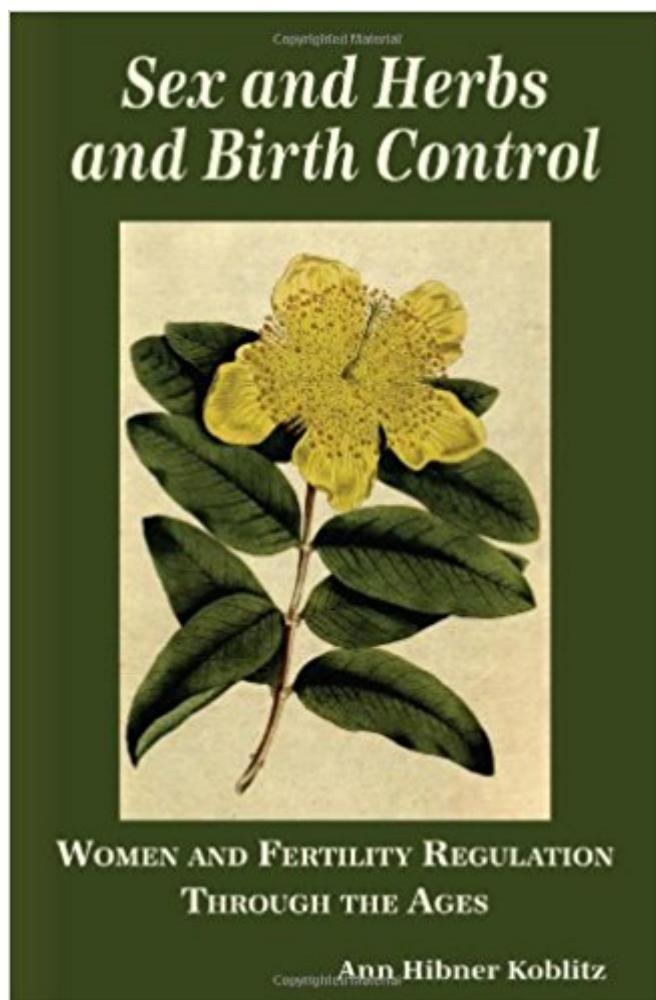


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Sex And Herbs And Birth Control: Women And Fertility Regulation Through The Ages



Synopsis

Bromo Selzer douches, pregnancy protection amulets, pennyroyal teas, birch bark tampons, slippery elm sticks -- these are but a few of the myriad methods women in different parts of the world have used in their efforts to prevent unwanted pregnancy. Meanwhile, the obstacles they have had to confront have included religious proscriptions, punitive law codes, persecution of midwives, and the devaluing of folk knowledge. *Sex and Herbs and Birth Control* is a lively, provocative account of women's attempts to provide themselves with as wide a range of reproductive options as possible. Selective rather than encyclopedic, the book includes examples not only from the U.S. and western Europe, but also from Algeria, China, Cuba, El Salvador, India, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Vietnam, and elsewhere. The book contains original treatments of Margaret Sanger, the origins of forensic pathology and its ties to abortion, the complex meanings of pregnancy and its termination, and the shortcomings of demographers' discussions of fertility control. Abortion is often an emotional issue in the political discourse of the United States and some other countries. This book includes a historically based examination of the attitudes toward abortion of different religious and cultural traditions through the ages. The Institute for Humanities Research of Arizona State University, in selecting it for the 2015 Transdisciplinary Book Award, described it as a 'groundbreaking book [that] takes the reader on a journey across time and space, investigating the always innovative (and occasionally surprising) approaches to women's health from India to Cuba... a fresh, insightful take on an age old problem... a wonderful example of truly transdisciplinary research and the amazing results of breaking down rigid disciplinary borders.'

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From Publishers Weekly "In this fearlessly female-centric survey of women's reproduction options, Arizona State University gender studies professor Koblitz...notes that herbs like acacia, parsley, mint, and juniper were commonly used for birth control purposes, and mallow root aided in the abortion process. Barrier methods ranged from rag tampons, nettle leaves, and sea tangle sponges to Native American diaphragms made out of birch bark.... Koblitz's survey also sheds light on the peculiar history of forensics used to detect illegal abortions.... Koblitz delivers a persuasive argument..." From *Conscience: The Newsjournal of Catholic Opinion* "Religious proscriptions against contraception have received the most coverage in history books, but women have long been quietly controlling their own fertility and passing down the knowledge. The author leads readers on an entertaining and original journey looking for these traditional techniques. Finding that religious leaders have vacillated about contraception through the ages, the author seeks to answer the question of why these traditional methods were lost at all." From *Choice* (American Library Association) "This account of women's efforts to maintain control of their sexuality and reproductive lives reaches across time and cultures. Koblitz... challenges the traditional tools and methods of historians and their conclusions that women have been submissive to authority over their fertility.... Koblitz mined family stories, oral histories, and artifacts such as newspaper advertisements and pamphlets (several of which are reproduced in the text) for her examination of fertility regulation. In this work, "old wives' tales" are not nonsense but instead are nuggets that reveal women's instrumentality on behalf of their reproductive lives, including knowledge about and use of herbal fertility control. Particularly noteworthy is the author's examination of the language of fertility and reproduction and its ambiguities, variations, and fluid meanings in various time periods and populations.... Recommended: All academic, professional, and general library collections." --*Choice* (American Library Association)

Ann Hibner Koblitz is a professor of Women and Gender Studies at Arizona State University.

I absolutely adored this book. The story told in this book is invaluable to discussions of reproductive choice. It added dimension to history and sociology, almost in a Jared Diamond way. I thought I knew the subject, but this was an education. The author went about gathering facts in a non-traditional way for an academic (which she is, without doubt) and analyzed with brilliant results. She brings to light the "hidden in plain sight" history of women dealing with reproduction. Through history, abstinence has been an option for very few - women having few options to begin with - and

not many chose it. Hence, women have always been monitoring their bodies and privately or sub-rosa regulating their fertility. What surprises a lot of us who know the struggles of reproductive choice in the 20th century is that for most of human history, women had this control of their bodies. The definition of pregnant was not static; treatments for "late periods" were often standard and regarded as good health practices. Neither Church nor State began to condemn abortion until the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, when modern medicine nudged midwifery and healers out of the picture. This drove the issue underground. It broke the chain of information from generation to the next about herbal remedies and methods. Some international attempts at promoting family planning are based on flawed models. They may not take into account the way some traditional communities of women view their own reproductive lives. They may overlook controversial demographics (e.g. favouring male births.) Too bad my matron saint (introduced to me by my mother), Margaret Sanger, came in for such a bad rap, but truth will out. Well written, even humorous at times to those of us who like irony; sad at other times to know the struggles of women. I am recommending it to my friends as a good read.

"It seems to me that it is difficult to write scholarly/popular crossover books, especially one on women's reproductive agency. How does one provide a balanced, historically accurate, sociologically sound account of one of the most contentious personal/political topics ever? How does one keep it interesting without resorting to sensationalism? In this interdisciplinary work exploring the history and culture of birth control, the author has managed to achieve all that and more. Her history is interesting and non-linear, her anecdotes are refreshing and relevant and she debunks everything from demographic theories to long-circulating hagiographies with ease. She brings matchless nuance in the discussion of and distinctions between emmenagogue and abortifacient; abortion and contraception; rights and practices; she unpacks binaries of mind/body, scientific/unscientific and legal/illegal. This book will put the war on women in context and explain the origins of the mindset that calls Sandra Fluke a slut, allows Hobby Lobby to get away with their refusal to cover birth control and perpetuates a victim blaming rape culture. While the author does not specifically discuss these aforementioned current events, she does write a history of women's dis-empowerment and resilience that will resonate with many. This is the sort of history we need to know to avoid some of its repetitions, this is the kind of critical thinking we need to aim for. This is a difficult-to-put-down book, that will delight academics and activists alike, as well as anyone interested in history of science, medicine and women. The illustrations and glossary are very helpful. Highly recommended!"

My mistake, I just read the title and not the subtitle.... I was looking for an herbal method of birth control from purely an informational and scientific standpoint, not about abortion, fertility regulation and everything that goes with from a strong feminist standpoint. I'm not saying the book isn't informative just not what I was looking for at all.

Well written. Includes information not easily found elsewhere.

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