maybe, maybe. Maybe the question mark, uncertainty, the present rather than the future, is the shape of queer narrative. Maybe.³⁶

* * *

Begin again. On the front cover of Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* is the image of a dead bird embryo. It is many things: an image that doesn't make me want to read the book, profoundly alienating, but also, significantly, an embryo. Here Halberstam locates failure not in the abstract but in the experience of reproductive loss specifically. It doesn't take long for me to see a human embryo and a profound image of infertility, stalled/dead family building. Yet for Halberstam there is also something productively *queer* in the idea of failure.

I am struck here and elsewhere by the no-man's land of the infertility patient who is alienated from that strange world of heteronormativity on the one hand and also the dominant rhetoric of anti-reproductive queer studies on the other. As Craven puts it, "This produces multiple layers of invisibility for bereaved LGBTQ parents as they combat the well-documented cultural silence surrounding reproductive loss and heteronormative assumptions about who should have children, as well as the political silencing of queer family-making efforts that do not always produce a 'happy ending.'"³⁷

* * *

Begin again. I have been working on this chapter for months, ordering it, reordering it. It's hard work emotionally. Makes me think about things I'd rather not think about. Levy's story sits uncomfortably because it doesn't provide the reader an easy out—no marriage, no baby, no meaning, just deep, deep sorrow. Yet, following Alexandra Kimball, I want to suggest the important work of Levy's narrative as a critical part of a feminist politics of grief (or the story of grief as feminist politics). Simply saying: *this happened*. Our stories are not abstract but concrete lived reality. They are also an opportunity for writers to claim ownership of their experience, to write a counternarrative.

In this vein, I want to suggest the potential work of the infertility memoir, one that explores not the happy-ever-after success narrative of the individual or couple who eventually conceives (the normalizing narrative that uses infertility merely as a detour toward its inevitable end) but rather the narrative of failure, queer reproduction, revealing the promises of heteronormativity to be a fraud. Queer reproductive memoirs serve as corrective lenses against both the fictive depictions of infertility and childlessness on the one side and easy queer conception and homonormativity on the other.

Queer mother memoirs function as theoretical insofar as they offer a critical (in both senses of the word) alternative to abstract queer and feminist theory that refuses to look at maternal desire in a serious way but, rather, vilifies the infertile queer who wants to conceive. In this way, these memoirs offer an implicit—and sometimes explicit—critique of anti-reproductive theory. Much as academic feminism has been slow to explore motherhood, it is even less welcoming of work on infertility. As Alexandra Kimball describes in *The Seed: Infertility Is a Feminist Issue*, despite the fact that infertility is profoundly connected to gender, “infertility has never been fully understood as an issue for women as a class, let alone as a feminist issue.” More than a lack of understanding, Kimball characterizes it as an outright “refusal of feminist policy and culture to recognize and support the labour of infertile women.”³⁸

* * *

Begin again. The narrative of narrative and the narrative of human reproduction are inexorably twinned, working toward a predictable life journey, a predictable life story. The day my child was conceived I read John Barth’s story “Night Sea Journey” and thought about the journey of the swimming sperm, their swimming their reason for existence, swimming toward death, swimming toward the egg that would allow one of them to commence a new life in the moment of fertilization. The sperm stands in for the man, living his life in miniature. As biological organisms, we live and die to reproduce. The narrative of narrative and the narrative of sexuality appear to be one and the same, wound around each other, a double helix of DNA. It is a story I know well: on day 14, the second blue line on the test strip; on day 21, a glowing balloon of the gestational sac on the monitor; on day 28, the visibility of the heartbeat, pumping the embryo’s way toward development; if the story goes as it should at the end of nine months, a human being emerges, commencing a life of interdependence. But what when the narrative fails? On day 1 or day 28, or even after a full nine months?

As Linda Layne discusses in *Motherhood Lost: A Feminist Analysis of Pregnancy Loss*, reproductive loss is an unspoken truth of (female) bodily experience. And it is an experience that is as unnarratable as it is ungrievable. Abstract more than concrete—it is the idea of the child, the potential

of the embryo lost. If, for Freud, the process of “normal” mourning relies on working through memories of the lost object, what exactly is to be worked through when the loss is an embryo as small as a thimble, or even a clump of cells invisible to the naked eye? Such losses of what Freud calls an “unreal” kind are often the most difficult to work through and therefore difficult to narrate. A successful narrative, in psychoanalytic terms, depends on successful mourning; it is teleological, working toward integration, redemption, self-knowledge.³⁹ It is not stumped or stunted in the no-where space of a woman who isn’t quite a mother. There is no word for her. There is no story to tell. Memoirs of reproductive loss, like Levy’s, like mine, wrestle with this silence.

* * *

When it happened to me. When the blood splattered like rain on the bathroom tile. When the doctor wrenched him from me, too small to be seen on the sonogram and big enough to change my whole world. When I gave birth to berries of blood instead of a boy. When my breasts flooded with milk and I had no child to feed. When I spent my thirtieth birthday pregnant and not pregnant all at once, drinking pink drinks because I could and nauseated because my body still thought itself fecund. When it happened to me, all I could do was close my office door and cry. And then I talked, constantly, words accumulated on paper and over the phone, and there was no story, or there were only other stories in place of the one story I could not, still cannot quite, tell, as much as I try. Now the miscarriage is a lyrical interruption in the predictable reproductive narrative that I have written, a memoir called *Texas Girl*, the site of my world lost and found. My children are twenty-one and thirteen. But sometimes, still, I go back to the June day long ago, my doctor showing me a picture of my empty uterus. It is a poem. And there is no story, just a file folder inches thick.

NOTES

1. With Craven, I use the term “reproductive loss” broadly to consider “experiences of loss during the process of forming a family,” including infertility, miscarriage, and stillbirth (*Reproductive Losses*, 33).
2. Craven, *Reproductive Losses*, 24.
3. See Robin E. Jensen, *Infertility: Tracing the History of a Transformative Term* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016). Jensen provides an important discussion of the historical development of the term “infertility.” The problem of this prevailing definition for single individuals and

LGBTQ couples is something my co-editors and I take up in *Infertilities, A Curation*. Recently, SART proposed a more expansive understanding of infertility that recognizes individuals regardless of sexuality or status as a couple.

4. Kimball, *The Seed*, 31
5. *Ibid.*, 32.
6. Although it is largely described as a decision limited to abortion access, the Dobbs decision of 2022 has undeniable ripple effects for all aspects of reproductive healthcare, including the use of IVF and other assisted reproductive technologies, the disposition of human embryos, and miscarriage care.
7. As Belle Boggs notes, infertile individuals are often portrayed as “needy, self-focused, materialistic, unnatural” within popular culture. See *The Art of Waiting: On Fertility, Medicine, and Motherhood* (Graywolf, 2016), 44. Alexandra Kimball’s *The Seed: Infertility as a Feminist Issue* likewise explores the representations of infertile women in popular culture; in the tradition of Susan Faludi’s reading of films and television in *Backlash*, she considers Tina Fey’s *Baby Mama* alongside Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, including the 2017 Trump-era Hulu production. Kimball argues that surrogacy, in particular, is depicted in ways that vilify infertile women.
8. Caveat: The books discussed in this chapter foreground heteronormativity of the clinic but do not meaningfully engage issues of race or class. In this regard, these memoirs considered here—like broader discourses surrounding infertility—testify to privilege in terms of socioeconomic class and presumed whiteness and, as Robin Jensen notes, reflect neoliberal ideas about the infertile subject under capitalism.
9. Roof, *Come As You Are*, xxiv.
10. While recent work in queer narrative theory, including that of Teagan Bradway, questions the use of the term “anti-narrative” to ask how narrative “elicits, arranges, and sustains queer bonds in and across time” (“Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form,” 713), I continue to find value in anti-narrative, as defined by Robert Scholes, as a term that overtly calls attention to the ideologies of dominant narrative forms and seek to challenge them, in contrast to “non-narrative.” As evidenced in my first two chapters, there is arguably less structural variation in queer mother memoirs than many of the more experimental texts that are used to explore “queer narrative,” as memoirs are tightly plotted, except insofar as they fail at reproductive ends—the delays, detours, miscarriages and losses—which is the focus of this chapter.

11. Maria Novotny, "The ART of Infertility: Finding Friendship & Healing After Reproductive Loss," *Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine* 4, no. 1 (2019): 5.
12. Although Freud rethinks the relation between mourning and melancholia at several points in his career, the seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia" sets up a critical distinction between a completed (healthy) grieving process and a pathological (melancholic) one. As he characterizes it in "Mourning and Melancholia" and "The Ego and the Id," melancholia refers both to a necessary stage in grief-work and a narcissistic fixation on loss, characterized by an arrested process of mourning. The melancholic will not give up the love relation, even though that love is inextricable from feelings of guilt, the belief "that the mourner is himself to blame for the loss of the love object" (251). It is useful, in this regard, as a means of understanding the complexity of grief surrounding reproductive loss which, per one significant study by Ali Domar and collaborators, is as stressful as a cancer diagnosis and often leads to long-term mental health struggles, particularly when it doesn't result in conception. See especially Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. James Strachey (Hogarth, 1953), 237–58; Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, trans. James Strachey (Hogarth, 1953), 1–66.
13. Novotny writes, "Queering the rhetoric of infertility, I believe, may queer infertile women's perceptions of their infertile bodies, challenging discourses that systemically label the infertile body as non-normative of deficient" ("Failing Infertility," 187).
14. Jennifer Berney, *The Other Mothers: Two Women's Journey to Find the Family that Was Always Theirs* (Sourcebooks, 2021), 7. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
15. Mamo, *Queering Reproduction*, 159.
16. Craven, *Reproductive Losses*, 18.
17. See Julien S. Murphy, "Should Lesbians Count as Infertile Couples?: Antilebian Discrimination in Assisted Reproduction," in *Queer Families, Queer Politics: Challenging Culture and the State*, eds. Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann (Columbia University Press, 2011), 182–200. Murphy suggests that an infertility diagnosis affords heterosexual couples who use medically-assisted reproduction multiple benefits, "benefits that lesbians lack and that constitute forms of antilebian discrimination" (183) while also cautioning that they are "better off seeking those benefits in other ways" than through diagnosis (197).
18. Suzy Becker, *One Good Egg: An Illustrated Memoir* (Bloomsbury, 2013), 80. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

19. Ramzi Fawaz, "A Queer Sequence: Comics as a Disruptive Medium," *PMLA* 134, no. 3 (2019): 589.
20. They are, rather: 1—Becker, Suzy. 2 Infertility, Female—Patients—United States—Biography. 3. Mothers—United States—Biography. 4. Fertilization, in vitro, Human—Popular Works.
21. To be clear, there are some exceptions of infertility memoirs that do not have happy endings, such as Pamela Tsigdinos's *Silent Sorority*, which focuses on infertility experienced by a heterosexual cisgender women. My co-edited collection *Infertilities, A Curation* also provides a range of "endings" to infertility experience and reconsiderations of the nature of "success."
22. Roof, *Come As You Are*, xiv.
23. Michelle Tea, *Knocking Myself Up: A Memoir of My (In)Fertility* (William Morrow, 2022), 8. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
24. The most recent statistics from SART show a national average of 51% for live births per egg retrieval for women under thirty-five, and as low as 4% for women over forty-two.
25. Kimball's book *The Seed: Infertility Is a Feminist Issue* offers a scathing indictment of the large scale feminist erasure of the experience of infertility: it is, she says "functionally systematic: the refusal of feminist policy and culture to recognize and support the labour of infertile women" (13).
26. Boggs, *The Art of Waiting*, 19.
27. As Leslie Jamison puts it succinctly in her (mostly positive) review: "For all my admiration, though, I never once hoped her essay would become a book. It was such a perfect essay. Why would it need to become anything else?" See Jamison's "A Memoir of Motherhood Lost," *New York Times*, April 3, 2017.
28. McCallum, "Thinking through Queer Narrative Forms," 367.
29. Ariel Levy, *The Rules Do Not Apply: A Memoir* (Random House, 2017), 8. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
30. Rohy, "Queer Narrative Theory," 599–600.
31. Roof, *Come As You Are*, 6.
32. See Leigh Gilmore, "American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-Help and Redemption on Oprah's Couch," *Biography* 33, no. 4 (2010): 657–79. For example, describing the self-help memoir genre, Gilmore describes an "endlessly renewable narrative template" in which "the narrative reproduction of redemption creates a preference for certain kinds of narratives that seem to substantiate through repetition the impossible access to mobility promised by the American dream" (658).
33. Roof, *Come As You Are*, 6.
34. Dana Seitler, "Suicidal Tendencies: Notes Toward a Queer Narratology," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 4 (2019): 601.

35. Ibid., 602.
36. I do not want to admit that I have, of course, done a Google search on Levy, and it appears in fact that Levy does marry Dr. John from the end of her book, that her “happy ending” is in fact straight, that she has in fact done multiple rounds of IVF to try to conceive again. Perhaps she will write another memoir about that—I suspect that she will—but it is important to me to read the end of *The Rules Do Not Apply* as it is published. It is also important to me that for the context of that book, she is queer identified, married to a woman, not a man, “socially” infertile before the experience of second trimester miscarriage. I am after all writing about books, not about people. But curiosity got the best of me.
37. Craven, *Reproductive Losses*, 2.
38. Kimball, *The Seed*, 9, 13.
39. As Roof puts it, discussing Freud, the “end of the whole story becomes the answer, the goal of analysis, and the possibility of health” (*Come As You Are*, 11).



Queer Mother: Mothering Queerly

Although it has been more than two decades, I still remember clearly the spring day that I took home pregnancy test after home pregnancy test, followed by blood test after blood test, that told me I was going to be a mother. I'd already had one miscarriage, was worried about another, but also clung to the possibility that I would have, at the end of nine months, "a take home baby." I think in retrospect those not-quite nine months were probably the happiest in my life. Of course, it is easy to *mother* when all you have to do is keep yourself fed and go to doctor's appointments and have basic common sense.

I have been actively single-mothering for more than twenty years, from the first moments of infancy, now through the third year of university. I have *verbed* my kids: breastfed them, cooked for them, bathed them, changed them, rocked them to sleep; I wore each of them strapped to my body for more hours than I can count; I have taken them to the doctors' offices, driven them here, there, and everywhere, done loads upon loads of laundry, wiped vomit from the floor, the bed, the car seat. I have talked with them about problems, big and small. I have helped them with math homework, with drafting emails, with applying to college. I tried (unsuccessfully) to throw baseballs to hit and played four-square during a pandemic. I bought them things they needed and gifts they wanted. We baked bread and cookies and cakes together, played our own version of Chopped.

A mother is so many things. *Mother* is who I am and what I do, noun and verb simultaneously.

As I write, I remember that video ad campaign from American Greetings around 2014 which used a series of fake job interviews describing motherwork, informing the “interviewees” that they needed to be available to work twenty-four hours a day, and the position was unpaid. (The goal was of course to sell greeting cards for Mother’s Day, not critique American motherhood.) Although none of the actions described above is fundamentally a “mother’s” job, of course, it is also true that such labor, largely undertaken by individuals who identify as mothers, is not granted the same social status as these same tasks undertaken by individuals who identify as fathers. If, as this book has made clear, we can think of mothering in at least three ways—as genetic mother, gestational mother, and social mother—this chapter focuses on the representation of those who identify as mothers and who also engage in carework, historically performed by women/mothers and devalued as such. Via the memoirs I curate here, the argument of this chapter, simply, is that motherwork matters and that it is embodied labor, undertaken by individuals who identify as mothers in intersectional contexts. That is, as Amber Musser and Linda Blum write, “care emerges as a site of specific, context-dependent engagement with power” (1). Gender and marital status are two such contexts; mothering, then, is not the same thing as parenting. This is, I think, a deeply anti-patriarchal argument, as well as a queer one.

This book has considered memoirs as archive and object of study. Gesturing toward a conclusion, I want to suggest that they are also a technology and theory of family outside heteropatriarchy. They are pedagogical and political, both critiquing patriarchal motherhood and pointing to new directions in understanding kinship, family formation, and carework. Andrea O’Reilly’s essay “The Motherhood Memoir and the New Momism: Biting the Hand that Feeds You” adeptly argues that the rise of mother memoirs from the 1990s on—the time-period considered in this book—largely supports rather than challenges patriarchal motherhood. Although they might wrestle with the ideology of intensive mothering, O’Reilly contends, on the whole traditional “momoirs” do not have enough critical distance to provide a true revolution and way out. In short, they don’t go far enough. Citing Ivana Brown, O’Reilly pinpoints three major elements of mother memoir: (1) “emphasis on gender difference in parenting”; (2) the significance of bodily experiences of motherhood; and (3) the “Natural mother” myth, which assumes women’s superiority and ability as “natural

caregivers.”¹ In contrast, *queer* mother memoirs, such as those discussed in this archive, problematize all three of these elements in different ways. That is, if O’Reilly calls for “more such memoir writers if we hope to move the genre from a rant to a revolution,” particularly those memoirs that “do away with the new momism and its naturalization of gender inequities,” this archive of queer mother memoirs heeds O’Reilly’s call.² They allow us to tell new stories about family and care in the twenty-first century.

* * *

Some critical context: I am writing in the waning years of the coronavirus pandemic. The immediate crisis is over, yet the virus continues to rage, and the effects persist. That first pandemic summer, when I was trying to work on this book, I had no childcare other than the two hours per day when I paid my then sixteen-year-old to watch their younger sibling so I could get something, anything, done. I remember viscerally the punched-in-the-gut feeling when it was announced that school would be remote, as I tried to imagine teaching university classes via Zoom while my two children, the younger of whom was eight and not yet on medication for ADHD, “learned” from home. I have said many times, only half joking, that if during my initial consultation my reproductive endocrinologist had asked me about how I would survive a global pandemic as a single mother of two, I might have made a different choice. When I chose motherhood, I knew it would be hard but could not have possibly predicted the precise ways that it would challenge me.

By that summer, research studies came out noting that male academics were submitting more papers than ever while women faculty (mothers) were not.³ That is, the pandemic exacerbated the “maternal wall.” This is not surprising given Mary Ann Mason and Marc Goulden’s conclusion that there is a “baby gap” that strongly advantages fathers and disadvantages mothers in academe. And in this vein, motherhood, Amy Westervelt has clarified, “is the most persistent part of the gender pay gap.”⁴ I highlight these findings because they sketch the social context in which we understand both the identity of mothers and the actions of mothering in the United States. The majority of carework done in the US is done by individuals who identify as mothers; it is devalued, under or unpaid. And for those who work outside the home, their paid employment is *also* comparatively underpaid. This is the double whammy of American motherhood. Thus, while queer theory and trans studies provide us with critical frameworks through which to understand the problem of essentialism, matricentric feminism provides a necessary reminder of the intersectional identities that undergird carework. That is, there are important lessons to

be learned by exploring the ways that queer *mothers* and motherwork undertaken in private domestic contexts complicate both essentialist and gender-neutral readings of reproductive labor. The figure of the queer mother, as she narrates her own experience via memoir, offers an instructive theoretical lens. Taking a cue from Jane Juffer's book that characterizes single mothers as "domestic intellectuals," I want to suggest that queer mothers use memoirs not only to give narrative to and theorize queer motherhood but also as a site of pedagogy, doing significant intellectual and political work.⁵

The preceding three chapters have explored queer family building efforts from (pre)conception through birth. Queer mother memoirs foreground maternal desire and explore the nature of maternal identity, as separate from, yet fundamentally linked to, heteropatriarchal assumptions and norms. Memoirs serve as nuanced technologies of, or vehicles for, rewriting and reconceptualizing family even as (some) mobilize arguments for the "normative" nature of their families. They make private family building efforts public, moving out from the domestic sphere, offering competing narratives to those presented in mainstream media, as well as fictional representations. This final chapter continues to move outward to consider the practices of queer motherhood and acts of care undertaken within queer family. Queer mother memoirs wrestle with the complex reality of building family and carework undertaken outside the context of the heteronuclear family; as such they are critical sites of theorizing maternal desire, identity, practices, and labor.

* * *

Written during the early days of the pandemic, Angela Garbes's book *Essential Labor* (2022) makes an important argument about the centrality and value of carework, which, she notes, is un- or underpaid and often undertaken by women of color. Garbes's introductory chapter claims that caregiving (also termed "essential labor") is not essentially women's work but can be undertaken meaningfully by persons of all genders; I do not disagree. Yet there is a telling slipperiness in Garbes's language. She does not actually say that "carework" can be done by all but rather: "The terrain of *mothering* is not limited to the people who give birth to children; it is not defined by gender."⁶ She continues, "My perspective has grown to consider the work of raising children as *mothering*, an action that includes people of all genders and nonparents alike" (9). "Rather than viewing care work as characteristic of the noun 'motherhood,'" Garbes says, "I now see it as the action of *mothering*, which includes anyone who is engaged in 'the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life'" (9).

On the surface, Garbes offers an inclusive, well-intentioned argument, in line with conversations regarding de-gendering reproductive labors, such as birth and nursing. But in this expansive redefinition, both rhetorically and politically Garbes has taken the mother out of mothering.

That is, Garbes's rhetorical slipperiness, which equates "mothering" with a series of actions that can be done by anyone who cares for children in any context, is, I would argue, rather than inclusive, illustrative of the profound anti-maternal bias in dominant heteropatriarchal culture, undertaken even by those who claim to be feminist and purport to value mothers. To be sure, I can easily agree that a father or nonparent such as a babysitter engages in "the practice of creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life" without describing that work as "mothering" (indeed, the verbs are already in the sentence!). But, if making an argument for valuing such work can only occur when undertaken by fathers and *nonmothers*, well, need I say more?

* * *

Beyond its function as a queer pregnancy memoir, as discussed in Chapter Two, Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings* begins to define what queer mothering might look like at the turn of the twenty-first century. Several critical passages in the book situate Moraga's family in public spaces, allowing her to reflect on and respond to how her family is read by others—pushing back against homophobia while also resisting respectability politics and domesticinormativity. In this regard, arguably some of the most meaningful work of Moraga's text occurs in the sections of the book that detail hospital visits during her son's three-month NICU stay. Within the hospital space, which can stand in place for heteropatriarchal institutions writ large, Moraga found herself embraced as the child's biological mother, while Ella was not legible and given the same rights as "co-mother." In response to the hospital staff interrogating Ella in regards to her relationship with the baby, Moraga remarks that she "can't protect her from the pain she experiences each time they make her the outlaw" (76). While Moraga feels that, as "the dyke in the matter" she is "the one who's supposed to be on the outside," in this context, as "Rafael's biological mother [she is] surrounded by acceptance at the hospital, until Ella walks in and [they] are again the lesbian couple, the queer moms—exoticized or ostracized" (76). On the one hand this passage reminds us of the way that pregnancy/motherhood rewrites Moraga's body as normative—a definition she resists—rather than "outlaw," at least in her understanding. Her postpartum body and legal status as Rafael's biological mother is legible within dominant narratives of family; despite her feminine appearance, Ella by

contrast becomes illegible in this situation. But even as Moraga discusses *not* fitting in, this section of the book also works rhetorically to frame their family situation for the reader; here they are quite simply mothers trying to care for their child at his most vulnerable. The hospital scenes then offer a site to push back against the “othering” that happens to their family because of its composition.

Later, by contrast, as she discusses life with Rafael outside the hospital, Moraga’s memoir reflects on the nature of her mothering, suggesting its radicality and queer potential. In a key passage, Moraga sets her family apart from what she takes to be white middle-class models of intensive parenting that are sanctioned by cultural, legal, and even medical institutions; she says, “I resent these white male pediatrician-types with their nurse-wives and seven kids ‘bonding’ their way into my Mexican psyche” (87).⁷ Here, as elsewhere in the book, Moraga positions herself as an outsider in terms of power of sexuality, gender, and race. From the book’s subtitle, *Waiting* defines Moraga’s mothering as queer and anti-normative.

Some of the critical work of Moraga’s book in terms of its defining queer motherhood arises in its final pages, as it extends past the usual temporal domain of the pregnancy memoir, which rarely proceeds beyond the so-called fourth trimester of early infancy. Although that section of the book is quite short, at under ten pages, Moraga incorporates a discussion of Rafael’s preschool years to explore concerns about the ways she will navigate her writing life and mothering life, the particular pressures of childrearing on her relationship with Ella, and the implications of raising a child in a racist, homophobic culture. Against the hospital and other public spaces Moraga defines as straight and white, she uses Provincetown—what she terms a “gay resort” (102)—as a site of belonging and recognition for her queer family. Although Moraga remarks on its whiteness, she also highlights the ability to “walk the streets here unafraid with the baby on my back and Ella in hand” (101). In these references, she refuses to capitulate both to heteropatriarchal norms, as well as its opposition to the anti-social thesis of much queer theory. Given the timing of its writing and publication, the book is very much aware of the AIDS crisis and situates her family building efforts alongside the deaths of beloved gay men (in this sequence, Moraga references the death of writer Paul Monette’s lover, for example [101]). In this way, she substitutes a story of queer life for queer death; her becoming mother is explicitly a political act.

Despite her concerns about homophobia referenced above, Moraga makes an implicit argument for the radical potential of her queer family. Rather than solidifying them in a domesticnormative nuclear family with two parents and a child, Rafael's arrival seemingly challenges Moraga's romantic partnership. Discussing some pressure on her relationship as a result of "babycare," Ella also moves out of their shared home (102), which can be read as the need to redefine space for queer family to thrive.⁸ Throughout the memoir, Moraga clarifies that she does not understand the call for gay marriage; "We are not domesticated loving. Keep your marriages," she writes, "I want the freedom of this unpredictable desire. I want to stay awake" (111). The baby is not in opposition to this goal; as Moraga's memoir consistently shows, reproduction is not coterminous with domesticnormativity. Rather, the book provides one of many models of what a queer, mother-headed family might look like, one that is deliberately undertaken and "unpredictable." Or, as Chris Roulston says of queer family forms: "rather than positioning queer parenting families as the exemplars of homonormativity—as much of queer theory has tended to do—they reveal the capacious heterogeneity of normative structures themselves, particularly with regard to how we imagine the family."⁹ In this way, the final moment of the book presents an image of such reimagined queer love: Moraga bringing "[her] woman coffee in bed" and "strok[ing] the silk of [her] son's hair" (127). It is a beautiful image of queer domesticity, one that pushes against predictable scripts for family life. Once Ella and Moraga have enjoyed separate homes, they are able to reinvigorate their relationship, as detailed in the epilogue. "We are what a couple looks like," Moraga asserts, "We are what a family looks like" (125). Throughout, Moraga's book illustrates the tension between the queer and the straight, the immense pressures of domesticity and the pleasures of queer motherhood. The bonds that Moraga describes are both "blood" but also "love"—a chosen family alongside and entangled with genetic or biological kinship bonds. In the end, she explains, "I remain awed by this mystery of how love and blood and home and history and desire coalesce and collide to construct a child's sense of self and family" (125).

* * *

There is a moment in Carla Sameth's *One Day on the Gold Line* (2019) that I particularly love in which she exposes the difficulty of single parenting, presenting an image of a trail of dirty socks and underwear on the floor. Sameth dreamed of parenting long before she was a parent, through six miscarriages and high-risk pregnancy; yet the heteronuclear family is

not the ideal that Sameth imagined. Rather, in this memoir of essays, Sameth refuses the linear success narrative. Instead, she raises question after question. Will she get pregnant? Will she find a happy (queer) partnership? Will her child, who has wrestled with drug addiction, survive into adulthood and beyond? Motherhood in Sameth's book is its own trauma. It is day in day out work. If, as explored in Chapter One, conception stories imagine family into being, Sameth counters fiction with reality. This is a critical part of the book's work. As Stephen Hicks explains, "If we are to represent lesbian/gay/queer parents' lives in all their complexity, then it seems vital that we pay attention to the quotidian, the doing of everyday life and the settings in which it occurs."¹⁰

This counternarrative element is a fundamental part of the queer nature of Sameth's memoir. From conception on, she consistently takes the idealized heteronuclear family and turns it on its head, exposing it to be at best an illusion, at worst a site of violence. But, significantly, Sameth does not hold up queer family as utopian ideal; her lesbian relationships depicted in the book fare no better than her relationship to ex-husband and Raphael's father, Larry. Sameth's book functions as queer mother memoir, thus, only partly because she is a queer-identified woman; the story she tells also functions as overtly counternormative. A few chapters in particular offer glimpses into home life with Carla and Raphael, revealing something other than domestic bliss but the mundane reality and difficulties of parenting. Discussing the cliché of "bringing home the bacon" as a single mother, Carla writes, "I was not just failing in my ability to consistently bring home the bacon, I was also managing to burn it. But who had time to monitor the cooking when doing fifty things at once?"¹¹ This moment, as she is literally burning bacon, serves as neat metonym for the household falling apart, not in a grand way (i.e., Raphael's drug use and overdose) but in terms of day-to-day reality that all parents, single or partnered, straight or gay, experience. During a humorous moment when Carla has a bottle of wine spill from her fridge, she tells us that she "only briefly contemplated licking it up. Way too dirty." Instead, she clarifies, "I did quickly clean up my spill. It wouldn't do to have someone drop by and find a house reeking of burned bacon *and* wine. Hardening oatmeal remained on the table and floor. A path of underwear and other boy clothing cast onto the floor each day snaked around from the living room desk and into Raphael's bedroom" (135). These details, which are meant to be read as decrepit (hardening oatmeal—*eww*) are also the baseline reality of living with children in the home, compounded by solo parenting when, as Brigid

Schulte reminds us, single mothers are among the most time-poor humans on the planet.¹² (I can testify to the oatmeal left too long on the stove and the trail, not of underwear but LEGO and crusty cat food, no matter how many times a day I seem to clean up). Again, Carla exposes (queers?) the shiny magazine image of motherhood, what Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels describe as the “mommy myth,” reminding us that it is that glossy image that’s the problem, not Sameth’s mothering. Yet Sameth also demonstrates an awareness of the cultural pressures to perform normative motherhood, which requires cleaning up the spills before facing judgment from the outside.

While some mainstream mother memoirs replicate such “momist” ideology, Sameth’s memoir (and queer mother memoir more broadly) works hard to undercut the assumptions and failings of intensive motherhood through details. After sketching a fantasy day in the chapter “When Hormones Collide: Part II”—which begins with her child bringing her a latte and “cheerfully” getting dressed, and continuing through meaningful work, playing music, enjoying tea with homemade scones, among other details that feel plucked from Instagram—Carla confesses to feeling “miserable” after a job interview and uncertain about her parenting. She wonders about all she doesn’t know and can’t do: “What didn’t I understand? Why the dishes piled up day after day? And why I tried so hard, and it all felt completely futile on mornings like that?” (144). In essay after essay, details such as these present the complex realities of her contemporary motherhood.

Sameth’s critique and reinvention of the ideal nuclear family peaks in the essay “Road Trip,” during which Carla and sixteen-year-old stepdaughter Serena bring Raphael to an inpatient rehab facility. Throughout the chapter, Sameth pits her desires and fantasies against reality, mobilizing the verbs “fantasized,” “imagined,” “pictured,” and “dreamed.” At the outset, on “a sort of road trip to save Raphael,” she confesses, “I’d always imagined a different kind of road trip with my kids” (164). With the trip providing a handy metaphor for life itself, they confront a number of detours on the way to the facility: “it seemed like this trip was getting longer and longer. I’d lost track of time, but by now we could have driven to Sedona, the Grand Canyon, or even part way to New Mexico. Places I had wanted to take the kids” (166). The fantasy goes on: “I dreamed we would reconnect as a family there, and the demons of addiction would release the hijacked soul of my son, their toxic presence floating far away down the river” (167). Seen here, by situating real familial troubles against

abstract fantasies and maternal desires, this chapter offers an overt counterpoint to the imaginative dreaming that happens during (pre)conception to bring queer families into being. Thus, in the wake of the experience of Raphael's addiction, Carla needs to reconstruct maternal identity to match lived experience. For instance, in the chapter "#Craycray Mom," when Raphael does not want to come home with her and she is unable to help him, she describes herself as "a desperate child-mom" (169), who wants to stay in the facility to be helped for a while; the crisis that Raphael experiences is a crisis of identity for Carla as well. The final chapters of the book thus outline both recovery for Raphael and new identity formation for Carla, as her son both recovers and grows into adulthood. In the aptly titled "Graduation Day at Addiction High," Carla pairs his "graduation" from Renewal Recovery House with his high school graduation that occurs in the same place. Carla, too, needs to figure out her next steps, expanding her identity beyond mother; she tries stand-up comedy at the urging of her therapist and also, in her mid-fifties, begins to pursue her writing career through an MFA "something [she] had contemplated for more than twenty years but found daunting to pursue as a single mom" (179); presented with this near-death experience, she "realize[d] that we need to seize our dreams today" (179). The motherhood she arrives at, with space to nurture her own interests and desires, is not idealized and self-sacrificing but queer.

Writing (and in particular writing *motherhood*, as in this memoir) thus serves as a mechanism through which Carla recovers, going back through earlier iterations of self. This process is demonstrated both literally and metaphorically in the essay toward the end of the book "Paper Weights," in which Carla wrestles with the material of her filing cabinets and discovers that "some of the same things cluttering my mind at age thirteen still do so today: debt, love, family, mortality, worrying" (180). But as the book comes to a close, "little by little" she "began to repair and to rewrite [her] story" (191). Some of this reparation and rewriting is literalized in the act of writing the memoir and in coming to identify as mother to a particular (adult) son. In one of the final pieces, "Some Markers As My Black Son Gets Older"—an essay in a list of twenty-one sections—Sameth raises the central question "*Would I still do it if I knew it would be this hard?* Yes," she admits, "I know I would still have this son" (200). Here, again, Carla chooses not the abstraction of motherhood that she wanted as a young woman struggling with recurrent miscarriage, but the lived reality of single parenting the child she has had with her abusive

ex-husband, a child who is marked racially as what Sameth terms “afro-Jew,” doubly minorized. On the whole, as she navigates the rocky terrain of her family life, Sameth’s book consistently explores the vast differences between her fantasies of motherhood and the complex realities of queer single mothering. That is to say, it uses memoir to theorize the reality of queer life in the contemporary United States.

* * *

For the purposes of claiming the gendered specificity of the verb “mother,” I want to concentrate on Krys Malcolm Belc’s recent book *The Natural Mother of the Child*, published amidst discussion in mainstream media of inclusive terminology for pregnancy, birth, and nursing. Belc’s book is a stunning memoir-in-essays that uses his own experience of gestational parenthood to offer a corrective and counternarrative to essentialist notions that operate in cultural discussions of pregnancy, in medical situations, and in legal documents, including birth certificates. As such, the memoir provides a vital point of entry into a conversation about the limits of language and dominant narratives of family. As the book lays bare, the problem of language that Belc and other transmasculine gestational parents experience is that they identify socially as men and fathers, while they are often, problematically, understood to be mothers biologically and genetically. One of those experiences is elided/erased on legal documents and in culture. In short, there is a lack of adequate language to hold both those experiences simultaneously, because of the deeply held binaristic cultural norms of parenting as well as essentialist logic. Mainstream heteronormative understandings of parenting roles predate reproductive technologies that allow for more complicated conceptualizations of family building and gender, including situations like Belc’s that involve third-party reproduction. And that inadequacy of language has undeniable material and legal consequences, including medical care and parental rights. Belc’s memoir, by contrast, offers a complex, multi-faceted look into gender and parenting from the vantage point of identity, family experience, legal documents and medical care. As such, it makes clear that the binary terms mother and father are wholly inadequate to wrestle with the specificity of nonbinary and trans experiences, and, by extension, suggests the value of reading memoir to apprehend the vitality of queer family life.

Belc’s memoir takes the shape of a brief preamble and six longer linked essays. The first long essay, “The Machine,” discusses his pregnancy with his first biological child, Samson, leading up to birth. The piece foregrounds Belc’s gender identity and the embodied experience of pregnancy,

situating gestation as a central experience in Belc's transition. Among other subjects, "The Machine" considers Belc's history of gender dysphoria and eating disorders, as well as discomfort at the surveillance of fertility/pregnancy care, linked to a series of ultrasounds. Following this line of thought, the essay elucidates the difference between Belc's feelings about his pregnancy in three contexts: alone, with his partner (Anna), and out in public. Similar to earlier memoirists I've considered in this archive, particularly Moraga, Summers, and Jimenez, Belc's feelings about his "masculine pregnancy" were highly fraught. Despite the prevalence of queer families, the assumption that pregnancy is experienced solely by cisgender women persists in culture and in medical care. As Belc comments, "Queer people had children, but I almost never saw pregnant people like me."¹³ In the privacy of their own home, Belc "felt at peace" with "his hands against the baby" growing inside him; yet Belc reads his own body differently outside the context of their home, "aware of the publicness of [his] body, the unexpectedness" (25).

Perhaps not surprisingly, pregnancy functions as a significant turning point in Belc's transition, which reaches a pinnacle in his postpartum experience. Beyond Belc's own identification and gender dysphoria, Samson's birth marks a critical moment for Belc in terms of navigating legal and social systems: "I lay in bed at the birth center. Wrote my name next to *Mother* on his birth certificate. The only approximate space" (110). This moment of claiming himself "mother" is fraught; despite his discomfort with the term, it codifies the real embodied connection that Belc has to his son, both through DNA (his egg) and biology (gestation). Marking the space "father" on a birth certificate, while socially appropriate for Belc's gender identification, would elide their gestational connection, one that is meaningful for Belc. He remarks, "Samson was made inside me, from parts of me, and in many ways the person I am now is made from him, too" (258).

Thus, it is within the legal system of birth certificates and adoption proceedings that Belc most struggles with existing terminology; as Belc says, "My relationship with Samson could be natural without my having to stand up in court and say I was a mother" (217). We do not have language to express this embodied connection for fatherhood. In transitioning, in giving up the term "mother," Belc explains: "There are things one gains by transitioning and the things one loses. There is the new body, the confidence, there is the title *Dad*, the power granted to men. And there is what one loses: the assumption of biological connection" (224). Yet while

the “naturalness” of their connection occurs through Belc’s genetic as well as gestational connection to Samson, this intimacy undoubtedly complicates Belc’s relation to his non-genetic/non-gestational offspring, who were carried by his partner Anna and whom he needs to adopt to have his parental rights acknowledged. Is he a different father to the child to whom he shares that “natural” or biological connection? While Belc’s memoir testifies to the importance of gender-neutral language with which to discuss embodied reproductive experiences, in doing so it also makes clear that embodiment matters. Fatherhood, in legal terms, is genetic and social, not gestational/biological.

Overall, Belc’s memoir beautifully unpacks the complexity of identifying as a man yet also experiencing profound “baby fever,” the desire not only to parent and raise a family but to gestate and nurse offspring. In complicating the cultural linkage of the embodied experiences of pregnancy and cisgender femininity, Belc undoes essentialist logic surrounding reproduction. As he puts it later in the book, “Nothing about being pregnant made me feel feminine. This body is what it is, not quite man, not quite woman, but with the parts to create and sustain life. To expel and care for that life” (192). As Samson’s gestational parent, Belc “had never embraced or used the term *mother*,” a term that filled him with “rage” (217). Yet even after beginning to take testosterone, Belc confesses, “I think about having another baby all the time” (270) and “I like pictures of me pregnant” (271). In this way, Belc’s book points to the need for more nuanced, inclusive discussions of gender in relation to reproductive labors of all kinds.

At key moments in the memoir, Belc presents his pregnancy as a major turning point in his transition, as his understanding of gender solidifies during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Belc observes, looking at family photos, “I don’t remember anything about the baby in the pictures, only the self, who I was then, just trying to make it through another day in the absolutely wrong postpartum body” (196). It is only after pregnancy and nursing that Belc begins to take testosterone; outwardly, Belc transitions from gestational parent (“natural mother” on the birth certificate) to social father, whose marriage to a cisgender woman in fact allows him to pass in certain contexts and thus renders him invisible as trans in the social sphere. Belc poignantly states, “This baby helped me know the person I had to become. Now no one ever thinks I’ve carried a baby” (39). He is read as father, end stop.

In contrast to the inadequacy of legal documents, such as Samson's birth certificate and second parent adoption forms, Belc writes a memoir that explores the complexity of queer family building, including his role as a non-genetic but social father to Sean and ZZ and his additional role as both genetic and gestational parent for Samson. In Belc's discussion, the experience of pregnancy and the experience of parenting are distinct in their relation to gender. Belc is not just parent to Samson but, significantly in their social relationship, "father." But despite Belc's discomfort with the term "natural mother," coming to fatherhood is equally complicated. Situating his own fatherhood alongside his family history, Belc suggests that mainstream fatherhood, as modeled by his own father, is deeply entwined with anger. In eschewing "mother" for "father," Belc's initial understanding of fatherhood ironically hinges on traditional notions of gendered parenting. "The first time I thought of myself as a dad," Belc writes, "I was in the checkout at SuperOne" (112). Thirty-years-old, he wrangled three children through the grocery store, where the cashier described him as "The Awesome Dad," Belc's ordinary performance of parenting noted as exemplary. This moment opens into a discussion of men and violence, including shaken baby syndrome, which, Belc says, occurs more frequently with boys. Belc worries about his own anger; he writes, "Once I gripped Sean by his denim shirt and it ripped. He just wouldn't listen. When I unclenched my fists they were full of torn collar. I turned them over; these white-knuckled things could not be a mother's hands" (113). But in this moment of embracing his non-mother status, Belc softens: "Becoming a dad, accepting that's what I was, made me gentler, calmer" (114). He reiterates, "I chose to accept becoming a dad. I am glad they are not babies anymore because now they cannot ever be shaken babies" (116). Through his verb choices in these sentences, Belc clarifies both that he identifies with and performs fatherhood; it is not something essential but a role that he "chose" and "accepted." And, in embracing this choice, he moves away from, rather than toward, his father's fathering. Indeed, the lifegiving, sustaining carework he does is certainly what Garbes would call "mothering," ironically erasing Belc's identification as father through the desire to be inclusive and de-essentialize the term "mother."

On the whole, Belc's memoir mobilizes narrative to argue for gender-neutral terms for gestation and birth within the contexts of medical care, cultural conversation, and the legal system. Yet, much as the casually used terms "biological mother" or "natural mother" fail to adequately account

for the experience of transmasculine gestational parents, his book more subtly suggests that it remains equally essential to maintain the specificity of the term “mother”—as it applies to actual caregiving (social mothering) when undertaken by women (cis or trans) who care for their children, regardless of whether they share a genetic or gestational connection—for reasons of equity. In describing his parenting/fathering practices, Belc’s memoir aligns with the work of Andrea Doucet’s work in *Do Men Mother?* to demonstrate that men (cis or trans) do not actively *mother* children, though they may in fact act as primary caregivers. In short, mother is a gendered verb.

Although this statement would seem obvious, the push to de-gender mothering has been baked into the study of mothers and motherhood for decades. Sara Ruddick’s argument that “maternal thinking” and practices can in fact be performed by men and others who do not identify as mothers is foundational in this regard.¹⁴ While I do not disagree with the fundamental argument about who can do what well, framing those acts of care rhetorically as “maternal” does a disservice to all caregivers, whose work occurs in particular intersectional social contexts. To put a sharper point on it, to say that men “mother” children by caring for children—as Garbes does—is to continue to understand such behaviors as feminine and, therefore, feminize or exclude nurturing behaviors undertaken by fathers, including transmen such as Belc. As trans scholar A.J. Lowik explains, “Labelling all nurturing behaviour [sic] performed by men as ‘acts of mothering’ may contribute to the invisibility of nurturing fathers—men may ‘mother,’ but if they identify as fathers are not all of *their acts of parenting acts of fathering*?”¹⁵ In this regard, describing care undertaken by men as “mothering” is as problematic as using the term “natural mother” to describe a transmasculine parent (indeed, thinking about his own propensity toward violence, Belc says he doesn’t have “mother’s hands”).

Ultimately, supporting carework and those who perform it requires that we acknowledge that acts of care are both embodied and gendered under patriarchy. Acts of care are intersectional practices that demand specificity rather than universality in our descriptions. If the gender-neutral term “parent” might be inclusive, it is not equitable. As Doucet explains:

while they [fathers] can develop ways of being and thinking that emulate what we consider stereotypical mothering behavior [...] fathers *do not* mother in practice, partly because mothering itself is a richly varied

experience and institution (Rich, 1986). They also do not mother because the everyday social worlds, the embodied experiences of women and men, and the larger ‘gender regime’ (Connell, 1995, 2000) do not permit eliding of the two institutions and distinct identities. Rather than comparing fathers to mothers, we require novel ways of listening to and theorizing about fathers’ approaches to parenting.¹⁶

As this chapter contends, one such way of “listening to and theorizing” is by reading the memoirs of parents who operate outside the gender binary, including queer mothers, transwomen, and transmasculine gestational parents. To my mind, it is quite telling that Belc’s book, which makes an implicit and explicit argument about the need for inclusive language for reproductive labor, has been reviewed as one of the best contemporary books about *motherhood*.¹⁷ To be clear, I love Belc’s book. But I am struck by the tension that an award-winning book about “motherhood” was written by someone who now identifies as the *father* (socially) of his children, someone who acknowledges that these days he can pass as a cisgender dad in some circumstances.¹⁸ If there is a critical value in using the lens of the trans parent to see that carework is not in fact “essentially” women’s work, it is also fundamental to use the lens of maternal theory/motherhood studies to remind us of potential for such deeply ingrained anti-maternal bias.

To underscore a central point: no parent should have their identity erased by deadnaming or misgendering, as Belc’s memoir powerfully illustrates. But eliminating the term “mother,” or erasing its embodied specificity entirely, also comes at a price. As both verb and noun, the term “mother” should be mobilized strategically to describe caregivers and caregiving undertaken by individuals, both cisgender and trans, who do not identify as “fathers” and who are not afforded the privilege of fathers under patriarchy. I take a cue here from Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee Pelletier’s edited collection *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, which strives to “find the right balance between combating gender essentialism and honouring [sic] the differences that define our lives,” particularly given the “social, political, and intellectual maternal aversion” of the present moment.¹⁹ In holding space for both cis- and transgender mothers, I am certainly not advocating for unchecked pronatalism or essentialism but, rather, acknowledge the particularity of mothers’ experiences. For instance, in her own discussion of parenting, *Stuck in the Middle with You*, Jennifer Finney Boylan

acknowledges her own position as a woman who did not have a girlhood and a mother who has had the experiences, rather, of boyhood and the attendant privileges afforded those who are, or pass as, straight white men. Memoirs by queer parents, both cisgender and trans, call attention to the problem of inadequate language and present nuanced understanding of individual caregivers and families. As their narratives reveal, the arguments to de-gender parenting fall flat, using the rhetoric of inclusion to obscure a meaningful analysis of mothering practices and maternal experiences. “Motherhood is,” as Jacqueline Rose reminds us, “in Western discourse, the place in our culture where we lodge, or rather bury, the reality of our own conflicts, of what it means to be fully human. It is the ultimate scapegoat for our personal and political failings, for everything that is wrong with the world, which it becomes the task—unrealisable, of course—of mothers to repair.”²⁰ In the interests of being inclusive, mothers are shamed, even, for claiming the specificity of their own experiences as mothers.

Much as the lens of trans studies usefully helps de-essentialize our understandings of parenthood, feminist motherhood studies reminds us of the particular embodied and intersectional contexts in which carework occurs, ones in which gender does matter (though arguably not as much as we once assumed). In this regard, queer mother memoirs offer a fruitful site in which to explore, interrogate, and complicate what it means to become mother within the broader cultural context of heteropatriarchy, if not heterosexual marriage. The term “mother” cannot be erased from parlance until actual mothers are afforded the privileges of fathers in culture, until carework—truly divorced from gendered expectations—is valued. And, as the coronavirus pandemic made abundantly clear, we are not there yet. Within North American and other contexts globally, patriarchy continues to thrive, with deeply held misogyny that extends to the work of caregiving, reproductive rights, and medical care. As such, the gender-neutral term “parent,” which pretends that equality is the same as equity, is no less patriarchal than the normative motherhood critiqued decades ago by Adrienne Rich. If we understand “mother” not as an innate identity but as a series of acts/verbs that constitute carework undertaken by non-fathers in specific, embodied, intersectional contexts, we might be able to approach an understanding of mother (and by extension, father) that is not only inclusive but equitable.

If queer/nonhetero families help us begin to see beyond the gender binary and the nuclear to family forms that are more capacious, queer

mother memoirs offer language and narrative that help us to rewrite our social scripts. Belc's story of transmasculine gestational parenthood is only one version of queer family building. Describing her own parenting across "three genders," Jennifer Finney Boylan's book *Stuck in the Middle with You* is a combination of memoir and interview that explores the relation between gender and parenting in a multitude of contexts, revealing the flexibility of parental identities. As Boylan puts it early in the book:

I was a father for six years, a mother for ten, and for a time in between I was both, or neither, like some parental version of the schnoodle, or the cockapoo. Of course, as parents go, I was a rather feminine father: for that matter I suppose I'm a masculine mother. When I was their father I showed my boys how to make a good tomato sauce, how to fold a napkin, how to iron a dress shirt; as their mother I've shown them how to split wood with a maul. Whether this means I've had one parenting style or two, I'm not entirely certain. I can assure you I am not a perfect parent and will be glad to review the long list of my mistakes. But in dealing with a parent who subverts a lot of expectations about gender, I hope my sons have learned to be more flexible and openhearted than many of their peers with traditionally gendered parents.²¹

Much like the argument Doucet makes in *Do Men Mother?*, Boylan discusses the nature of parental nurture and claims "At the heart of this theory [that 'mothering' can be done by anyone of any gender] seems to be an assumption that caring for children is something women do. If you're a man and you're trying to nurture and protect your kids, it seems to me as if you're being called an honorary woman." Boylan continues, "There are lots of men who don't feel that expressing love makes them honorary women. One would think it makes them fathers."²²

Boylan's book, rather than either reifying a binary of mother/father or evacuating the term mother of its gendered specificity, uses personal narrative and interview to suggest the vast range of carework underwork in myriad intersectional contexts. Throughout, Boylan explores gender and division of labor in a two-parent household and the evolving nature of parenting. As she puts it, "There was a time once when motherhood and fatherhood were states as simple to define as *woman* and *man*. But as the meanings of *male* and *female* have shifted from something firm and unwavering into something more versatile and inconstant, so too have the terms *mother* and *father* become more permeable and open-ended."²³ In exploring how parental identity and embodied experience inform

carework, Boylan's memoir theorizes not gender-neutral parenthood but the vast possibilities that move beyond the essentialist binary. Boylan confesses, "I wonder sometimes if I am fathering my children without maleness. [...] There was a time when I thought, No, I need to be more womanly with my sons because otherwise I'm shortchanging my identity as female. But now I believe that parenthood is a mutable experience. There's a lot of room for me to be whoever I want to be with my children without having to lose any of my own identity."²⁴ More broadly, Boylan explains, "to accept the wondrous scope of gender is to affirm the vast potential of life, in all its messy, unfathomable beauty. Surely, if we make room for the mutability of gender, we have to accept that motherhood and fatherhood themselves are no longer unalterable binaries either."²⁵

Likewise, Raine Dozier's essay "Guy-Moms Unite!: Mothering Outside the Box" helps locate a specific caregiving that is neither an uncritical patriarchal motherhood nor a gender-neutral parenthood. As Dozier says of their own (single, queer) parenting, "'Mother' and 'single mother' are specific, gendered social locations evoking particular expected behaviors in families, but also in interactions with social institutions. [...] The physical and economic constraints of single parenthood and the legal status of a primary parent with fewer assets is a uniquely gendered situation." They continue, "I proudly claim the identities of 'mother' and 'single mother' and all they entail in resources, time use, legal history, oppression, resistance, and life chances while retaining my masculine and male gender identity. Surely this is queering motherhood."²⁶

* * *

Just because I am insisting upon the maternal as the maternal does not make it any less queer. In sketching more expansive notions of kinship and reproductive labor, queer mother memoirs undercut the heteronormative assumptions that undergird carework. If mothering is care performed by those who identify as mothers, how might it be done queerly? As Margaret Gibson asks, "What if queer parents have different objectives for their children than meeting the standard developmental outcomes? What if queer parents don't particularly care if their children demonstrate 'normative' (i.e., heterosexual, cisgender) sexual and gender identities? What if queer parents parent 'queerly,' with different goals, values, and strategies than those found in dominant ideologies of motherhood?"²⁷ Toward a tentative answer, I want to return to Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, which points to the instability of the binary that places queer on one side and heteronormative on the other, and locates in pregnancy, parenting, and domesticity a vital site for creating and sustaining queer life.

As has been discussed ad infinitum in extant criticism, Nelson's book takes its title from the idea of "argo" borrowed most directly from Roland Barthes.²⁸ Writing about *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, Nelson says "Barthes describes how the subject who utters the phrase 'I love you' is like 'the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name.' Just as the *Argo's* parts may be replaced over time but the boat is still called *The Argo*, whenever the lover utters the phrase 'I love you,' its meaning must be renewed by each use" (5). The Argo, then, becomes a metaphor for the nature of identity, its performativity, an avowal of the fragment itself. Glossing Eve Sedgwick, Nelson continues, "She wanted the term [queer] to be a perpetual excitement, a kind of placeholder—a nominative, like *Argo*, willing to designate molten or shifting parts, a means of asserting while also giving the slip. That is what reclaimed terms do—they retain, they insist on retaining, a sense of the fugitive" (29). Or, in the words of Annamarie Jagose: "Queer is an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (11). In this way, the Argo is the molten, shifting figure of queerness and queer family, built in motion, at sea.

While the book does not incorporate substantial discussion of the day-to-day goings-on of their family (it's not really narratively driven), a portrait emerges in fragments: Nelson playing baby bear with her stepson, folding his socks and underwear, and, later, the unnamed big brother totting little Iggy around. In these moments Nelson presents her changing relation to domestic life, once disavowed; as she puts it early on: "I didn't have a domestic, and I liked it that way." In fragments, she characterizes the work (and play) that goes into building queer family. She arranges these pieces, like the Argo, into something entirely new but also the same. She undertakes a version of parenting that goes "against the rules" (43), which I take to mean heteronorms. As Bradway elegantly puts it, "By tracing the angles of queer scenes, Nelson refuses to locate pregnancy, domesticity, and partnership as endpoints in a heteronormative teleology."²⁹ Refusing the anti-social thesis of queer theory, Nelson instead presents reproduction and domestic life as a site of queer becoming, joy, and theorization.

Notably juxtaposing an image of her cervix during insemination against a discussion of Lee Edelman's seminal work in queer theory, Nelson writes: "Reproductive futurism needs no more disciples. But basking in the punk allure of 'no future' won't suffice either" (76). This moment explicitly uses a moment of queer reproduction—Iggy's conception, via

donor insemination—as a challenge to—and site of queer theory. As Fournier puts it, “Much of the power of *The Argonauts* lies in Nelson processing theoretical ideas and modes of thinking and writing through her own particular experience in the world as queer, as a stepmother and a biological mother.”³⁰ But it’s not just *processing* theory through experience; she enacts queer theory through undertaking maternal practices. Much as Juffer characterizes single mothers as domestic intellectuals who operate “within the usually denigrated realms of childcare and housework,” Nelson too “rearticulate[s] these realms as ones of potential political, economic, and social possibility” (4). Describing her conception, Nelson conceives a different sort of queer engagement.

In this regard, one of my favorite details is Nelson’s invocation of the laminated newspaper that references her winning the Guggenheim (provided, like the Snapfish mug, by her mother), which she turns into a mat placed under her child’s highchair. The award, as she tells it, literally paid for her child’s conception, which is to say Nelson’s academic / intellectual / creative work operates in service of making and sustaining queer family. It does so again, here, both literally and symbolically, in its placement underneath the highchair while Iggy eats. In this moment, as well as another that positions Nelson in the act of writing while attached to an electric breast pump, the boundaries between the domestic and the intellectual—as well as between “essential” and paid labor—are porous and cross-pollenating. Not unlike the moment I discuss in Chapter Two that depicts Nelson laboring among her books, Nelson stages an autotheoretical encounter in order to reposition (her) maternal body and domestic work within the contexts of feminist and queer theory. In describing maternity and reproductive labors, then, Nelson suggests that family building can be an integral site of queer knowledge production rather than an obstacle to it. Or, as Chris Roulston puts it: “queer parenting arguably generates forms of queerness that have yet to be theorized, providing us with new pathways for imagining parent-child alliances in terms of queer affinities, unexplored futures, and alternative queer relations.”³¹ Queer mother memoirs such as Nelson’s arguably function as such a site of alternative theorization.

If *The Argonauts* opens, notoriously, with a scene of queer (non-reproductive) sex early in Maggie and Harry’s relationship (“the words *I love you* come tumbling out of my mouth in an incantation the first time you fuck me in the ass” [3]), it ends with a celebratory family dance party. Much like the gloss of the family photo on the Snapfish mug, Nelson

offers a moment that looks normative to reframe it as queer. As Bradway suggests via an extended reading of Sedgwick, who “rewrites queerness as a project of cultivating intersubjective care” (221), Nelson invites us to understand the work of building family as a queer mode of relating. “Holding, nourishing, loving, touching; reparation, happiness, possibility—these terms constellate a series of queer relations.”³² Watching her two children (one biological, one not) play together, Nelson remarks that it “makes me feel like I’ve finally done something unequivocally good. That I’ve finally done my stepson an unequivocal good” (143). Despite the odds and obstacles, they are there together as a (queer) family “ablaze with our care, its ongoing song” (143).

* * *

I went looking for books on queer motherhood, on motherhood outside the mainstream, and at long last, I found Maggie Nelson. While I do not know this with definitive certainty, I suspect it is the only prize-winning book of literary criticism (criticism!) to reference transvaginal ultrasounds and intrauterine insemination. It is and is not a memoir; it is and is not about motherhood. And perhaps this both/and liminality in itself marks *The Argonauts* as queer. In the end, the label doesn’t matter except that in labeling, in identifying, in specifying genre, the book will find its way to the readers who need it most. It is hard to find the narratives you need. Sometimes you need to write your own.

NOTES

1. Qtd. in Andrea O’Reilly, “The Motherhood Memoir and the New Momism: Biting the Hand that Feeds You,” in *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women’s Literature*, eds. Andrea O’Reilly and Elizabeth Podnieks (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 210.
2. *Ibid.*, 212.
3. As early as May 2020, Coleen Flaherty addressed this issue in “More Bad News on Women’s Research Productivity,” *Inside Higher Education*, May 20, 2020, www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/05/20/more-bad-news-womens-research-productivity.
4. Amy Westervelt, *Forget ‘Having it All’: How America Messed up Motherhood—and How to Fix It* (Seal Press, 2018), 206. The “motherhood penalty” was first described by Michelle Budig and Paula England. Subsequent work has indicated that the pay gap between mothers and nonmothers is larger than the pay gap between women and men. This is particularly true for mothers of color.

5. As Juffer explains, single mothers “give value to the work of mothering—to the pure organicity of birth, diaper changing, nursing; they are organic intellectuals who do not rank intellectual over bodily labor but rather live out of their convergence.” In *Single Mother: The Emergence of the Domestic Intellectual* (New York University Press, 2006), 9.
6. Angela Garbes, *Essential Labor: Mothering as Social Change* (Harper Wave, 2022), 9, emphasis mine. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
7. Although she does not mention him by name, Moraga clearly references William Sears, a major proponent of “attachment” parenting method popular around the turn of the twenty-first century.
8. For instance, in her autotheoretical work *The Breaks: An Essay* (Coffee House Press, 2021), Julietta Singh describes her duplex, where she lives with her daughter and co-parent, Nathan, in a relationship she characterizes as queer: “We have made two discrete apartments into a single queer home. Two units that are also one; one home that is more than itself,” 50.
9. Roulston, “Queer Parenting,” 134.
10. Stephen Hicks, *Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Parenting: Families, Intimacies, Genealogies* (Palgrave, 2011), 83.
11. Carla Sameth, *One Day on the Gold Line* (Black Rose Writing, 2019), 131. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. I am interested in the way that Sameth risks critique about her parenting through this confession. As Mack observes: “Only a mother secure in her legal and socio-cultural legitimacy can express insecurities about how well she mothers. Mothers who are most vulnerable to state intervention stand to be penalized, or even lose custody of their children, if their mothering is deemed too deviant from middle-class norms” (*The Case for Single Motherhood*). While Sameth faces this risk of critique as *narrator*, she writes from such a temporal distance—as the mother of an adult child—that there’s not a material risk of actual penalty.
12. Brigid Schulte, *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play when No One Has the Time* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 25.
13. Krys Malcolm Belc, *The Natural Mother of the Child: A Memoir of Nonbinary Parenthood* (Counterpoint, 2021), 25. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
14. Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Beacon, 1989), 107.
15. A. J. Lowik, “The Ties that Bind Are Broken: Trans* Breastfeeding Practices, Ungendering Body Parts, and Unsexing Parenting,” in *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, eds. Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee Pelletier (Demeter Press, 2015), 213, emphasis mine.
16. Andrea Doucet, *Do Men Mother?* (University of Toronto Press, 2006), 224.

17. In this regard, I am struck by Helen Lewis's argument about the potential misogyny of gender-neutral terminology; as she explains, "substituting *people* for *women* might emphasize women's humanity—as some have argued—but it does so at the cost of obliterating the history and theoretical basis of feminism. Yes, women are people. But they are a particular *kind* of people, the kind of people who have historically been denied the vote, not allowed to own property, excluded from higher education and professional careers, beaten into submission by their partners, and paid lower wages. These things did not happen by coincidence. They were part of a social order—patriarchy—that controlled and monitored female sexual purity and reproduction. Dismantling that system is not as simple as declaring women to be people too and then retiring in triumph. To combat a problem, you have to be able to name it." Helen Lewis, "Why I'll Keep Saying Pregnant Women," *The Atlantic*, October 26, 2021, www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/pregnant-women-people-feminism-language/620468/.
18. As Belc writes in a recent essay "The me moving past 35 was, in some ways, 'post-transition.' After all, it's been years since anyone had called me 'she' or my birth name, and I had a man's voice and a silly little moustache. Every week, I come closer to being part of the group I call the 'cool art dads' on the playground at my kids' school. I can now go days, even weeks, without transness being relevant to my daily life, especially if I stay off news sites and focus on the wonderfully trans-affirming life I am lucky to have at home." In this way, Belc's household dynamic is similar to the findings of Carla Pfeffer that outwardly many cisgender women with transmen partners *appear* to be cisgender heterosexual couples in public even as they identify as queer.
19. Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee Pelletier, eds., *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering* (Demeter Press, 2015), 18, 20.
20. Rose, *Mothers*, 1.
21. Jennifer Finney Boylan, *Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders* (Penguin, 2014), 9.
22. *Ibid.*, 30.
23. *Ibid.*, 204.
24. *Ibid.*, 254.
25. *Ibid.*, 205. Further work on this subject might consider memoirs by adoptive or non-gestational lesbian mothers, as they likewise attempt to trouble language and to invent new terms for their roles and their families. As Christa Craven points out, "At present, there is no language—professionally, academically, or colloquially—that is both accurate and affirming of all LGBTQ parents' roles" (Craven, *Reproductive Losses*, xxi). Attempting to

address this problem, Harlyn Aizley's anthology *Confessions of the Other Mother*, for example, collects a series of essays by co-mothers who are raising children they did not gestate. Among other issues, these essays explore alternate names for parents who identify as neither mother nor father, moving beyond the binary. As Jennifer Berney asks, considering her own family: "It was still up in the air what we would call these folks. Would we call them aunt and uncle? Bio-family? Would we label these relationships at all? Or would we continue our lives as friends, tethered by something invisible and strong? (*The Other Mothers*, 251).

26. Raine Dozier, "Guy-Moms Unite!: Mothering Outside the Box," in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Gibson (Demeter Press, 2014), 135.
27. Gibson, *Queering Motherhood*, 4.
28. There are many scholarly essays on *The Argonauts*, in contrast to the rest of the books curated here, so I do not feel the need to rehearse their arguments at length. However, Tyler Carson's "Engendering the Anti-Social Thesis: The Queerness of Pregnancy in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*" is one of the most provocative and, to my mind, true to the work of the book, which very much centers maternity. See *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 22, no. 1 (2021): 40–49.
29. Bradway, "Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form," 718.
30. Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, 149.
31. Roulston, "Queer Parenting," 118.
32. Teagan Bradway, *Queer Experimental Literature: The Affective Politics of Bad Reading* (Palgrave, 2017), 222.



Coda / Mamafesto

When I decided to become a mother, I found Ariel Gore's magazine *Hip Mama* on the shelves of my local Barnes and Noble, where I went to grade undergraduate student papers. Back then, I thought of myself as the antithesis of Gore, who got pregnant accidentally in her late teens. Although she elected to keep the pregnancy instead of having an abortion or making an adoption plan, to my mind that wasn't the same as conceiving a planned pregnancy. At the time, high on third-wave feminism and young(-ish) adult bravada, choice mattered to me more than constraint.¹ But—apologies and deep gratitude to Gore—I see so clearly now how she, as an unmarried young woman excluded from normative motherhood, both offers a critique and, more significantly, serves as a vibrant model for queer motherhood. As she writes in the essay “Queering Family”: “what strikes me most profoundly, five thousand language-lives in, is the immense psychological damage that is the direct result of the marketing of an idealized American nuclear family.”²

I am tempted to say that memoir is the opposite of marketing. Queer mother memoirs offer a different story than the one sold to us by capitalist heteropatriarchy on the one side and the anti-social abstraction of much queer and feminist theory on the other. In long-form narrative prose, queer mother memoirs have the capacity to dramatize and theorize the complex particularities of intersectional identities, real-life experiences, desires and emotions.

Before I could conceive in the doctor's office, I needed to tell myself a story that made queer family conceivable.

* * *

Saturday afternoon, the time of the coronavirus. I'm sitting on the front stoop in a slight breeze. My son and his friend are riding down the slope of the street on skateboards, giggling. I'm eating some potatoes with scalions and corn. Reading Ariel Gore's *We Were Witches*. The book is some inexplicable genre, speculative memoir, or maybe autofiction/theory, as it's the only novel I can think of offhand that cites Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Gloria Anzaldua, Tillie Olsen. All the feminist foremothers.

It's a book that exists outside genre norms, as her motherhood lies outside normative motherhood. It's a book that points to the limits of memoir, its uses too. Gore, the author, wants to write a story to save Ariel, the girl writer, single young mother. There is a story here about choice. There is a story about the power of (personal) narrative and writing your way out. Gore writes: "In truth, I want only a few things vis-à-vis this idealized nuclear family: To be a threat to it. To thrive outside its boundaries. To live to see the end of it. To use my limited talents and energy to be of whatever help I can as those damaged by its legacy begin to heal, make art, and build lives free from its intrinsic violence."³

The children are now moving tables inside the tent that will be used as a school because this is late summer 2020. And while I have taken a certain amount of pride in being a true single mother—that is, one without a co-parent in the mix—I am also incredibly grateful that we have family friends/neighbors who have invited us to join in a tent-schooling endeavor. This project of multi-household domesticity that fills the cracks in the system, the strain that COVID has wrought on so many of us, and we—with our homes in the historic district, our Rosie the Riveter "we can do it" signs—have it so good so good, and still this is all so hard. Between us, three parents will school two children across five days. They will bring their sack lunches into the tent (I have told them I will make ramen on Tuesday, which is my day). They will bring their books and their tablets and their fidgets. The non-supervisory parents will be at home working, which is the work of running a household and also the work that we do for pay, for the university. We will also take walks and garden and do things other than parent. "In the contemporary moment," Bradway and Freeman write of the pandemic, "many of our assumptions about heteronormative kinship thus no longer hold."⁴ More pointedly, as May Friedman says, "[o]ur family lives, our encumbered subjectivity, the ways we are all

accountable to one another in complex ways” complicate and press back “against normative notions of individuality and self-reliance.”⁵

Still, it’s Saturday afternoon and I am reading and writing and thinking and basking in the sunshine. In a few hours a new babysitter will come over, and my son will try out being with her outside, so I might buy—quite literally—a few more hours in which to theorize queer motherhood.

* * *

In *We Were Witches*, Gore makes an argument for the power of narrative to rewrite self and world. Gore writes in response to the Dan Quayle conservatives of the 1990s, who bemoaned the death of the nuclear family: “the voices of the men on the AM radio ranted fast about welfare queens and unfit mothers and all the ways our children would suffer, and the scarlet letter of my bad decisions seared itself into my skin like a brand, reminding me to feel dirty and afraid even when I’d woken up content, my breasts swelling with sustenance.”⁶ Writing offers her the opportunity to reframe her story and rewrite motherhood altogether: “Maybe this could be my new genre: the memoirist’s novel. My words could form a magical spell, like an alchemical furnace, built with the conscious intention of transmuting shame into power” (151). Trying to save herself and her daughter, Gore writes: “I think about how ‘Ariel’ in this story hardly ever has any agency over anything in her life, and how ‘Ariel Gore,’ the author, can write it any goddamn way she chooses” (256). But significantly, it is her chosen genre, “memoirist’s novel”—memoir, with a twist—that allows her to do so.

In lived experience and in the book, Gore rewrites motherhood, explaining, “I loved my daughter instinctively, but I couldn’t bend myself into the definitions of *mother* I’d been handed. Even if I hadn’t been unwed and too young to be invited to the performance, I don’t think I could have pulled it off—the self-effacing. I need magic instead and a new definition of maternal love that allowed for us both to thrive” (215).

I turn to Gore, to Nelson, to Moraga, as they theorize other models of maternal being.

* * *

“[O]ne of the gifts of genderqueer family making,” Nelson writes, “is the revelation of caretaking as detachable from—and attachable to—any gender, any sentient being” (72). Please note, dear reader, Nelson says “care-taking,” not “mothering.”

I have fifteen minutes before I need to stop. To make my children some lunch, which I didn’t do when school was a place they went and ordered lunch (chicken nuggets, a hamburger).

* * *

“As someone who mothers outside of heteronormative contexts,” in the words of Shelley Park, “I have been struck by how infrequently the scholarship of motherhood questions the heteronormative boundaries of kinship and maternal practice.”⁷ I too mother outside of heteronormative contexts. And while Park looks to the “polymaternal family” as “a queer family structure that requires the queering of intimacy in triangulated—or even more complex—relations of mothers and child(ren),” I want to suggest, following Gore, that a single mother might also work to challenge heteropatriarchal motherhood.⁸ Although all the memoirs I consider in this archive ultimately create families within partnerships, it is telling that the desire to mother exists separate from and, in many cases, predates the desire for a co-parent; as they tell it, Moraga, Becker, Berney, Sameth, and Tea all contemplate single motherhood before they eventually conceive within partnerships. Thus, whereas Park argues that polymaternal “mothering may reveal itself as a queer form of breeding (a practice that breeds queerness), rather than as the compulsory activity of reproducing heteropatriarchal, heteronormative, and domesticinormative forms of life” (256), Gore counters that an unmarried woman, which is to say “a woman who has rejected the enslavement of [her] household labor” functions as “a threat to the entire system of economic valuation and, by extension, a threat to justifications for war.”⁹

Oh, I really like the idea of being a threat to the entire system of economic valuation! But liking it doesn’t make single mothering easy.

* * *

If I appreciated some of the revolutionary potential of elective single motherhood in my twenties, I am coming, slowly, to making an argument about chosen single motherhood as queer. For more than two decades, I have been reluctant to co-opt that language, as it did not feel like mine to claim.¹⁰ But there is also no question that chosen single motherhood is “a queer form of breeding,” that stretches and challenges heteronormativity. As Margaret Gibson explains, “Queering motherhood can therefore start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components of ‘expected’ motherhood are challenged.”¹¹ Relationship status is one such component. My family is only one version; this broader archive of queer mother memoirs begins to sketch the different degrees and ways that queer families come into being and thrive.

* * *

To do: write a chapter that includes a discussion of Cherrie Moraga. To do: write a chapter that explores a family structure that isn’t divisible by two. To do: clean the downstairs bathroom, take out the laundry, write a list of tasks for the children to do after they are done with their

“schooling.” To do: reread Ariel Gore’s *We Were Witches*. To do: think with Maggie Nelson about whether it is possible, in the end, to have a queer family that is not also naively normative. To do: consider whether there are shorter works by non-biological lesbian mothers to think through the disimbrication of gender, parenting, and other forms of domestic labor. Do this while taking a walk. Do this while the children are otherwise occupied.

* * *

Rather than reproducing heteronorms, queer mother memoirs theorize radical notions of reproduction, gender, and family, not as a single united metanarrative but rather a multiplicity of forms. Queer mother memoirs testify to the complicated nature of identity that arises when uterus-bearing individuals—including nonbinary and trans folx—give birth to and/or care for children. And as these memoirs reveal—beginning with the imaginative work of deciding to build a family—narrative itself is fundamental to the creation of queer family. At the end of *One Good Egg*, Becker acknowledges how she *authors* her family; it ends literally with Suzy working on a comic while Aurora and Lorene sleep, addressing another, pre-mother version of herself: “It’s even better than you dreamed” (211). Likewise, toward the end of her memoir Jennifer Berney asks, “What if, beyond heredity, families are really a collection of stories, some of them spoken, some of them withheld?” (290). She continues, “I had never imagined that being queer could mean a chance to shed the expectations of tradition, to shed the insularity of heredity and gender, to define family on my own terms and remake everything anew” (302). In these ways, this archive of queer mother memoirs offers an important site of resistance to heteropatriarchal life/narrative. Queer mother memoir, like queer literature more broadly, “encounters loss, stays off aggression, and answers erasure by offering itself as a site of *care* and empowerment and activism for LGBTQ people.”¹² Queer memoir is a space where care, which is to say motherwork, happens.

Queer mother memoirs thus use narrative to begin to unpack the complex relationships between gender, reproduction, sexuality, and carework. They open up questions and possibilities and suggest tentative answers. They wrestle with the inadequacy of language to describe queer family and parenting relationships; they grapple with implicit and explicit homophobia and the politics of everyday life; they suggest care work is both embodied and also not essentialized. In short, they undertake the work of queer theory not as abstraction but through narrating lived experience, getting closer, as Ahmed implores, to the skin. Writing about

memoirs by elective single mothers, Katherine Mack claims that such work explains “in part, the memoirist’s negotiation of societal expectations and norms, the ones to which they adhere, that they resist, and with which they ambivalently engage.”¹³ And as such, while memoir has been dismissed as narcissistic navel-gazing, I would counter that queer mother memoirs do the work of autotheory, which, as Stacy Young explains, “enables authors and readers alike to explicate interior experience while simultaneously locating that experience in broad social power structures and justice projects.”¹⁴

As autotheoretical projects, queer mother memoirs function *as* queer theory, not through imposing an external framework but by actively thinking through the way that individuals who have chosen to parent/mother queerly understand what they do, representing the variance of queer family and its liberatory potential for reproductive choice, labor, gender, and sexuality. Memoir or personal narrative is a powerful way of dramatizing in specific intersectional terms the reproductive labors at work in making a family from preconception through adulthood. And although some—like Nelson, like Gore—engage in explicit citation of other scholars in their (auto)theoretical projects, they do not need to do so.¹⁵ Rather, like other autotheoretical works, queer mother memoirs undertake substantive “thinking about the self, the body, and the particularities and peculiarities of one’s lived experiences, as processed through or juxtaposed against theory *or*,” as Arianne Zwartjes qualifies, “*as the basis for theoretical thinking*” (emphasis mine).

It is within mother memoirs by queer writers that we can understand ways that individual parents understand and narrate their experiences in specific, embodied, intersectional terms—the ways that they understand the acts of care they undertake, acts that shape their subjectivity, and perform it in a variety of private and public contexts that are read by audiences in the forms of family, neighbors/communities, as well as the broader audience of readers of their books. Reading about motherhood informs my mothering, and my mothering informs my writing and so on. And both of those doings become public as witnessed / read by others. At the risk of being reductive, memoirs of queer mothers *matter* to queer mothers and others.¹⁶ *Doing* / performing queer motherhood and writing about queer motherhood are conjoined and mutually informing practices of reproductive labor. “My role as [a] mother may be nothing more than an endless task of reading narratives against the grain, of resisting the mainstream’s consumptive ease,” Julietta Singh writes in *The Breaks*,

making a powerful argument that mothering is an “enduring act of radical pedagogy.”¹⁷ (59). Mothering is a queer form of relation and reproduction, not “as a reproduction of the same, but as an abiding process of resistance and disruption [...] *Why not engage it as an intimate, unrelenting experiment in unlearning the world we’ve inherited?*”¹⁸

* * *

I started researching and planning and narrativizing a life of single motherhood in my last year of graduate training; I went up for promotion to full professor deep in the pandemic, based on a portfolio of writing about motherhood, infertility, and reproductive loss, the same year my older child graduated from high school. A temporal coincidence, yes, but my intellectual and domestic pursuits have always been entangled. Reading and writing about queer motherhood allowed me to dream my family into being, and living as a queer / single mother also served as lens of critique for the heteronuclear family and the institutions that support it. Every day, in ways large and small, we participate in what Carla Pfeffer terms “normative resistance.” When I sign a school form—writing “n/a” in the space for second parent; when I tell the baseball coach that a “Father’s Day” scrimmage will leave out some kids who have neither a father nor a local grandfather; when I take my thirteen-year-old to Pride, with their rainbow flag as a cape, we push back against dominant assumptions and cultural narratives about family.

But *writing* about these small daily acts serves to underscore, to theorize, to bring to light. And if we believe that reading life narrative is, as McNeill and Douglas contend, “a form of ethical response,” then writing our stories of queer motherhood and family may help author new stories of gender, sexuality, family, and care—ones that will (hopefully, eventually) lead to real social change.

After what feels like a lifetime of infertility and loss, I wake to the sounds of children not outside my window but in the rooms next to mine. My children are growing up in a feminist, anti-heteronormative household. A particular kind of queer family made consciously out of maternal desire, not as a second, lesser than “plan B” that mourns the loss of heterosexual partnership but as true choice for creating queer life. With Nelson, I want to continue to explore and support “a politics based on more than reproductive futurism, without belittling the daily miracle of conception, nor the labor and mysterious promise of childbearing and rearing.”¹⁹ That is, a feminist and queer theory that recognizes the desire—indeed, imperative—of some queer folk to build family and also embraces motherhood as a queer act.

In the morning, after I drive my children across town to school and work, I drive home. Make a cup of coffee. Sit down to read and write.

I write prose poems. I write criticism and memoir. I try to stay in the liminal spaces between. I want to say something about queer motherhood memoirs. Every day, I continue to live/write the story of my own experiment in queer family.

NOTES

1. Katherine Mack's *The Case for Single Motherhood* provides a clear-sighted critique of the term "single mothers by choice" and the rhetorics of legitimacy, including a section on my *Texas Girl*.
2. Ariel Gore, "Queering Family," in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, eds. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams (PM Press, 2016), 142.
3. *Ibid.*, 143.
4. Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, eds., *Beyond Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form* (Duke University Press, 2022), 9.
5. Friedman, "On Being Impossible," 410.
6. Ariel Gore, *We Were Witches* (Feminist Press, 2017), 55. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
7. Park, *Mothering Queerly*, 1.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 256; Gore, *We Were Witches*, 265.
10. I appreciate Julietta Singh's discussion of her relation to the term "queer" in *The Breaks*: "I was still at a remove from describing *queer* to describe myself, not because I had any hesitation about queer sexualities, but because I was uneasy about laying claim to preexisting identity categories" (39). I am similarly reluctant. But if the myth, if not reality, of heterosexuality is that its purpose is reproductive, then reproduction without sex or romance is arguably queer. Moreover, as Erin Lavender-Stott claims, single life challenges heteronormativity and, in some cases—as mine—amatonormativity. See Erin Lavender-Stott, "Queering Singlehood: Examining the Intersection of Sexuality and Relationship Status from a Queer Lens," *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 15, no. 3 (2023): 428–43.
11. Gibson, *Queering Motherhood*, 6.
12. Breen, *Narratives of Queer Desire*, 7, emphasis mine.
13. Mack, *The Case for Single Motherhood*, 77.
14. Stacy Young, "Our Autotheoretical Lives," in *Autotheories*, eds. Alex Brostoff and Viliashini Cooppan (MIT Press, 2025), 135.

15. The generic gatekeeping that keeps autotheory (praised) on one side and memoir (derided) on the other is deeply problematic. Discussing citational practices as a purported requirement of autotheory, Leila C. Nadir asks, "But while the names make our stories more easily read, we must continue to ask why we can't criticize without Criticism or theorize without Theory? How many beautiful humans, how many spectacular artists, critics, and theorists do you know whose minds don't work this way?" See Leila C. Nadir, "More Life After Ruins: Autotheory, the Politics of Citation, and the Limits of The Scholarly Gaze," *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 3 (September 2021): 548. In practical terms, R. L. Goldberg suggests that early trans memoirs should be construed as autotheory. And Francesca Royster notes in her introduction to a special issue of *Biography*, "Bodies are ways of dreaming utopia, sites for dreaming utopia—for conceiving of one's individual truth, but also for reaching outside of one's own circumstances, learning and understanding others, serving as a bridge." See Francesca T. Royster, "Introductory Notes: Performing Queer Lives," *Biography* 34, no. 3 (2011): x. Taken together, they suggest the importance of reconceiving memoir as autotheoretical mode which is, of course, the larger project of this book.
16. Frankie de la Cretaz writes in *Harper's Bazaar* about their experience reading recent books about queer family, including Belc's and Tea's: "I see much of my own experiences in these books, as well as what is missing. I am so happy to see positive stories of queer motherhood, but the truth is that for many queer mothers, like me, our motherhood is challenged as a result of our queerness." See "What Queer Parenting Memoirs Teach Us About Motherhood," *Harper's Bazaar*, May 12, 2023, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a43806739/queer-motherhood/>.
17. Singh, *The Breaks*, 5–6, 59.
18. *Ibid.*, 59.
19. Maggie Nelson, "Slipping the Surly Bonds of Earth: On Ben Lerner's Latest," *LA Review of Books*, August 24, 2025, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/95063/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press.
- Aizley, Harlyn. 2003. *Buying Dad: One Woman's Search for the Perfect Sperm Donor*. Alyson Books.
- Andreassen, Rikke. 2019. *Mediated Kinship: Gender, Race, and Sexuality in Donor Families*. Routledge.
- Austin, Nefirtiti. 2019. *Motherhood So White: A Memoir of Race, Gender, and Parenting in America*. Sourcebooks.
- Baiada, Christa. 2024. Making Masculine Maternity Visible in A. K. Summers's *Pregnant Butch*. In *The Missing Mother*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly and Martina Mullaney, 247–268. Demeter Press.
- Becker, Suzy. 2013. *One Good Egg: An Illustrated Memoir*. Bloomsbury.
- Belc, Krys Malcolm. 2021. *The Natural Mother of the Child: A Memoir of Nonbinary Parenthood*. Counterpoint.
- Belc, Krys Malcolm. 2023. Back Under the Bar Postpartum—And Post Transition. *Romper*. www.romper.com/life/gym-trans-postpartum. Accessed 6 June 2023.
- Bergman, David. 2014. Autobiography. In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 643–659. Cambridge University Press.
- Berney, Jennifer. 2021. *The Other Mothers: Two Women's Journey to Find the Family That Was Always Theirs*. Sourcebooks.

- Blum, Linda M., and Amber Jamilla Musser. 2023. Introduction: Complexities of Care and Caring. *Signs* 49 (1): 1–6.
- Boggs, Belle. 2016. *The Art of Waiting: On Fertility, Medicine, and Motherhood*. Graywolf.
- Boswell, Parley Ann. 2014. *Pregnancy in Literature and Film*. McFarland.
- Boylan, Jennifer Finney. 2014. *Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders*. Penguin.
- Bradway, Teagan. 2017. *Queer Experimental Literature: The Affective Politics of Bad Reading*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bradway, Teagan, and E.L. McCallum eds. 2019. *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bradway, Teagan. 2021. Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form. *PMLA* 136 (5): 711–727.
- Bradway, Teagan, and Elizabeth Freeman, eds. 2022. *Beyond Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*. Duke University Press.
- Breen, Margaret Sönsner. 2009. *Narratives of Queer Desire: Deserts of the Heart*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Britt, Elizabeth C. 2001. *Conceiving Normalcy: Rhetoric, Law, and the Double Binds of Infertility*. University of Alabama Press.
- Brostoff, Alex, and Vilashini Cooppan. 2025. *Autotheories*. MIT Press.
- Brostoff, Alex, and Lauren Fournier. 2021. Introduction: Autotheory ASAP! Academia, Decoloniality, and ‘I.’ *ASAP/Journal* 6 (3): 489–502. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2021.0040>.
- Carson, Tyler. 2021. Engendering the Anti-Social Thesis: The Queerness of Pregnancy in Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 22 (1): 40–49.
- Cerankowski, KJ, and Megan Milks, eds. 2014. *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*. Routledge.
- Chen, Angela. 2020. *ACE: What Asexuality Reveals about Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex*. Beacon.
- Chute, Hillary. 2015. The Space of Graphic Narrative: Mapping Bodies, Feminism, and Form. In *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions*, ed. Robin Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, 194–209. Ohio State University Press.
- Claggett, Shalyn. The Human Problem. In *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions*, ed. Robin Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, 353–360. Ohio State University Press, 2015.
- Cooke, Jennifer. 2020. *Contemporary Feminist Life-Writing: The New Audacity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Craven, Christa. 2019. *Reproductive Losses: Challenges to LGBTQ Family-Making*. Routledge.

- de la Cretaz, Frankie. 2023. What Queer Parenting Memoirs Teach Us About Motherhood. *Harper's Bazaar*. www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a43806739/queer-motherhood/. Accessed 12 May 2023.
- Domar, Alice D., Patricia C. Zuttermeister, and Richard Friedman. 1993. The Psychological Impact of Infertility: A Comparison with Patients with Other Medical Conditions. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology* 14 (Suppl): 45–52.
- Doucet, Andrea. 2006. *Do Men Mother?* University of Toronto Press.
- Douglas, Pamela. 2013. Milkmother Memoir. In *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating Writing Lives*, ed. Justine Dymond and Nicole Willey, 105–130. Demeter Press.
- Douglas, Susan J., and Meredith W. Michaels. 2004. *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. Free Press.
- Dozier, Raine. 2014. Guy-Moms Unite!: Mothering Outside the Box. In *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Gibson, 127–139. Demeter Press.
- Duggan, Lisa. 2002. The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism. In *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, 175–194. Duke University Press.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. 1990. *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*. Routledge.
- Dymond, Justine, and Nicole Willey, eds. 2013. *Motherhood Memoirs: Mothers Creating Writing Lives*. Demeter Press.
- Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press.
- Epstein, Rachel. 2002. Butches with Babies. *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 6 (2): 41–57. https://doi.org/10.1300/J155v06n02_06.
- Epstein-Fine, Sadie, and Makeda Zook, eds. 2018. *Spawning Generations: Rants and Reflections on Growing up with LGBTQ+ Parents*. Demeter Press.
- Erdrich, Louise. 1996. *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year*. Harper Perennial.
- Farwell, Marilyn. 1996. *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*. New York University Press.
- Fawaz, Ramzi. 2019. A Queer Sequence: Comics as a Disruptive Medium. *PMLA* 134 (3): 588–594.
- Fournier, Lauren. 2021. *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. MIT Press.
- Friedman, May. 2021. On Being Impossible: Thoughts on Ethnicity, Embodiment and Kinship. *Life Writing* 18 (3): 401–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0/14484528.2021.1926870>.

- Freud, Sigmund. 1953a. The Ego and the Id. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. vol. 19. Trans. James Strachey, 1–66. Hogarth.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1953b. Mourning and Melancholia. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. vol. 14. Trans. James Strachey, 237–58. Hogarth.
- Gallop, Jane. 2002. *Anecdotal Theory*. Duke University Press.
- Galbraith, Rebekah. 2021. Inappropriate Objects: On Gender, Self, and Parenthood in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* and Krys Malcolm Belc's *The Natural Mother of the Child: A Memoir of Nonbinary Parenthood*. *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 42 (3): 221–238.
- Garbes, Angela. 2022. *Essential Labor: Mothering as Social Change*. Harper Wave.
- Gibson, Margaret, ed. 2014. *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*. Demeter Press.
- Gilmore, Leigh. 2010. American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-Help and Redemption on Oprah's Couch. *Biography* 33 (4): 657–679.
- Golombok, Susan. 2015. *Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gore, Ariel. 2016. Queering Family. In *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, ed. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, 142–144. PM Press.
- Gore, Ariel. 2017. *We Were Witches*. Feminist Press.
- Green, Fiona Joy, and Gary Lee Pelletier, eds. 2015. *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*. Demeter Press.
- Halberstam, Jack. 2011. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press.
- Hanson, Elizabeth Hanna. 2014. Toward an Asexual Narrative Structure. In *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*, ed. K. J. Cerankowski and Megan Milks, 344–374. Routledge.
- Hayford, Sarah R., and Karen Benjamin Guzzo. 2015. The Single Motherhood by Choice Myth. *Contexts* 14 (4): 70–72.
- Hayot, Eric. 2014. *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*. Columbia University Press.
- Hewett, Heather. 2019. Motherhood Memoirs. In *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, ed. Lynn O' Brien Hallstein, Andrea O'Reilly, and Melinda Giles. Routledge.
- Hicks, Stephen. 2011. *Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Parenting: Families, Intimacies, Genealogies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- hooks, bell. 2007. Revolutionary Parenting. In *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly, 145–156. Demeter Press.
- Horn, Elizabeth, Maria Novotny, and Robin Silbergleid, eds. 2023. *Infertilities, A Curation*. Wayne State University Press.

- Jameson, Fredric. 1981. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell University Press.
- Jamison, Leslie. A Memoir of Motherhood Lost. *New York Times*. 3 April, 2017.
- Jensen, Robin E. 2016. *Infertility: Tracing the History of a Transformative Term*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Jimenez, Karleen Pendleton. 2011. *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*. Zurita-Tightrope.
- Juffer, Jane. 2006. *Single Mother: The Emergence of the Domestic Intellectual*. New York University Press.
- Kawash, Samira. 2011. New Directions in Motherhood Studies. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36 (4): 969–1003.
- Kervick, Mollie Ann. 2019. Embracing Maternal Eroticism: Queer Experiences of Pleasure in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 3 (1–2): <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/5914>.
- Kimball, Alexandra. 2019. *The Seed: Infertility Is a Feminist Issue*. Coach House.
- Lamott, Anne. 1993. *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*. Fawcett Columbine.
- Lavender-Stott, Erin. 2023. Queering Singlehood: Examining the Intersection of Sexuality and Relationship Status from a Queer Lens. *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 15 (3): 428–443.
- Layne, Linda L. 2003. *Motherhood Lost: A Feminist Account of Pregnancy Loss in America*. Routledge.
- LeMoine, Monica Murphy. 2010. *Knocked Up, Knocked Down: Postcards of Miscarriage and Misadventure from the Brink of Parenthood*. Catalyst Book Press.
- Levy, Ariel. 2017. *The Rules Do Not Apply: A Memoir*. Random House.
- Lewis, Helen. 2021. Why I'll Keep Saying Pregnant Women. *The Atlantic*. www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/pregnant-women-people-feminism-language/620468/. Accessed 26 October 2021.
- Loveless, Natalie. 2019. *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research Creation*. Duke University Press.
- Lowik, A. J. 2015. The Ties That Bind Are Broken: Trans* Breastfeeding Practices, Ungendering Body Parts, and Unsexing Parenting. In *Essential Breakthroughs: Conversations about Men, Mothers, and Mothering*, ed. Fiona Joy Green and Gary Lee Pelletier, 205–221. Demeter Press.
- Mack, Katherine Elizabeth. 2024. *The Case for Single Motherhood: Contemporary Maternal Identities and Family Formations*. University of Alabama Press.
- Mamo, Laura. 2007. *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*. Duke University Press.
- Maso, Carole. 1990. *The Art Lover*. North Point.
- Maso, Carole. 1993. *AVA*. Dalkey Archive.
- Maso, Carole. 2000. *The Room Lit by Roses: A Journal of Pregnancy and Birth*. Counterpoint.

- Mazzoni, Christina. 2002. *Maternal Impressions: Pregnancy and Childbirth in Literature and Theory*. Cornell University Press.
- McCallum, E. L. 2022. Thinking through Queer Narrative Forms with Ben Marcus and Renee Gladman. *Narrative* 30 (3): 364–387. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2022.0052>.
- McCallum, E. L., and Teagan Bradway, eds. 2019. *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCullough, Kate. 2004. Of Woman (But Not Man or the Nuclear Family) Born: Motherhood Outside Institutionalized Heterosexuality. In *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's of Woman Born*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly, 103–124. SUNY Press.
- McNeill, Laurie, and Kate Douglas. 2017. Heavy Lifting: The Pedagogical Work of Life Narratives. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 32 (1): 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2017.1250061>.
- Meese, Elizabeth A. 1992. *(Sem)Erotics: Theorizing Lesbian: Writing*. New York University Press.
- Meisner, Natalie. 2014. *Double Pregnant: Two Lesbians Make a Family*. Roseway Publishing.
- Minich, Julia Avril. 2015. Writing Queer Lives: Autobiography and Memoir. In *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. Scott Herring, 59–72. Cambridge University Press.
- Moffat, Wendy. 2015. The Narrative Case for Queer Biography. In *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions*, ed. Robin Warhol and Susan S. Lanser, 210–226. Ohio State University Press.
- Moraga, Cherríe. 1997. *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood*. Firebrand.
- Mortensen, Joani, and Luke Mortensen. 2014. Borders, Bodies, and Kindred Pleasures: Queering the Politics of Maternal Eroticism. In *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Gibson, 185–202. Demeter Press.
- Muñoz, Jose Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press.
- Murphy, Julien S. 2011. Should Lesbians Count as Infertile Couples?: Antilebian Discrimination in Assisted Reproduction. In *Queer Families, Queer Politics: Challenging Culture and the State*, ed. Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann, 182–200. Columbia University Press.
- Musser, Amber Jamilla. 2019. All About Our Mothers: Race, Gender, and the Reparative. In *After Queer Studies: Literature, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*, ed. Teagan Bradway and E. L. McCallum, 122–136. Cambridge University Press.
- Nadir, Leila C. 2021. More Life After Ruins: Autotheory, the Politics of Citation, and the Limits of The Scholarly Gaze. *ASAP/Journal* 6 (3): 547–550.

- Nelson, Maggie. 2015. *The Argonauts*. Graywolf.
- Nelson, Maggie. 2025. Slipping the Surly Bonds of Earth: On Ben Lerner's Latest. *LA Review of Books*. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/95063/>. Accessed 24 August 2025.
- Nelson, Maggie. 2026. *The Slicks: On Sylvia Plath and Taylor Swift*. Graywolf.
- Novotny, Maria. 2017. Failing Infertility: A Case to Queer the Rhetoric of Infertility. In *Interrogating Pregnancy Loss: Feminist Writings on Abortion, Miscarriage, and Stillbirth*, ed. Emily R. M. Lind and Angie Deveau, 183–197. Demeter Press.
- Novotny, Maria. 2019. The ART of Infertility: Finding Friendship & Healing After Reproductive Loss. *Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine* 4 (1): https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive/vol4/iss1/19/.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. 2016. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice*. Demeter Press.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. 2010. The Motherhood Memoir and the New Momism: Biting the Hand that Feeds You. In *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literature*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly and Elizabeth Podnieks, 203–214. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- O'Reilly, Andrea, ed. 2007. *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*. Demeter Press.
- O'Reilly, Andrea, and Elizabeth Podnieks, eds. 2010. *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Park, Shelley M. 2013. *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaterialism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*. SUNY University Press.
- Philyaw, Deesha. 2008. Ain't I A Mommy: Why Are So Few Motherhood Memoirs Penned by Women of Color? *Bitch*, Summer.
- Polikoff, Nancy D. 2007. Lesbians Choosing Children: The Personal Is Political Revisted. In *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings*, ed. Andrea O'Reilly, 194–200. Demeter Press.
- Przybylo, Ela. 2014. Masculine Doubt and Sexual Wonder: Asexually-Identified Men Talk About Their (A)Sexualities. In *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives*, ed. KJ Cerankowski and Megan Milks, 225–246. Routledge.
- Qureshi, Huma. 2019. Why Are All the Motherhood Memoirs So White? *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/03/mothers-white-women-of-colour-reflected-books. Accessed 3 September 2019.
- Rifkin, Mark. 2022. Beyond Family: Kinship's Past, Queer World-Making, and the Question of Governance. In *Beyond Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*, ed. Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, 139–158. Duke University Press.
- Rohy, Valerie. 2018. Queer Narrative Theory. In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. Matthew Garrett, 169–182. Cambridge University Press.

- Roof, Judith. 1996a. *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*. Columbia University Press.
- Roof, Judith. 2007. *The Poetics of DNA*. Minnesota University Press.
- Roof, Judith. 1996b. *Reproductions of Reproduction: Imaging Symbolic Change*. Routledge.
- Rose, Jacqueline. 2018. *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Roulston, Chris. 2021. Queer Parenting and the Challenge to Queer Theory. *Studies in Canadian Literature* 46 (1): 117–144.
- Royster, Francesca T. 2023. *Choosing Family: A Memoir of Queer Motherhood and Black Resistance*. Abrams Press.
- Royster, Francesca T. 2011. Introductory Notes: Performing Queer Lives. *Biography* 34 (3): v–xii.
- Ruddick, Sara. 1989. *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*. Beacon.
- Sameth, Carla. 2019. *One Day on the Gold Line*. Black Rose Writing.
- Scholes, Robert. 1981. Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative. In *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell, 200–208. University of Chicago Press.
- Schulte, Brigid. 2015. *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*. Bloomsbury.
- Seitler, Dana. 2019. Suicidal Tendencies: Notes Toward a Queer Narratology. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25 (4): 599–616.
- Silbergleid, Robin. 2014. *Texas Girl*. Demeter Press.
- Silbergleid, Robin, and Kristina Quynn, eds. 2017. *Reading and Writing Experimental Texts: Critical Innovations*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Singh, Julietta. 2021. *The Breaks: An Essay*. Coffee House Press.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2024. *Reading Autobiography Now: An Updated Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 3rd ed. University of Minnesota Press.
- Soiseth, Alesandra. 2008. *Choosing You: Deciding to Have a Baby on My Own*. Seal.
- Stritzke, Nadyne, and Elisa Scaramuzza. 2016. Trans*, Intersex, and the Question of Pregnancy: Beyond Repronormative Reproduction. In *Transgender and Intersex: Theoretical, Practical, and Artistic Perspectives*, ed. Stefan Horlacher, 141–163. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Swick, Marly. 1990. *A Hole in the Language*. Iowa University Press.
- Summers, A. K. 2014. *Pregnant Butch: Nine Long Months Spent in Drag*. Soft Skull Press.
- Talbot, Jill. 2015. *The Way We Weren't: A Memoir*. Soft Skull Press.
- Tea, Michelle. 2022. *Knocking Myself Up: A Memoir of My (In)Fertility*. William Morrow.
- Tsigdinos, Pamela Mahoney. 2010. *Silent Sorority: A (Barren) Woman Gets Busy, Angry, Lost and Found*. BookSurge Publishing.
- Tober, Diane. 2019. *Romancing the Sperm: Shifting Biopolitics and the Making of Modern Families*. Rutgers University Press.

- Walker, Rebecca. 2008. *Baby Love: Choosing Motherhood After a Lifetime of Ambivalence*. Penguin.
- Warhol, Robyn, and Susan Lanser, eds. 2015. *Narrative Theory Unbound: Feminist and Queer Interventions*. Ohio State University Press.
- Warner, Michael. 1999. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Harvard University Press.
- Westervelt, Amy. 2018. *Forget 'Having It All': How America Messed up Motherhood—and How to Fix It*. Seal Press.
- Weston, Kath. 1991. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Columbia University Press.
- Wiegman, Robyn. 2020. Introduction: Autotheory Theory. *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76 (1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2020.0009>.
- Wyverkens, E., V. Provoost, A. Ravelingien, P. De Sutter, G. Pennings, and A. Buysse. 2014. Beyond Sperm Cells: A Qualitative Study on Constructed Meanings of the Sperm Donor in Lesbian Families. *Human Reproduction* 29 (6): 1248–1254. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/deu060>.
- Young, Stacy. 2025. Our Autotheoretical Lives. In *Autotheories*, ed. Alex Brostoff and Viliashini Cooppan, 121–137. MIT Press.
- Zwartjes, Arianne. 2019. Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory. *Essay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* 6 (1):

INDEX

A

Abortion, [xxviii](#), [xxxi–xxxii](#), [145](#)
 Adoption, [xxi](#), [3](#), [61](#), [81](#), [87](#), [130](#),
[131](#), [145](#)
 second-parent, [68](#), [132](#)
 Aging
 conception and, [7](#), [13](#)
 infertility and, [101](#)
 Ahmed, Sara, [xxiv](#), [149](#)
 AIDS epidemic, [9](#), [51](#), [124](#)
 Aizley, Harlyn
Buying Dad, [xxviii](#), [11–23](#), [26](#),
[32](#), [95–96](#)
 Amatonormativity, [xiv](#)
 Anaphora, [17](#), [18](#), [34](#)
 Andreassen, Rikke, [xxii](#), [9](#), [18](#), [32](#)
 Anthropology, [11](#), [35](#)
 Anti-heteronormativity, [xvi](#),
[xix](#), [68](#), [151](#)
 Anti-narrative, [xiii](#), [1](#), [53](#), [82](#)
 Anti-natalism, [xxix](#), [47](#)
 Anzaldúa, Gloria, [146](#)
 Asexuality, [xix](#), [64](#), [69](#), [79](#), [90](#), [106](#)

Aslami, Zarena, [xvi](#)
 Assisted reproductive technology
 (ART), [xiv](#), [xvii](#), [xix](#), [xxviii](#), [xxix](#),
[xxxii](#), [16–18](#), [67](#), [68](#), [70](#), [79](#), [81](#),
[83](#), [90](#), [92](#), [98](#)
 failure and, [79](#), [88](#)
 family and, [xxii](#), [xxxi](#), [5](#), [129](#)
 motherhood and, [xxi](#)
 nonbinary, trans, and asexual
 individuals using, [xix](#)
 queerness and, [xvii](#), [81](#), [84–85](#), [89](#),
[94–96](#), [102](#)
 Austin, Nefirtiti, [xvii](#)
 Autobiography, *see* Memoir
 Autobiography studies, [xv](#), [108](#)
 Autotheory, [xxiv](#), [xxv](#), [65](#), [71](#), [139](#),
[146](#), [149–150](#)

B

Baggott, Julianna
This Country of Mothers, [2](#)
 Baiada, Christa, [59](#), [60](#)

- Barth, John
 "Night Sea Journey," 112
- Barthes, Roland, 138
- Becker, Suzy
One Good Egg, xxix, 89–95, 99, 101, 149
- Belc, Krys Malcolm
The Natural Mother of the Child, xxi, xxx, 129–136
- Bergman, David, xxii
- Berney, Jennifer
The Other Mothers, xxix, 78, 81, 83–93, 100–101, 149
- Biopower, 19
- Birth, xxi, xxix, 46, 53, 123, 129, 130, 132
 body and, 56, 65
 control, xxxi, 6
 desire and, 56, 65
 gender and, 57, 63
 labor of, 71
 narrative and, 57
 queerness and, 57
 sexuality and, 57
- Blum, Linda, 120
- Body
 birth and, 56, 65
 care and, xx–xxi, 135
 conception and, xxii, 98
 desire and, xix, 60
 gender and, xxi, 51, 53, 54, 58, 60, 62, 84, 85, 88, 98, 100, 112, 123, 129–131, 133–135
 identity and, 129–131
 infertility and, 83, 103–104
 knowledge and, xxiv
 labor and, 72, 120
 loss and, 112
 maternity and, 46, 56, 57, 66, 68
 memoir and, xxiv
 motherhood and, xxi–xxii, xxvi, xxx, 46, 120, 123
 narrative and, xxix, 46, 52, 54
 pregnancy and, xxii, xxix, 46, 51, 52, 55, 57, 60, 62, 65, 68, 72, 129–130
 queerness and, xix, xxi, xxiv, xxvi, xxviii, 44, 58, 66, 68, 84, 85, 123
 reading and, 45
 reproduction and, xxi, 55, 58, 100, 130–131
 sexuality and, 55, 85, 100
 social and, 62
- Boggs, Belle, 80, 99
- Boswell, Parley Ann, 44, 66, 68
- Boylan, Jennifer Finney
Stuck in the Middle with You, xxx, 134–137
- Bradway, Teagan, xviii–xix, xxii, xxiv, 66, 138, 140, 146
- Breakup, 79
- Breastfeeding, xxi, 44, 46, 57, 60, 64, 69
See also Nursing
- Breen, Margaret Sönsner, xxvii
- Brostoff, Alex, xxv
- Brown, Ivana, 120
- Brown, Louise, 84
- C**
- Capitalism, 56, 86, 145
- Care
 access to, 19, 79, 100, 121, 135
 body and, xx–xxi, 135, 137, 149
 family and, 121
 gender and, xxi, 57, 63, 100, 120–123, 132–137, 147
 identity and, xxx, 121, 137
 motherhood and, xxx, 120–121, 123, 133–138

narrative and, 135, 149
 queerness and, xxx, 140
 sexuality and, 19, 99–101
 Cerankowski, Karli June, 64
 Chen, Angela, 65
 Choice
 conception and, xxviii, 3–4, 6, 11, 13–16, 31, 85
 family and, 3, 6, 9, 11, 16, 18
 gender and, 13
 infertility and, 16
 memoir and, 18
 motherhood and, xvii, xxii, xxxi–xxxii, 64, 121
 narrative and, 17
 pregnancy and, 64
 queerness and, xxii, 6, 9, 15, 16
 reproduction and, xxxi, 3, 11, 35, 96, 103
 sexuality and, 13–15
 Cis-heteropatriarchy, *see*
 Heteropatriarchy
 Cixous, Hélène, 50
 Claggett, Shalyn, xxii
 Class
 family and, 12, 124
 motherhood and, xxxii
 parenting and, 124
 sexuality and, 8
 Comics, 61, 62, 79
 Community, xxii, 88, 92, 99
 Conception, xvii, xxvii, xxviii, 2–5, 31, 45
 aging and, 7, 13
 body and, xxii, 98
 choice and, xxviii, 3–4, 6, 11, 13–16, 31, 85
 desire and, 3, 91, 96
 family and, 3, 5, 7–8, 11, 25, 32–35
 gender and, 5–8, 28, 98
 imagination and, 25
 memoir and, 10

narrative and, 3, 5, 7, 11–13, 20–23, 25, 31, 34–36, 77, 83, 88, 95, 96, 98, 109
 queerness and, xxviii, 2–7, 10–17, 23, 26, 27, 34, 35, 80–81, 85–88, 97–100, 107, 111–112
 race and, 15, 24
 sex and/sexuality and, 5–8, 12–18, 21, 26, 27, 29–33, 61, 79, 84–88, 98–99
 Cooke, Jennifer, 67
 COVID-19 pandemic, xxvii, xxx, 121–122, 135, 146, 151
 Craven, Christa, xx, 79, 87, 101, 111
 Creative nonfiction, *see* Memoir
 Cryobank, 88

D
 Death, 9, 51
 maternal, 43
 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), 5
 Delaney, Samuel, xxiv
 Derricotte, Toi
 Natural Birth, xiii
 Desire
 asexual, 65, 69, 90
 birth and, 56, 65
 body and, xix, 60
 conception and, 3, 96
 family and, 16, 83
 gender and, 57, 60, 84
 loss and, 19
 maternal/maternity and, xxvii–xxx, 2, 8, 13–15, 19, 22, 32, 55, 64, 82–85, 88–90, 98, 99, 103, 104, 107, 112, 122, 128, 131, 148, 151
 mothering and, 57
 narrative and, 95, 110
 pregnancy and, 55, 60, 65, 70

Desire (*cont.*)

- queerness and, [xxviii](#), [xxix](#), [19](#),
[22](#), [70](#), [98](#)
- reproduction and, [xxix](#), [99](#)
- sex and/sexuality and, [xix](#), [8](#), [57](#),
[64](#), [65](#), [84](#)

Diagnosis, [4](#), [30](#), [79–81](#), [86](#), [90](#),
[100](#), [103](#)

Didacticism, [xxvii](#)

Divorce, [5](#), [79](#), [88](#), [95](#)

Domestinator, [125](#)

Domestinator, [65](#), [96](#), [123](#)

Donor gametes, use of, [xv](#), [xxii](#), [xxxi](#),
[30](#), [54](#), [81](#), [97](#), [102](#)

Doucet, Andrea, [133](#), [136](#)

Douglas, Susan, [127](#)

Dozier, Raine, [137](#)

Drag, [29](#), [59](#), [65](#), [67](#), [97](#)

Duggan, Lisa, [xx](#), [13](#)

DuPlessis, Rachel, [xxv](#)

E

Edelman, Lee, [xxvii](#), [138](#)

Egg donors, [79](#), [88](#), [94](#), [95](#),
[100](#), [102–104](#)

Episiotomy, [88](#)

Epstein, Rachel, [63](#)

Erdrich, Louise, [xvii](#)

Eroticism, [24](#)

- asexual, [65](#), [69](#)

- autoeroticism, [56](#), [68](#) (*see*
also Desire)

- maternal, [5](#), [47](#), [55](#), [65](#), [68](#)

- pregnancy and, [69](#), [70](#)

- sex and, [69](#)

Essentialism, [xx](#), [xxix](#), [xxx](#), [xxxii](#), [46](#),
[50](#), [58](#), [70](#), [85](#), [95](#), [102](#), [121](#),
[129](#), [131](#), [134–137](#), [149](#)

Eugenics, [15](#), [33](#)

Experimentation

- defining, [xxiv–xxvi](#)

feminism and, [xxv](#), [50](#)

formal, [xxv](#), [xxvii](#), [48](#)

knowledge and, [xxiv](#), [xxvi](#)

literary, [xv](#)

lived, [xv](#), [xxxii](#)

memoir and, [xxvi](#), [xxvii](#)

motherhood and, [xxv](#)

narrative and, [xxv](#), [1](#), [48](#), [49](#), [53](#)

queerness and, [xxiv–xxvi](#), [xxxii](#), [49](#)

reproduction and, [48](#)

F

Family

biological, [3](#), [61](#), [83](#), [93](#), [125](#)

blood and, [8–10](#), [15](#)

care and, [121](#), [122](#)

choice and, [3](#), [6](#), [9](#), [11](#), [16](#), [18](#)

chosen, [xxx](#), [3](#), [8](#), [30](#), [52](#), [79](#), [83](#),
[93](#), [99](#), [125](#)

class and, [12](#), [124](#)

conception and, [xxviii](#), [3](#), [5](#), [7–8](#),
[11](#), [25](#), [32–35](#)

desire and, [16](#), [83](#)

gender and, [44](#), [95](#), [129](#)

genetics and, [6](#), [8–10](#), [15](#), [22–23](#),
[32–33](#), [61](#), [95](#), [125](#)

imagination and, [34](#), [83](#)

infertility and, [27](#), [83](#), [88](#), [103](#)

law, [xvii](#)

loss and, [78](#), [93](#)

love and, [8](#)

marriage and, [xvi](#), [61](#)

memoir and, [129](#)

motherhood and, [xiv](#)

narrative and, [xxxi](#), [xxxii](#), [5](#), [8](#), [13](#),
[21](#), [34](#), [64](#), [89–90](#), [101–103](#),
[122](#), [123](#), [126](#), [129](#), [151](#)

nuclear, [xiv](#), [xvi](#), [1](#), [4](#), [10](#), [18](#), [20](#),
[22](#), [24](#), [57](#), [67](#), [83](#), [103](#), [122](#),
[125–128](#), [147](#), [151](#)

obstacles to, [19](#)

- performance and, 67
 politics of, 8, 123
 queerness and, xvi, xix–xx, xxvii–xxxii, 3–18, 20–21, 24–25, 27, 30–32, 34, 35, 51, 57, 79–81, 83–88, 93–103, 123–125, 128–130, 138–140, 147–152
 race and, 8–10, 124
 reproduction and, xvii, xxii, 5, 15, 19, 26, 93
 sexuality and, xx, 3, 11, 14, 16, 19–20, 31, 32, 34, 51, 57, 61, 80, 81, 84, 85, 88, 96, 99, 102
 social, 6
 Farwell, Marilyn, xviii–xix, 12
 Fatherhood, 129–137
 Fawaz, Ramzi, 92
 Feminism, xv, xviii
 anti-social theory and, 145
 choice and, 145
 experimentation and, xxv, 50
 family and, 99
 grief and, 111
 matricentric, xxx
 memoir and, 146
 motherhood and, xvi, xxvii, 112, 123, 135, 139, 151
 pregnancy and, 70
 Fertility, xiv–xxxii, 4, 8, 21, 77–78
 clinic, xiv, xxix, 3, 17–20, 26–31, 34, 36, 44, 78–83, 85–89, 91, 92, 95, 98, 100–101, 103
 emotional consequences of, 15
 industry, 17, 20, 34, 80–85, 89, 90, 92, 95
 queerness and, 95
 sexuality and, 17, 93
 Form
 experimentation and, xxv, xxvii, 48
 loss and, 79
 narrative and, 53
 queer/queerness and, xviii, xx, xxv, 10
 Foucault, Michel, 19, 90
 Fournier, Lauren, xxv, 65, 139
 Freeman, Elizabeth, 146
 Freud, Sigmund, 82, 112
 Friedman, May, xxvi, 146

G
 Galbraith, Rebekah, 66, 69
 Gallop, Jane, xxv, 70
 Garbes, Angela
 Essential Labor, 122–123, 132, 133
 Gaskin, Ina May, 63
 Gender, xv
 birth and, 57, 63
 body and, xxi, 51, 53, 54, 58, 60, 62, 84, 85, 88, 98, 100, 112, 123, 129–131, 133–135
 care and, xxi, 57, 63, 100, 120–123, 132–137
 choice and, 13
 conception and, 5–8, 28, 98
 desire and, 57, 60, 84
 essentialism and, 50, 58, 85, 129, 134–135, 137
 family and, 44, 95, 129
 identity and, 8, 28, 55, 56, 59, 62, 65, 68, 129–132, 135–137
 infertility and, 28–30, 32, 84, 86–87, 112
 labor and, 136
 loss and, 112
 memoir and, 4, 23
 motherhood and, xx–xxi, xxix, 5, 19, 25, 57–59, 63, 66, 85, 120–121, 123, 124, 129, 132–137, 149
 narrative and, 6, 50, 53, 54, 107, 135, 149–150
 parenting and, 22, 129, 132–137
 performance and, 24, 62, 64, 68
 pregnancy and, 47, 50, 55, 56, 58, 59, 65, 68, 129–132

Gender (*cont.*)

- queerness and, 2, 26, 47, 58, 60, 61, 84, 108
- reproduction and, xxi, xxix, 6, 10, 24, 28, 44, 47, 56, 58, 59, 64, 65, 68, 70, 95, 100, 102, 123, 129–131, 134, 149–150
- romance and, 84
- sex and/sexuality and, 24, 28–30, 47, 58, 59, 62, 64, 65, 68, 70, 83–84, 100, 102, 149–150
- studies, xvii

Genetics, xvii, xx–xxii, 6, 8–10, 61, 81, 94, 125, 129, 132–133

Genre, xvi–xviii, xxii–xxiv, xxvii, 2, 4, 10, 17, 53, 58, 65, 71, 106, 140, 146, 147

Gestation, xxi, xxix, 6, 11, 46, 49, 53, 54, 58, 59, 62, 69

surrogacy, xvii, xxi, 81, 100, 102

See also Pregnancy

Gibson, Margaret, 137, 148

Gilmore, Leigh, 108

Golombok, Susan, xvii

Gore, Ariel

Hip Mama Survival Guide, xiii, 1, 96, 145

We Were Witches, 146, 147, 149

Goulden, Marc, 121

Green, Fiona Joy, 134

Grief, 77, 82, 104–106, 111, 112

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline, xvii

H

Halberstam, Jack, xxiv, 111

Hanson, Elizabeth Hannah, 64, 106

Hayot, Eric, xviii

Heteronarrative/heteronormativity, xviii, xxvii, xxix, 6, 12, 17–18, 21, 24, 29–31, 47, 52, 57, 66, 70, 71, 82, 83, 85–86, 91, 93, 95,

96, 99, 101–102, 108, 111, 112, 129, 137, 148

See also Narrative

Heteropatriarchy, xv, xxix, xxx, 47, 50, 53, 55, 58, 70, 80, 85, 93–94, 120, 122–124, 135, 145, 149

Heterosexism, 81, 83, 93, 95

Hewett, Heather, xxiii

Hicks, Stephen, 126

Homonormativity, xx, 13, 51, 112

Homophobia, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 51, 81, 91, 93, 97, 100–101, 103, 123, 149

Hybridity, of scholarship, xxiii, xxvi, 1

I

Identity, 65, 71

body and, 129–131

care and, xxx

gender and, 8, 28, 55, 56, 59, 62, 65, 68, 129–132, 135–137

infertility and, 80, 82, 89, 91, 102

memoir and, 36, 145

motherhood and, xiv, xxi, xxx, 28, 119–122, 127–129, 135

performance and, 138

politics of, 34

pregnancy and, 47, 55, 56, 62, 68, 131–132

queerness and, xviii, 47, 69, 96, 97, 100

sexuality and, 10, 16, 28, 50

Imagination, 34, 83

Infertility, xiii, xv, xxvii, xxix, 7, 17, 151

age-related, 13, 101

biomedical, xxx, 5–7, 20, 27, 28, 32, 35, 55, 80–82, 85–90, 99–102

body and, 83, 103–104

choice and, 16

family and, 27, 80, 83, 88, 103
gender and, 28–30, 32, 84,
86–87, 112
identity and, 80, 82, 89, 91, 102
male factor, 86, 100
marriage and, 79
memoir and, 80–82, 95, 96
narrative and, 23, 45, 80–83, 88,
89, 91–96, 98, 99, 101,
103–104, 109, 110
performance and, 80
queerness and, xvii, xxx, 19, 22, 23,
26–28, 80–83, 85, 88–93, 96,
99, 100, 102, 103,
106–107, 110–112
representation and, 79
sexuality and, 26–30, 32, 34,
78–80, 83, 85–87, 91,
99, 101–102
social, xxix, 5–8, 20, 27–30, 35, 55,
78–82, 85–88, 90, 100–102
Insemination, xiv, 3, 31, 33, 78, 89,
94, 98, 104, 138
failed, 90
at home, 15
queerness and, 26
sexuality and, 26, 32
Insurance, xxx, 4, 16, 19,
78–80, 86, 90
Intersectionality, xx, xxiii, xxx, xxxii,
81, 101, 120, 121,
133–136, 150–151
Intimacy, 64
Intrauterine growth restriction, xv
Intrauterine insemination (IUI), 2, 11,
18, 21, 54, 140
In vitro fertilization (IVF), xv, xvii,
xxx, 2, 10–12, 17, 54, 61, 79,
81–82, 89–92, 94–96, 101,
104, 109
IUI, *see* Intrauterine insemination
IVF, *see* In vitro fertilization

J

Jagose, Annamarie, 138
Jameson, Fredric, 2
Jimenez, Karleen Pendleton
How to Get a Girl Pregnant, xxviii,
11, 23–32, 78, 80, 88
Juffer, Jane, 122, 139

K

Kahlo, Frida, 49
Kervick, Mollie Ann, 69
Kimball, Alexandra, xxviii, 80, 112
Kinship, xviii, xxx, 15, 24, 55, 64, 67,
93, 96, 99, 100, 120, 125, 137
queer, xxii, xxviii, xxx, 3, 5, 52, 68,
83, 94, 97, 102
reproduction and, 11
Knowledge
body and, xxiv
experimentation and, xxiv, xxvi
maternity and, 70
memoir and, xxvi, 97, 110
narrative and, 110, 113
queerness and, xxiv, xxvi, 139
reproduction and, 97
Krauss, Rosalind, 70
Kristeva, Julia, 70

L

Lamott, Anne
Operating Instructions, xiii, 2, 4
Lanser, Susan S., xix, 6
Layne, Linda, 112
LeMoine, Monica, 110
Levy, Ariel
The Rules Do Not Apply, xviii, xxix,
82, 104–111, 113
LGBTQ+ rights, 51
Life writing, *see* Memoir
Listserv, 2, 30

Literary studies, *xv*, *xxii*
 experimentation and, *xxiv*
 heterosexual reproduction and, *xxix*
 Lorde, Audre, *xvii*, *xviii*, *xxiii–xxiv*, *65*, *146*
 Loss, *xvi*, *36*, *52*
 body and, *112*
 desire and, *19*
 family and, *93*
 gender and, *112*
 memoir and, *81–82*
 motherhood and, *19*
 narrative and, *1*, *78–79*, *82*, *88*, *105–113*
 queerness and, *78–81*, *87*, *101*, *107*
 reproduction and, *xx*, *xxix*, *79*, *81*, *82*, *87*, *89*, *91*, *101*, *105–113*, *151*
 sexuality and, *87*
 Love, *8*
 Loveless, Natalie, *xxvi*
 Lowik, A. J., *133*
 Low theory, *xxiv*

M

Mack, Katherine, *18*, *150*
 Mamo, Laura, *86*
 Marriage, *5*, *51*, *65*, *131*
 family and, *xvi*, *61*
 infertility and, *79*
 narrative and, *24*, *97*, *108*, *110–111*
 pregnancy and, *47*, *51*
 reproduction and, *51*
 same-sex, *8*, *12*, *68*, *93*, *95*, *107*, *125*
 sexuality and, *xvi*, *135*
Martha Stewart Baby, *xiii*
 Maso, Carole
Art Lover, *49*, *51*

Aureole, *53*
AVA, *49*, *53*
Defiance, *48*, *49*
Mother and Child, *54*
The Room Lit by Roses, *xiii*, *xxix*, *8*, *45*, *46*, *48*, *59*, *66*
 Mason, Mary Ann, *121*
 Maternal theory, *134*
 Maternity, *xxi*, *xxix*, *46*, *139*
 body and, *46*, *56*, *57*, *66*, *68*
 desire and, *55*
 gender and, *57*, *59*, *63*
 knowledge and, *70*
 leave, *xxi*
 queerness and, *46*, *56*, *63*, *65*, *66*, *70*, *72*, *107*
 Matrescence, *xxix*
 Matricentric feminism, *xxx*, *121*
 Mattes, Jane, *xiii*, *2*
 Mazzoni, Christina, *46*, *53*, *66*
 McCallum, E. L., *xviii–xix*, *xxii*, *xxiv*, *105*
 McCullough, Kate, *4*
 Meese, Elisabeth, *xxv*
 Meisner, Natalie
Double Pregnant, *xxviii*, *11*, *31–35*
 Melancholia, *xiii*, *82*, *105–107*, *110*
 Memoir, *xv*, *xxii*
 body and, *xxiv*
 choice and, *18*
 conception and, *10*
 defining, *xxii–xxiv*
 experimentation and, *xxvi*, *xxvii*
 family and, *129*
 gender and, *4*, *23*
 genre and, *xvi*, *xvii*, *xxii–xxiv*, *xxvii*, *4*, *10*, *17*, *53*, *58*, *65*, *106*, *146*
 graphic, *59*, *79*, *89*, *91*
 identity and, *36*
 infertility and, *78*, *80–82*, *95*, *96*
 knowledge and, *xxiv*, *xxvi*, *97*, *110*

- loss and, 81–82
 motherhood and, 10, 50, 106,
 107, 149–151
 narrative and, xxiv, 7, 21, 79,
 81–82, 91, 109
 politics of, xxii, 53, 61, 80
 pregnancy and, 45, 46, 49
 queer mother, xv–xviii, xxi–xxiv,
 xxvi–xxx, xxxii, 1–5, 10–11, 17,
 20–22, 34, 51, 53, 55, 57, 58,
 65, 72, 80, 83, 84, 92, 95–96,
 101, 105–107, 112, 121–123,
 126–127, 135–137, 139,
 145, 148–152
 queerness and, xxii, xxvi, 4, 23,
 34–35, 44, 46, 48, 49, 55, 65,
 79, 80, 102, 106–107, 112,
 135, 149–150
 race and, xvii, 4, 9
 representation and, xxii, xxiii, 53, 61
 reproduction and, 81, 82, 108
 sexuality and, 4, 107
 social and, 80
 speculative, 146
 studies, xv
 technology of, xxxi, xxxii, 34, 53,
 96, 102, 120, 122
 trauma, 108
 Michaels, Meredith, 127
 Milkmother, xvii
 Milks, Megan, 64
 Minich, Julie Avril, xxiii
 Miscarriage, xiii, xv, 12, 33, 36, 43,
 50, 54, 78, 82, 87, 89, 103, 106,
 109, 113, 119
 Moffat, Wendy, xxii
 Momoir, 4, *see* Memoir
 Monette, Paul, xxiii, 124
 Moraga, Cherríe
 Waiting in the Wings, xvi, xviii,
 xxvii–xxx, 2, 4–11, 14–16, 20,
 23, 24, 28, 31, 45, 46, 52, 54,
 60, 61, 66, 69, 78, 80, 85,
 88, 123–125
 Morrison, Toni, 77
 Mortensen, Joani, 47
 Motherhood, xiii
 academia and, xiv
 biological, xxii, xxx, 46, 95, 129
 body and, xxi–xxii, xxvi,
 xxx, 46, 123
 care and, xxx, 120–121,
 123, 133–138
 choice and, xvii, xxii, xxxi–xxxii, 64,
 121, 146
 class and, xxxii
 defining, xx–xxii
 desire and, xxvii–xxx, 2, 8, 13–15,
 19, 22, 32, 64, 77, 83–85,
 88–90, 98, 99, 103, 104, 107,
 112, 128
 elective single mother, xiii–xxxii, 2,
 3, 9, 11, 36, 45, 64, 70, 90,
 122, 125–129, 139,
 145–148, 150
 experimental, xxv
 family and, xiv, 120
 feminism and, xvi
 gender and, xx–xxi, xxix, 5, 19, 25,
 58, 66, 85, 120–121, 123, 124,
 129, 132–137
 genetic, xvii, xxi, xxii, 23, 95, 120,
 129, 133
 gestational, xvii, xx–xxii, 120, 133
 identity and, xiv, xxi, xxx, 28,
 119–122, 127–129, 135
 labor of, xxx, 120, 122, 125,
 127, 149
 loss and, xvi, 19
 memoir and, xxiii, 10, 50, 106,
 107, 149–151
 narrative and, xv, xvii, xxxi, 5, 36,
 64, 107, 119–121, 125–128,
 146, 147, 150–151

Motherhood (*cont.*)

- performance and, 127, 150
- politics of, 123, 124
- queerness and, xx–xxv, xxvii–xxviii, xxx–xxxii, 4, 12, 19, 21, 25, 34, 58, 64, 88, 95–96, 103, 106, 107, 120, 123–125, 127–129, 139, 150–151
- race and, xvi, xvii, xxxii, 5, 124–125, 129
- representation and, 120
- reproduction and, 151
- sex and/sexuality and, xiv, xvii, xix, xxi, xxii, 5, 6, 8–9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 25, 50, 57, 70, 96, 124, 151
- social, xxi, 95, 120; contexts of, xv, xxi, xxx, 121, 133
- studies, xv, xxiii, 134, 135; heteronormativity of, xxvii
- technology and, xxi
- theory and, xxv
- Mothering, xxx, 5, 68, 120–125, 129, 132–133, 135, 150
 - desire and, 57
 - gender and, 57, 58, 133
 - parenting compared to, xxi, xxx, 120
- Motherwork, xxvii, xxx, 120, 122
 - See also* Mothering
- Mourning, 82, 110, 112
 - See also* Loss
- Musser, Amber, 120

N

- Narrative, xv, xix
 - asexual, 106
 - birth and, 57
 - body and, xxix, 46, 52, 54, 78
 - care and, 135, 149, 150
 - choice and, 17

- conception and, 3, 5, 7, 11–13, 20–23, 25, 31, 34–36, 83, 88, 95, 96, 98, 109
- desire and, 95, 110
- experimentation and, xxv, 1, 48, 49, 53
- family and, xxxi, xxxii, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 64, 89–90, 101–103, 123, 126, 129, 151
- form and, 53
- gender and, 6, 50, 53, 54, 107, 135, 149–150
- identity and, 150
- imagination and, 25
- infertility and, 23, 45, 80–83, 88, 89, 91–96, 98, 99, 101, 103–104, 109, 110
- knowledge and, 110, 113
- loss and, 1, 77–79, 82, 88, 105–113
- marriage and, 97, 108, 110–111
- memoir and, xxiv, 7, 21, 79, 81–82, 109
- motherhood and, xv, xvii, xxxi, 5, 36, 64, 107, 119–121, 125–128, 147, 150–151
- performance and, xv, 4
- politics of, xxxii
- pregnancy and, 43, 45, 48, 52, 60, 66, 71, 109
- queerness and, xv, xviii, xx, xxiv, xxix, 2, 3, 5–7, 12, 21, 22, 24, 27, 29–31, 45, 49, 53, 60, 71, 80, 82, 83, 89–93, 95–97, 101–103, 105–108, 110, 111
- reproduction and, xxix, xxxi, xxxii, 12, 15, 23–24, 31, 35, 45, 47, 48, 53, 78–79, 82, 91–92, 95–97, 103, 106–108, 113
- romance and, xv, 6, 12, 24, 31, 97, 103
- sexuality and, xviii, xxix, 6, 12, 21, 32, 45, 47, 57, 95

social and, xxxii, 4
 technology of, xxxi, xxxii, 34
 theory, xv, xviii; queer, xxii
 Nelson, Maggie
The Argonauts, xviii, xxv, xxvi, xxix, 47, 65, 96, 137–140, 149, 151
 Neoliberalism, 12
 Nonbinary individuals, xix, 46, 129, 149
 Nonfiction, *see* Memoir
 Novotny, Maria, 27, 28, 82, 84
 Nursing, 123, 129, 131
See also Breastfeeding

O

Olsen, Tillie, 146
 O'Reilly, Andrea, xv, xx, xxi, xxiii, 120
 Ovarian stimulation, 89, 90, 101

P

Parental leave, xxi
 Parental rights, 68, 123, 129, 131
 Parenting, 95, 126, 127
 class and, 124
 gender and, 22, 129, 132–137, 149
 genetic, xx, 131, 132
 gestational, xvii, xx–xxi, 129–134, 136
 mothering compared to, xxi, xxx
 performance and, 132
 queerness and, 137–138, 149
 sexuality and, xviii
 single, 96, 125–128
 Park, Shelley, xxvii, 148
 Pelletier, Gary Lee, 134
 Performance, xv
 family and, 67
 gender and, 24, 62, 64, 68
 infertility and, 80

motherhood and, 127
 narrative and, 4
 sexuality and, 29
 Personal essay, *see* Memoir
 Pfeffer, Carla, 151
 Podnieks, Elizabeth, xxiii
 Politics
 of family, 8, 123
 of grief, 111
 of identity, 34
 of memoir, xxii, 53, 61, 80
 of motherhood, 123, 124
 of narrative, xxxii
 of queerness, xviii, 18, 26, 51, 123, 149
 of representation, xxvii, 53, 61
 of respectability, 123
 of sexuality, 16, 18, 51
 Postpartum, xxii, 46
 Pratt, Minnie Bruce, xviii
 Pregnancy, xvii, xxvii, 3, 7, 22
 body and, xxii, xxix, 46, 51, 52, 55, 57, 60, 62, 65, 68, 72, 129–130
 chemical, 33
 choice and, 64, 145
 desire and, 55, 60, 65, 70
 ectopic, 79, 88, 91, 92
 eroticism and, 69, 70
 gender and, 47, 50, 55, 56, 58, 59, 65, 68, 129–132 (*see also* Gestation)
 high-risk, xiii, xv
 identity and, 47, 55, 56, 62, 68, 131–132
 labor of, 70
 marriage and, 51
 medicalized, 16
 memoir and, 45, 46, 49
 narrative and, 43, 45, 48, 49, 52, 60, 66, 71, 109

Pregnancy (*cont.*)

- queerness and, [xxix](#), [11](#), [12](#), [43](#), [45](#),
[51](#), [55](#), [57](#), [60](#), [64](#), [66](#), [68](#), [70](#),
[107](#), [137](#)
- sex and/sexuality and, [5](#), [17](#), [44](#),
[47](#), [51](#), [55](#), [59](#), [61](#), [65](#), [68](#), [104](#)
- social and, [62](#)
- unplanned, [15](#)

Pronatalism, [xx](#), [xxxii](#), [46](#), [70](#), [95](#), [134](#)

Pryzbylo, Ela, [64](#)

Psychoanalytic theory, [xix](#)

Psychology, [xvii](#)

Q

Quayle, Dan, [12](#), [147](#)

Queerness

- asexuality and, [64](#)
- birth and, [57](#)
- body and, [xix](#), [xxiv](#), [xxvi](#), [xxviii](#), [44](#),
[58](#), [66](#), [68](#), [84](#), [85](#), [123](#)
- care and, [xxx](#), [140](#)
- choice and, [xxii](#), [6](#), [9](#), [15](#), [16](#)
- conception and, [xxviii](#), [2–7](#), [10–17](#),
[23](#), [26](#), [27](#), [34](#), [35](#), [80–81](#),
[85–88](#), [97–100](#),
[107](#), [111–112](#)
- death and, [9](#), [51](#), [124](#)
- defining, [xviii–xx](#), [2](#)
- desire and, [xxviii](#), [xxix](#), [19](#),
[22](#), [70](#), [98](#)
- eroticism and, [48](#)
- experimentation and, [xxiv–xxvi](#),
[xxxii](#), [49](#)
- family and, [xvi](#), [xix–xx](#), [xxviii](#),
[xxx–xxxii](#), [3–18](#), [20–21](#), [24–25](#),
[27](#), [30–32](#), [34](#), [35](#), [51](#), [57](#),
[79–81](#), [83–88](#), [90](#), [93–103](#),
[122–125](#), [128–130](#), [132](#),
[138–140](#), [147–152](#)
- form and, [xviii](#), [xx](#), [xxv](#), [10](#)

gender and, [2](#), [26](#), [47](#), [58](#), [60](#),
[61](#), [84](#), [108](#)

identity and, [xviii](#), [47](#), [69](#), [96](#), [97](#),
[100](#), [149](#)

imagination and, [83](#)

infertility and, [xxx](#), [19](#), [22](#), [23](#),
[26–28](#), [80–83](#), [85](#), [88–93](#), [95](#),
[96](#), [99](#), [100](#), [102](#), [103](#),
[106–107](#), [110–112](#)

insemination and, [26](#)

kinship and, [xxii](#), [xxviii](#), [xxx](#), [3](#), [5](#),
[52](#), [68](#), [83](#), [97](#), [102](#)

knowledge and, [xxiv](#), [xxvi](#), [139](#)

loss and, [78–81](#), [87](#), [101](#), [107](#)

marriage and, [107](#)

maternity and, [46](#), [56](#), [63](#), [65](#), [66](#),
[70](#), [72](#), [107](#)

memoir and, [xxii](#), [xxiii](#), [xxvi](#), [4](#), [23](#),
[34–35](#), [44](#), [46](#), [48](#), [49](#), [55](#), [65](#),
[79](#), [80](#), [102](#), [106–107](#), [112](#),
[135](#), [149–150](#)

motherhood and, [xx–xxv](#), [xxvii–](#)
[xxviii](#), [xxx–xxxii](#), [4](#), [12](#), [19](#), [21](#),
[25](#), [34](#), [58](#), [64](#), [88](#), [95–96](#), [103](#),
[106](#), [107](#), [120](#), [123–125](#),
[127–129](#), [139](#), [145](#), [150–151](#)

narrative and, [xv](#), [xviii](#), [xx](#), [xxiv](#), [xxix](#),
[2](#), [3](#), [5–7](#), [12](#), [21](#), [22](#), [24](#), [27](#),
[29–31](#), [45](#), [49](#), [53](#), [60](#), [71](#), [80](#),
[82](#), [83](#), [89–93](#), [95–97](#),
[101–103](#), [105–108](#), [110](#), [111](#),
[136](#), [149](#)

parenting and, [137–138](#)

politics and, [xviii](#), [18](#), [26](#), [51](#), [123](#)

pregnancy and, [xxix](#), [11](#), [12](#), [43](#), [45](#),
[51](#), [55](#), [57](#), [60](#), [64](#), [66](#),
[68](#), [70](#), [107](#)

race and, [8](#), [24](#)

reading and, [xviii](#), [xix](#), [xxvi](#)

relationality and, [xxix](#), [xxx](#), [5](#), [97](#),
[140](#), [151](#)

- representation and, [xxiii](#), [79](#), [81](#)
 - reproduction and, [xvii](#), [xix](#), [xxix](#), [10](#),
[16](#), [23](#), [25](#), [31](#), [45](#), [49](#), [52](#), [57](#),
[65](#), [69](#), [78–81](#), [83](#), [85](#), [87](#), [89](#),
[91–92](#), [96](#), [97](#), [101](#), [107](#), [125](#),
[138–139](#), [149](#)
 - romance and, [84](#), [97](#)
 - sex and/sexuality and, [xix](#), [2](#), [26](#),
[29](#), [62](#), [69](#), [84](#), [96](#), [98](#)
 - social and, [xv](#), [58](#)
 - technology and, [xvii](#), [xix](#), [81](#), [84–85](#),
[95](#), [96](#), [102](#)
 - Queer theory, [xv](#), [xviii](#), [xxiv](#), [53](#), [66](#),
[71](#), [138](#), [149–150](#)
 - anti-natalism of, [xxix](#), [47](#)
 - anti-social thesis, [124](#), [138](#), [145](#)
 - essentialism and, [xxx](#), [121](#)
 - experimentation and, [xxv](#)
 - maternity and, [72](#)
 - memoir and, [65](#)
 - motherhood and, [xxvii](#), [70](#), [112](#),
[139](#), [151](#)
 - reproduction and, [97](#), [111](#)
- R**
- Race
- conception and, [15](#), [24](#)
 - family and, [8–10](#), [124](#)
 - genre and, [4](#)
 - memoir and, [xvii](#), [4](#), [9](#)
 - motherhood and, [xvi](#), [xvii](#), [xxxii](#), [5](#),
[124–125](#), [129](#)
 - queerness and, [8](#), [24](#)
 - reproduction and, [24](#)
 - sexuality and, [8](#)
- Reading
- body and, [45](#)
 - queer, [xviii](#), [xix](#), [xxvi](#)
- Realism, [xxvii](#)
- Repository for Germinal Choice, [33](#)
- Representation
- infertility and, [79](#)
 - memoir and, [xxiii](#), [53](#), [61](#)
 - politics of, [xxvii](#), [53](#), [61](#)
 - positive, [xxiii](#)
 - queerness and, [xxiii](#), [79](#), [81](#)
 - sexuality and, [12](#)
 - social work of, [53](#)
- Reproduction, [xv](#), [xviii–xx](#)
- assisted, [xxviii](#), [xxix](#)
 - body and, [xxi](#), [55](#), [58](#),
[100](#), [130–131](#)
 - choice and, [xxxi](#), [3](#), [11](#), [35](#), [96](#),
[103](#), [150](#)
 - desire and, [xxix](#), [99](#)
 - experimentation and, [48](#)
 - family and, [5](#), [15](#), [19](#), [26](#)
 - gender and, [xxi](#), [xxix](#), [6](#), [10](#), [24](#), [28](#),
[44](#), [47](#), [56](#), [58](#), [59](#), [64](#), [65](#), [68](#),
[70](#), [95](#), [100](#), [102](#), [123](#),
[129–131](#), [134](#), [149–150](#)
 - genetics and, [95](#)
 - knowledge and, [97](#)
 - labor of, [xxi](#), [xxx](#), [20](#), [57](#), [58](#), [66](#),
[70](#), [71](#), [100](#), [122](#), [123](#), [131](#),
[134](#), [137](#), [139](#), [150–151](#)
 - loss and, [xx](#), [xxix](#), [78](#), [79](#), [81](#), [82](#),
[87](#), [89](#), [91](#), [101](#), [105–113](#), [151](#)
 - marriage and, [51](#)
 - medically assisted, [27](#)
 - memoir and, [81](#), [82](#), [108](#)
 - narrative and, [xxix](#), [xxxi](#), [xxxii](#), [12](#),
[15](#), [23–24](#), [31](#), [35](#), [45](#), [47](#), [48](#),
[53](#), [78–79](#), [82](#), [91–92](#), [95–97](#),
[103](#), [106–108](#), [113](#), [149](#)
 - queerness and, [xvii](#), [xix](#), [xxix](#), [10](#),
[16](#), [23](#), [25](#), [31](#), [45](#), [49](#), [52](#), [57](#),
[65](#), [69](#), [78–81](#), [83](#), [85](#), [87](#), [89](#),
[91–92](#), [96](#), [97](#), [101](#), [107](#),
[125](#), [138–139](#)
 - race and, [24](#)

Reproduction (*cont.*)

- romance and, 64, 84, 97, 103
 - sex and/sexuality and, xx, xxviii–xxix, 6, 10, 17, 19, 24–27, 29–30, 34, 44, 45, 47, 51, 55–57, 59, 64, 65, 68–70, 80, 83–87, 92, 96, 100, 102, 149–150
 - social and, 64
 - technology and, xiv, xvii, xix, xxi, xxii, xxviii, xxix, xxxi, xxxii, 5, 16–18, 32, 33, 68, 70, 78–86, 88, 95, 96, 98, 102, 129
 - third-party, xiv
- Reproductive endocrinologist, 90, 121
- Reproductive futurity, xxvii
- Reproductive health, 21
- Reproductive justice, 21
- Reproductive rights, 80, 135
- Repronormativity, 65, 70
- Reprosexuality, 24, 26
- Rich, Adrienne, xviii, 135, 146
- Rifkin, Mark, 5
- Roe v. Wade*, xxxi
- Rohy, Valerie, xxii, 108
- Romance, 6, 8, 12, 23–24, 31, 51
- gender and, 84
 - narrative and, 97, 103
 - queerness and, 84, 97
 - reproduction and, 64, 84, 97, 103
 - sex and/sexuality and, 64, 84
- Roof, Judith, xviii, 5, 11, 30, 82, 95, 110
- Rose, Jacqueline, 5, 135
- Roulston, Chris, 56, 125, 139
- Ruddick, Sara, 133

S

- Sameth, Carla Rachel
- One Day on the Gold Line*, xxx, 125–129

- Schulte, Brigid, 126–127
- Sedgwick, Eve, 138, 140
- Seitler, Dana, 110, 111
- Sex, xiv, xv, xix
- conception and, 15, 85, 98
 - desire and, 65
 - eroticism and, 69
 - gender and, 47, 59, 62, 65, 68, 70, 84
 - love and, 8
 - motherhood and, xxi
 - pregnancy and, 47, 55, 65, 68
 - queerness and, 29, 62, 69, 98
 - reproduction and, xx, xxviii, xxix, 26, 27, 29–30, 44, 47, 55, 59, 64, 65, 68, 80, 83, 85
 - romance and, 64
 - sexuality and, 57, 69, 77, 98
- Sexuality, xix
- birth and, 57
 - body and, 55, 85, 100
 - care and, 19, 99–101
 - choice and, 13–15
 - class and, 8
 - conception and, 5–8, 12–14, 16–18, 21, 26, 27, 29–33, 61, 79, 84–88, 98–99
 - desire and, xix, 8, 57, 64, 84
 - family and, xx, 3, 11, 14, 16, 19–20, 31, 32, 34, 51, 57, 61, 80, 81, 84, 85, 88, 96, 99, 102
 - fertility and, 17
 - gender and, 24, 28–30, 58, 59, 62, 64, 70, 83–84, 100, 102, 149–150
 - identity and, 10, 16, 28, 50
 - infertility and, 26–30, 32, 34, 78–80, 83, 85–87, 91, 99, 101–102
 - insemination and, 26, 32
 - loss and, 87
 - marriage and, xvi, 135

memoir and, 4, 107
 motherhood and, xiv, xvii, xix, xxi,
 5, 8–9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 25,
 57, 96, 124
 narrative and, xviii, xxix, 6, 12, 21,
 32, 45, 47, 57, 95, 149
 parenting and, xviii
 performance and, 29
 politics and, 16, 18, 51
 pregnancy and, 5, 17, 44, 47,
 51, 55, 59, 61, 65,
 68, 104
 queerness and, xix, 2, 26, 84, 96
 race and, 8
 representation and, 12
 reproduction and, xxviii–xxix, 6, 10,
 17, 19, 24–26, 29, 34, 45, 47,
 51, 56, 57, 64, 65, 69, 70, 80,
 83–87, 92, 96, 100,
 102, 149–150
 romance and, 84
 sex and, 57, 69, 98
 Sexusociety, 64
 Silbergeld, Robin
Texas Girl, xv, 1, 36, 54, 82,
 106, 113
 Smith, Sidonie, xxiii
 Social
 body and, 62
 family and, 19
 media, xxiii
 memoir and, xxii, 80
 motherhood and, xv, xxi, xxx, 133
 narrative and, xxxii, 4
 pregnancy and, 62
 queerness and, xv, 58
 representation and, xxii, 53
 reproduction and, 64
 Sociology, xvii
 Speculum, 27, 88, 91
 Sperm bank, 10, 14, 33, 86, 89

Sperm donors, xxviii, 3, 5, 7–11,
 13–16, 22–26, 30–34, 85–88, 90,
 93, 95, 97, 98, 109
 Steiner, A. L., 69
 Stillbirth, 43
 Summers, A. K.
Pregnant Butch, xxix, 47,
 59, 66, 91
 Swick, Marly, 109
 Synecdoche, 24, 71

T

Tea, Michelle
Knocking Myself Up, xviii, xxix,
 18, 95–103
 Technology
 narrative and, 34
 queerness and, xvii, xix, 81, 84–85,
 95, 96, 102
 reproduction and, xiv, xvii, xix, xxi,
 xxii, xxviii, xxix, xxxi, xxxii, 5,
 16–18, 32, 33, 68, 70, 78–86,
 88, 95, 96, 98, 102, 129
 Tober, Diane, xxii, 3, 8–9, 11,
 29, 35
 Trans individuals
 gender and, 60, 62, 132–133
 motherhood and, xx, 130,
 132–134, 149
 parenting and, 129, 134, 136
 pregnancy and, 129–131
 reproduction and, xix
 Trans studies, 121, 135
 essentialism and, xxx
 Transvaginal ultrasound, 28, 140

V

Van der Kolk, Bessel, 104
 Voice, xxv, 26, 105

W

Wallace, David Foster, [49](#)
 Warhol, Robyn, [xix](#), [6](#)
 Warner, Michael, [13](#), [24](#)
 Watson, Julia, [xxiii](#)
 Westervelt, Amy, [121](#)
 Weston, Kath, [3](#)

What Makes a Baby, [xxx](#)

What to Expect When You're Expecting, [46](#)

Woolf, Virginia, [54](#), [106](#)

Z

Zwartjes, Arianne, [150](#)