

BOOK REVIEW

How to Get a Girl Pregnant: Once Upon a Time There Was a Chicana Butch Who Could Do Anything

Lisa Justine Hernandez

How to Get a Girl Pregnant. By Karleen Pendleton Jiménez. Toronto: Tighrope, 2011. Pp. 192. \$17.95 (paper).

Karleen Pendleton Jiménez's

memoir, *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*, reveals the personal and turbulent yet humorous experiences of a butch Chicana lesbian who longs for motherhood. Where Cherrie Moraga's 1997 *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of Queer Motherhood* portrayed Chicana butch lesbian motherhood, Jiménez's 2011 account focuses on the complexity of finding sperm. Jiménez fills the pages with deadpan comedic moments that convey the complexity of her hunger for a child. In her memoir, she shares the answer to the book's opening question, "How do I get sperm when I look like a dude and I'm older and fatter than when I picked up guys as a teenager?" (5). *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*, however, is not a "how-to" book about insemination, but a love story about the fluidity of Chicana butch lesbian desire and identity.

Chronicling Jiménez's need to get pregnant, *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* is a modern epistolary memoir, which uses very private dated journal entries as well as email messages and letters spanning eighteen years. Through her personal journal entries, the author shares her apprehensive search, including intimate insemination sex scenes and poignant personal disappointments. Throughout the narrative, Hilary, her Canadian partner, supports her as the

couple negotiates various sources for sperm: friends, sperm banks, strangers, and the Internet. The journal entries underscore Jiménez's inner struggles to remain open to her sperm options and allow readers to understand the enormous strength required to persevere in her struggle.

Each possibility for acquiring sperm forces the author to wrestle with important multi-layered analyses about what she wants for her child and herself. She examines each possibility through the lens of queer Chicana identity. One example of this is when she learns that there are profound limits to her original dream, as finding gay Latino sperm proves more difficult in practice than she originally thought. Gay Latino friends need time. The sperm banks in Canada don't accept sperm from gay men and have few Latino donors. Reflecting on these limitations forces Jiménez's fears to surface: "I worry that the darkness will not only take over the land, but take over my little body as well and I will disappear" (161). However, her parental journey sheds light on unresolved fears and allows her to reaffirm and redefine Chicana butch lesbian identity.

By exposing her inner-struggles, the author reveals her sources of vulnerability as well as her sources of strength. Although apparent, Hilary and Jiménez's trust in one another should not be taken for granted as a major source of Jiménez's strength. As a committed but non-monogamous couple, Jiménez and Hilary model one of the most honest, accepting, and trusting relationships portrayed in Chicana literature. Hilary's absolute acceptance allows Jiménez to explore gender-bending experiences without fear of rejection. This stands in strong contrast to Jiménez's anxieties about what others, especially Chicanas/os and queers, will think about her. By sharing her fears, Jiménez learns to move through her anxieties and release herself from negativity. Her ultimate strength lies in her honesty examining her life on the page.

Although Jiménez successfully reveals several important lessons, *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* lacks an introduction that familiarizes readers with the memoir's larger significance in the small yet growing body of Chicana lesbian memoir. Without introductory comments, readers are pulled into the emotions of events as they unfold chronologically, thus inducing readers to identify with the author's experience. While some readers will appreciate being pulled into the narrative, others may find themselves wanting a bit more framing and context.

How to Get a Girl Pregnant is an emotionally and intellectually rewarding book with a compelling story about the rewards and risks of love. It promises to challenge scholars in Literary Studies, Chicana/Chicano Studies, Queer Studies, Psychology, and Women's Studies to better appreciate fluid definitions of family and identity. Karleen Pendleton Jiménez's writing will be enjoyed in coffee shops by undergraduates, shared between family and friends, and re-read whenever troubled about making a major life decision. The book is a generous gift given freely so that others may recognize their own freedom to choose how they live in the world. Everyone who has ever struggled to let go of her or his insecurities should read it.

Works Cited

- Moraga, Cherríe. 1997. *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand.
- Pendleton Jiménez, Karleen. 2011. *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*. Toronto: Tightrope.