

he would categorize a particular group of animals by a biological characteristic "active" in only one sex and for only a brief period of time: mammae, or breasts. That he chose to make such a characteristic the identifying feature of an animal group which includes humans is noteworthy for the political and social agenda it promoted, since Linnaeus was a proponent of the abolition of the institution of wet nursing.

From this example we can see that wet nursing is implicated in a number of intersecting discourses, as Janet Golden notes in *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America*. Golden draws together historical, social, political, economic, and medical threads to weave a complex chronicle of the practice of wet nursing from the colonial period to the early twentieth century. She begins by describing wet nursing activities in colonial and antebellum America, noting how necessity and geography shaped wet nurses' experiences, and how religious directives (influenced, ironically, by European Enlightenment-era secular theorists such as Linnaeus) warned against the decadence of upper-class women who did not suckle their own children. The nineteenth century saw the growing institutionalization of the medical profession and the consequent intervention by physicians into the practice of infant care, as well as the increasing commodification of wet nursing and milk. The early twentieth century, where Golden leaves off, marked the large-scale termination of the wet nursing profession in favour of bottled breast milk.

On one level Golden's book may be read as a historical account of the practice of wet nursing in America, a subject which has been documented only marginally compared to European experiences. It is tempting to view the history of wet nursing as a single linear progression from a pleasantly bucolic colonial occupation to a fully medicalized and commodified practice. However, Golden does not make this mistake. She is careful to note discrepancies, tensions, and re-

gional dynamics. For instance, she does not argue that wet nursing was gradually eliminated because it was less efficient or sophisticated than artificial feeding with formula; instead she links the demise of wet nursing to the tumultuous interaction of increasingly institutionalized medical science, class divisions, discourses of childrearing and proper motherhood, individual family experiences, infant mortality, and so forth. In addition, Golden does not cast families and wet nurses as passive victims of institutional forces; rather, she shows how both were active agents who often resisted or ignored the dictates of physicians and popular childrearing literature.

Golden carefully notes the limitations of her sources; since wet nursing tended to be a private, often informal, or non-institutional service, there are few official records. Thus much of her analysis is restricted to more urbanized centres where, for example, archives of newspaper advertisements by and for wet nurses might be found, or where ledgers of poorhouses and homes for single mothers might have documented women being contracted out.

On another level, Golden's history is a lens through which larger issues may be brought into focus. She critically examines the dynamics of race, noting the regional differences between North and South in employing white working-class, free black, or slave wet nurses (which led to much scientific debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries over whether or not "hereditary" characteristics could be transmitted through milk). She points out the class divisions in negotiating the "proper" place for the wet nurse in the private upper- or middle-class home, and she traces the relationship of urban development to wet nursing practices.

Golden's work is useful not just for feminists concerned with historical study but also for present discourses around mothering. Her analytic model is effective precisely because its meshing of material practice and theoretical relationships is applicable

to our present struggles. She explicitly indicates the ideological link between mothering style and class demarcations in North American society, as well as the power relations inherent in defining proper motherhood and childrearing practices. As Golden concludes, though the wet nurse has disappeared, the "enduring cultural resonance of actions performed in the nursery" has not.

WITHOUT CHILD: CHALLENGING THE STIGMA OF CHILDLESSNESS

Laurie Lisle. New York: Ballantine Books, 1997.

BY MARIA BONANNO

As feminists have discovered, language is not neutral; its bias is inherent in the structure and vocabulary. Laurie Lisle chooses the vocabulary of nonmotherhood as her starting point, noting that "the existing vocabulary is unrelentingly negative, descending from a mythological or distant past when being childless was rare, inadvertent, and most often unlucky." Our language, therefore, reflects the fact that motherhood is considered normal and nonmotherhood is "other."

Anyone who marches to the beat of an "other" drummer will tell you that they are generally called upon to explain themselves. Lisle begins this task by examining the possible motivations of nonmotherhood. She examines a number of psychological, social, and psychoanalytical perspectives on childlessness, but the overriding evidence seems to support the theory that there are no consistent "explanations" or psycho-social "problems" that lead to nonmotherhood. It is simply an independent choice made by each unique person for varying reasons.

However, throughout history nonmothers have consistently felt the sting from the accusation of selfish-

ness. This charge is an easy one to make when the assumption of woman as caregiver and nurturer is ingrained into the dominant moral and social codes. In addition, voluntary childlessness belies the "maternal instinct" theory on which so much of our psychosocial assumptions are based. "Implicit in the accusation of self-centeredness leveled against those without children is the assumption that child rearing has greater moral value in a woman's life than any other activity." Lisle perceptively acknowledges that similar charges have not been made against childless men, and childless women have even been subjected to severe criticism from the community of feminist mothers. (She gives the example of Jane Lazarre, who referred to the childless woman as a "dark lady.")

Undaunted, Lisle encourages her child-free readers: "We are part of an old and respectable—and even inspiring—social tradition which, like other aspects of women's history, has been neglected and forgotten." As part of her effort to correct this imbalance, Lisle finds positive examples of childlessness throughout history. From the powerful goddess Artemis, to Chaucer's Wife of Bath, to the "New Woman" of the turn of the century, Lisle frequently cites examples from mythology, art, literature, and drama. She also points out that in the present time, nonmothers tend to be in more egalitarian marital relationships and "continue to have the most education and the best-paid jobs of all American women."

Lisle also devotes much time to emphasizing the positive role that nonmothers have played in the general welfare of mothers and children. Nonmothers are not necessarily child-haters and she expands on the roles that childless women have played in the development of families, what she calls "social mothering." For example, during the last century it was common practice for an unmarried, single woman (perhaps a sister or aunt) to move in with her brother or niece's family to assist with house-keeping and/or childrearing. Even

today, single women act as objective counsel and support for extended family members; often a young person needs someone with an objectivity that is not always available in their parents, and childless activists devote their time and energy in trying to improve conditions for mothers and children alike. She briefly tributes women such as Florence Nightingale, the Brontës, Virginia Woolf, Georgia O'Keefe, Judy Chicago, and Mother Theresa.

This book is also a deeply personal account of Lisle's own journey. "The realization that I will never give birth to a child has enveloped me gradually and aroused in me an intense, combustible mixture of emotions that follows no existing script." She offers her own story in creating a script for nonmothers, and her personal insight and experience illuminates the discussion of sexuality, perceptions of femininity, work, the idealization of children, and relationships with men. Her relaxed and inclusive narrative style make this a pleasant book to read (even if some of her points are repeated unnecessarily) and would serve as an excellent tool for both nonmothers and mothers. As Lisle states: "If we as childless women can courageously accept all our inclinations and interests as unquestionably legitimate and womanist, we can enlarge what it means to be a woman."

**MODÈLES DE SEXE ET
RAPPORTS A L'ÉCOLE—
GUIDE D'INTERVENTION
AUPRÈS DES ÉLÈVES DE
TROISIÈME SECONDAIRE**

Pierrette Bouchard, Natasha Bouchard, Jean-Claude St-Amant, et Jacques Tondreau. Montréal: les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1996.

PAR DIANE GÉRIN-LAJOIE

A partir de leur recherche portant sur les stéréotypes et la réussite scolaire (*Garçons et filles : stéréotypes et réussite*

scolaire, aux Éditions du remue-ménage, Montréal, 1996), Pierrette Bouchard et ses collègues ont rédigé un guide d'intervention pratique pour les élèves de troisième secondaire au Québec. Ce guide comprend trois parties. La première situe les résultats de recherche obtenus par les auteurs dans le contexte de la réussite scolaire des filles et des garçons. Intitulée «Pour contrer l'exclusion sociale», cette section met particulièrement l'accent sur l'impact du milieu socio-économique des élèves en ce qui a trait à leur rendement scolaire, sur l'existence de stéréotypes sexuels et sur la relation pédagogique. L'information que l'on retrouve dans ces quelques pages est concise et bien présentée. La deuxième partie du guide comprend quatorze activités à faire en salle de classe. Ces activités ont été conçues pour rencontrer les objectifs pédagogiques des divers programmes du ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. La démarche y est bien expliquée et le personnel enseignant devrait pouvoir s'en servir sans grande difficulté. La troisième partie du document, présente des outils de références et un lexique contenant des définitions ayant trait au contenu du guide.

Dans l'ensemble, ce guide est bien structuré et peut s'avérer utile en salle de classe, quoique bien souvent ces guides d'intervention y soient peu utilisés, à moins que le personnel enseignant ait bénéficié d'une formation en cours d'emploi sur les problématiques traitées à l'intérieur de ces documents. Il est donc à espérer que la promotion de ce guide a été faite afin d'en maximiser l'utilisation par le personnel enseignant, pour le plus grand bénéfice des élèves.