

Book Reviews

Doucet, A. (2006). *Do Men Mother? Fatherhood, Care, and Domestic Responsibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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Men and Masculinities
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Mothers still outnumber fathers as primary caregivers, but more men have taken on caregiving. Whether resulting from employment disruption or mothers out-earning fathers, Canada has seen an increase of stay-at-home fathers and a decrease in stay-at-home mothers. In a culture dominated by ideologies of motherhood, feminist scholars have exposed the various myths of motherhood. Many of these same scholars have explored men's roles in the home, arguing that men are equally capable of providing the nurturing and care historically deemed natural for women. In *Do Men Mother?: Fatherhood, Care, and Domestic Responsibility*, Andrea Doucet explores the world of fathering by asking, when men care for their children, are they actually mothering?

Doucet locates her question of whether men mother between two gender theory camps. The first position, *difference feminism*, argues that men do not mother. This camp includes such polarities as conservative organizations who maintain innate differences between mothers and fathers and feminists who acknowledge differences, while noting the social organizations of gender. The second camp, *equality feminism*, can also be represented by extremes. At one end are those who suggest that work in the home is largely interchangeable, and at the other, father's rights groups who argue for equal access in child custody disputes. Doucet recognizes the potentially political location of her question and seeks to chart a middle path. Doucet's frame attempts to integrate the equality-difference debate, considering specifically "difference that difference makes" (p. 26).

This qualitative study, conducted in Canada, utilizes multiple data collection methods: in-depth interviews with 62 fathers who were identified as either stay-at-home fathers or single fathers (sole, joint custody, or widowed); focus groups; and Internet surveys. In addition, Doucet met with 14 heterosexual couples in their homes. Also diligent in seeking diversity, this total sample of 118 Canadian fathers accesses fathers across lines of sexuality, race, ethnicity, and social class.

Doucet provides a rich collection of narratives revealing fathers' language of care. Utilizing Thorne's typology of *borderwork* and *border crossings*, Doucet considers the questions of difference within this image of boundaries created by men and women and their attempts at crossing over. She finds that fathers and mothers in this study acknowledge and adhere to traditional notions of difference in terms of parenting. Even as fathers provide the daily care for their children, they simultaneously speak of the "fundamental differences between mothering and fathering" (p. 126). However, Doucet discovers in the fathers' stories, amid the talk of differences, details of daily care and practices that are not so starkly different from mothers' care.

Many findings in this work are consistent with gender and parenting research; that is, mothers still feel hyperresponsible. As opposed to employed fathers with a stay-at-home partner, these mothers return home and take over. Mothers in this study are still performing the majority of the chores deemed gender-specific: housecleaning and organizing summer camps, babysitters, and birthday parties. Fathers reported spending more time in so-called fun activities, preferring to be outside in play activities, rather than multitasking, as mothers complained of. Doucet finds that men *can* perform these tasks, but speak of doing so in terms of “filling in the gaps” left by wives and ex-wives (p. 146). Doucet reveals that while men are crossing boundaries and taking on more tasks typically reserved for mothers, at the same time, they “alter the meanings of these responsibilities” (p. 172).

The men in this study are parenting within the norms of masculinity. Many of the stay-at-home fathers wrestled with issues of status, finding that not providing financially meant not “being a good man” (p. 185). Masculinity was maintained in a variety of ways, from engagement in sports to adopting leadership positions in community organizations. While these narratives suggest adherence to masculinity, Doucet argues that these caregiving fathers are in fact “actively reconstructing masculinities in order to include aspects of traditional feminism” (p. 237).

Throughout the book, the narratives detail fathers (and mothers) working in the Venus and Mars land of perceived differences. Doucet returns to the notion of “difference that difference makes” by arguing that “gender difference . . . can coexist with gender equality. . . . What should be acknowledged is gender symmetry” (p. 233). While her participants spoke of the *shoulds* of masculine/feminine parenting, the daily workings of their lives revealed more fluidity. Many gender scholars will be satisfied with such attention to symmetry. However, there are times when her argument that “sometimes differences are not disadvantages or inequalities but simply differences per se” (p. 233) neglects to note the inequalities that differences produce. For example, throughout the book, fathers often distinguish their care as fun, expressing little to no concern with the state of the house. This is often noted as a difference between dads and moms. A mother in the study even noted that stay-at-home mothers tend to “create a lot of work,” whereas fathers “create fun and play” (p. 243). What is missing here is the reminder that a father *can* create more fun when he knows that the mother will return from work and clean the house. This is not a “difference per se,” but rather an example of how perceived differences (he is more laid back) in fact produce inequalities in the home (he does less cleaning).

In the end, Doucet deconstructs the question of whether men mother, concluding that while men are capable of parenting in ways that “emulate what we consider stereotypical mothering behaviour,” they are not mothering (p. 224). While relying on norms of mothering to define them, these men still “view themselves as fathers” (p. 217). This work contributes to the parenting literature by drawing attention to the flaws of analyzing fathering through the maternal lens. Through its rich use of multiple theoretical perspectives, it also contributes to analyses of masculinity, division

of labor in the home, and narrative ethnography. *Do Men Mother?* is an in-depth, insightful, and much-needed account of the day-to-day experiences of men caring for their children.

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