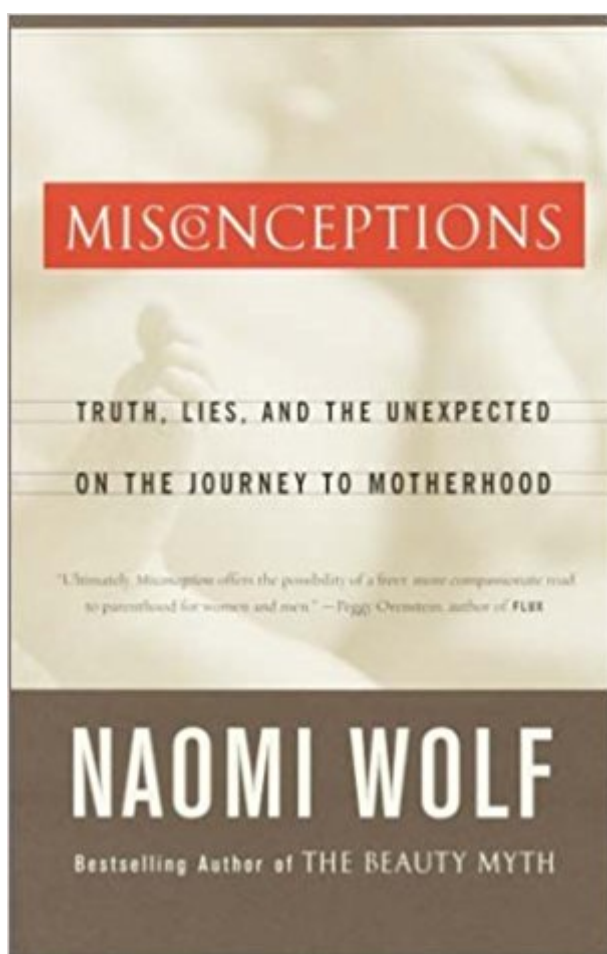


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# Misconceptions: Truth, Lies, And The Unexpected On The Journey To Motherhood



## Synopsis

In *Misconceptions*, bestselling author Naomi Wolf she demythologizes motherhood and reveals the dangers of common assumptions about childbirth. With uncompromising honesty she describes how hormones eroded her sense of independence, ultrasounds tested her commitment to abortion rights, and the keepers of the OB/GYN establishment lacked compassion. The weeks after her first daughter's birth taught her how society, employers, and even husbands can manipulate new mothers. She had bewildering post partum depression, but learned that a surprisingly high percentage of women experience it. Wolf's courageous willingness to talk about the unexpected difficulties of childbirth will help every woman become a more knowledgeable planner of her pregnancy and better prepare her for the challenges of balancing a career, freedom, and a growing family. Invaluable in its advice to parents, *Misconceptions* speaks to anyone connected personally, medically, or professionally to a new mother.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In her latest work, the author of the bestselling *The Beauty Myth* and other titles attempts to employ her fiercely confident and uncompromising, rip-the-lid-off style to tell the painful truth of motherhood in contemporary America. Interweaving personal narrative and reportage and pouncing with particular vehemence on what she considers to be the dumb, patronizing misinformation in the bestselling guidebook *What To Expect When You're Expecting* Wolf reveals that birth in this country is often needlessly painful. In a portentously dramatic tone, she describes how difficult and lonely it

can be to care for a child and to be a working mother. Indeed, Wolf finds new motherhood so difficult that it has rocked her celebrated feminism. "Yet here we were," she concludes "to my horror and complicity, shaping our new family structure along class and gender lines daddy at work, mommy and caregiver from two different economic classes sharing the baby work during the day just as our peers had done." Wolf says little here that hasn't been said before in books like Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Birth* and Ann Crittenden's *The Price of Motherhood*. What stands out with embarrassing clarity is her emphasis on the sufferings of a privileged minority. In prose that often lapses into purple, Wolf describes the "savagery" of breastfeeding and the unsheltered wilderness of suburban playgrounds. This work is so unoriginal in its social critique and so limited in its portrayal of the hardships endured by mothers and children and families in this country that it comes across as a weirdly out-of-touch bid for personal attention rather than a genuine exposé. It is likely to alienate all but the newest and most sheltered mothers. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Steingraber turns to embryology to follow the growth and development of the child she is carrying. While describing the intricacies of fetus development with lyrical prose, she notes a heightened awareness of environmental hazards that threaten the unborn. Our industrial society produces toxic substances that can cross the placenta and appear in breast milk. She issues a wake-up call in the tradition of Rachel Carson as she welcomes her daughter, Faith, into the world. Both of these books are excellent companions to mainstream pregnancy guides such as *What To Expect When You're Expecting* (Workman, 1996). Highly recommended for all collections. [Misconceptions was previewed in *Prepub Alert*, LJ 6/1/01; for an interview with Wolf, see p.225.] Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland P.L., C.- Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland P.L., CA Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Naomi R. Wolf (born 1962) is an author and journalist, who has written books such as *The Beauty Myth*, *Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle for Womanhood*, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*, *The Treehouse: Eccentric Wisdom from My Father* on *How to Live, Love, and See*, etc. [NOTE: page numbers below refer to the 340-page paperback edition.] She wrote in the Introduction to this 2001 book, *When Did I Get So Fat?* "This book will explore the hidden truths behind giving birth in America today. By looking at how a number of women, including myself, experienced the journey to first-time motherhood I intend to show how the experience of becoming a mother, as miraculous and fulfilling as it is, is also undersupported,

sentimentalized, and even manipulated at women's expense. (Pg. 1-2) She continues, "Books, classes, and videos frequently have hidden agendas. Many of them omit aspects of the birth experience, or withhold information to advance their cause, to women's detriment. Little that women are exposed to in pregnancy adequately prepares them for the first three trimesters and delivery, or offers them a grounding in the gut-wrenching changes of the sometimes savagely difficult adjustment that follows birth. (Pg. 3) She adds, "I believe the myth about the ease and naturalness of mothering is propped up, polished, and promoted as a way to keep women from thinking clearly and negotiating forcefully about what they need from their partners and from society at large in order to mother well, without having to sacrifice themselves in the process. (Pg. 7) She concludes the Introduction, "This book delineates some of the drastic, absurd, and sometimes painful changes women go through in the transition to new motherhood, but it is still a book about love. It is far from an idealized, impossible love. It is a tough slog. I wrote this book to explore the genuine miracle, not the Hallmark card; to trace the maternal bond as it forms in spite of the obtuse and unnatural ideology of motherhood under which we labor. I wrote this book in the hope that we realize that truly becoming a mother is also a miraculous achievement---of the will, as well as of the heart. (Pg. 9-10) In a controversial passage, she recalls, "When I was three and a half months pregnant, I was interviewed by a conservative commentator. A subject he raised in passing was abortion. "Is that not a baby?" he asked, pointing at my belly, in a cheap but I suppose un-pass-uppable shot. "Of course it is a baby," I answered. "And if God forbid I was not able to care for it or feed it or raise it, if I had to face the terrible decision to end the pregnancy, that decision would be between my conscience and God." (Pg. 31) She admits, "Being a pro-choice woman, pregnant in a country in which almost a quarter of all pregnancies end in abortion, presented a conundrum so uncomfortable, I could hardly stand to think about it. It was, as the pro-choice slogan asserted, "my body. But did I own this baby the way I owned my possessions, my hair, and my fingernails?" (Pg. 33) She observes, "I thought about the white couples who would rather adopt a light-skinned baby from a faraway mountain village than a dark-skinned child from a neighborhood in our own city; and of the motivation on the part of such

prospective parents. Did they hope for racial neutrality for their family in a country torn apart by race? (Pg. 53) She acknowledges, "I did in fact experience moments of epiphany. These were brighter moments of that sense of interconnection with all women" (Pg. 102) She continued, "Babies, I speculated in that peculiar mystical state, are sort of leaky little understudies for God. With each baby the human species gets the chance to break out of the self into the service of something so other that the reasons for conditional love can give way to faith in unconditional love" (Pg. 105-106) She laments, "I, along with other ambitious women of my generation, felt myself gradually becoming one of those women with whom I had always refused to identify. My self-sufficiency and independence, two qualities I admired most in others, shut down in me like the lights of a business that had lost its clientele" (Pg. 123-124) She says, "All around me, it seemed that the baby's birth was cleaving couple after couple---once equals in roles and expectations---along the lines of the old traditional gender roles. That was certain what I experienced when my husband went back to work and I found myself with a tiny baby, staring out the kitchen window into the backyards of the suburbs, living life much as I had read about it in *The Feminine Mystique*. The baby's arrival wrenched open the shiny patina of egalitarianism in the marriages of virtually every couple I knew." (Pg. 225-226) She adds, "The woman was no longer willing to take risks that involved the baby that she would have been willing to take when it was her life alone that was at stake." (Pg. 227) She notes, "I was loving the moment and my baby with all my heart. I did indeed melt with joy in her. Yet in that joy was exhaustion, and frustration, too, about the life I found I was living, that I had both chosen and not chosen. This scene was not what I had wanted. What I had wanted was a revolution." (Pg. 256) She outlines *A Mother's Manifesto*: "We deserve: real flextime that lets us and the fathers

of our babies more easily cycle in and out of the workplace. We need real Family Leave. We need on-site day care. We need tax deductions and benefits. We need to overhaul the birthing industry. How do we accomplish all this? With a new push of Motherhood Feminism: a mothers' movement that will pressure the government and employers more efficiently. (Pg. 283-284) This was a fascinating, thought-provoking yet also highly "personal" book. It will interest a wide variety of readers: feminists (particularly those with children), mothers, mothers-to-be, and those interested in social issues affecting modern women.

What I had long suspected about the birth experience in America is beautifully exposed here with meticulous research. Our collective brainwashing by Big Pharma and the medical establishment is all the more heinous when you consider the vulnerable young families who have been targeted. I wish I had known about this book when I was instinctively seeking an alternative to the Path of Guilt I was being forced down due to the Insurance Industry's support of the all powerful medical machine that preys on nature's driving forces of the pregnant woman and the protective instincts of the loving partner. Naomi Wolf has written the book I could not find anywhere when I was searching for truth, courage and an end to the unrelenting suspicion I and my husband had been "played" by unwitting virtuosos. We owe her a debt of gratitude and, if she desires, a cleansing hypnotherapy session for her unfortunate birthing outcome now that it has served us all.

This is a book that opened my eyes and nearly described my mother's birth of my brother perfectly - isolate and keep ignorant the expectant mother, create chaos and go for the C section. I am so glad I read this before getting pregnant. I also would not have had the nerve to fire one OB for another - how would I know any reason to quit seeing an OB without this book? I appreciated the different thoughts about before, during and after giving birth. Now I can have some conversations with my husband well beforehand. Instead of wanting to return to work, I'm guessing I will want to stay home, but the author didn't make me feel bad about it. And it is true that a mother's emotions can affect her baby - just read Dr. Wirth's Prenatal Parenting. The mother's emotions affect the development of the fetus's brain chemistry. I was very interested to read about the author's research into midwife techniques and practices and plan to find a practice near me. I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I READ A NONFICTION BOOK SO QUICKLY! p.s. This was my gateway book - it made me find other books on pregnancy and childbirth, and for that, I am grateful.

Great read! I needed this for my Doula certification!

I've read half of it and i'm LOOOOOOOOOOVING it!

This book shifted my thinking about birth and my experience considerably. It goes into detail about options available to us, whether we know it or not. More than anything, it has made me feel more prepared about the kind of birth I want. Highly recommended.

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