

is never certain that Borich *wants* to be married, even when she and Linnea get married in a kitsch Las Vegas wedding ceremony officiated by a lesbian minister. We never really know whether she wants to fit in with the straight world of heterosexual couples or the seemingly subversive world exemplified by her quirky friends and neighbours, or does she flourish by being altogether different.

We do learn that the bonds that hold two people together can be as firm and strong as they are invisible. We are shown, however, that such bonds do not develop easily. This memoir/cultural exploration/love story, written with tenderness and toughness, utilizes a breathtaking range of sustained metaphors. As a poet, Borich brings a deft touch to this exploration of two people embedded in communities that can sustain, and also challenge, their members.

## **Halving It All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works**

Francine M. Deutsch  
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999

### **Reviewed by Merryl Hammond**

Do not be fooled by the clever title. *Halving It All* is a Harvard University Press publication: heavily footnoted, referenced, and indexed, it includes 11 chapters with such titles as “Creating Equality at Home,” “Career Detours,” “The Mother and Mr. Mom,” and “Equality Works.” It is not an easy book to read. Author Francine Deutsch tries to put human faces on complex family arrangements—“Steve and Beth stood in their kitchen discussing how they were going to manage the afternoon care of their four-year-old”—which is helpful. But several chapters later, when she again refers to Steve and Beth’s arrangements and their methods of negotiating, I could not recall their particular case, having since encountered so many other couples and their childcare arrangements. Nevertheless, Deutsch explodes many commonly-held myths about parenting and occasionally offers succinct, gem-like flashes of insight.

Examples of such gems include the following: “Daycare is the crucible on which ideals of equality are often destroyed” (159); “People change” (216); and “Couples create equality by the accumulation of large and small decisions and acts that make up their everyday lives as parents” (230). Deutsch also quotes the individuals she interviewed for her study: “We’re more equals. It’s more like I’m his wife, not his slave” (181); and “You can’t raise children by spectating” (216).

Some of the couples are “equal sharers” who divide the responsibilities of parenting. Within this category, there are many variations on the “size of the parenting pie to be divided” (33). Childcare, for example, can be provided by parents, as well as substitute caregivers. Some families undertake joint parenting, spending time together as a family, while others prefer “tag-team parenting,” leaving one parent in charge while the other takes a break.

In unequal families, Deutsch finds that fathers function either as helpers, sharers, or slackers (45). The “helper” father leaves planning, organizing, and worrying to his spouse and helps out when asked or told to do something. The “sharer” father takes equal emotional responsibility for his children but spends less time parenting than his spouse. And the “slacker” father makes one’s blood boil. He is the man who returns from work, slumps in a chair, and asks, “Why isn’t supper ready yet?” When challenged, he justifies himself: “Cooking relaxes her” or “She can never sit still” (62). Deutsch analyzes male power and privilege and gives examples of the “stunning array of indirect strategies” (62) that many men use to resist parental work and responsibility: passive resistance, strategic incompetence, strategic use of praise, adherence to inferior standards, and denial (74-78). The reader meets “proprietary mothers” and the “discouraged” or “disconnected” fathers with whom they live (111), as well as many “maternal,” “non-traditional,” or “hands-on” fathers (218).

Over time, however, couples can change and equality can be established within any family, if a woman believes in and insists upon equally shared parenting: “Gendered choices at one moment in time do not preclude gender-resisting choices at another. It’s never too late to edit that video” (151). Deutsch stresses that “equally sharing women feel entitled to equality” (61). Such women compare their spouses’ contributions to their own, while women in unequal families compare their spouses’ contributions to those of other men, many of whom are “slacker” fathers.

Once the principle of equality in parenting is accepted by a woman, the day-to-day details of childcare need to be negotiated – and constantly renegotiated. In many families, however, this is not easy: “We wake up in the morning and yell at each other about who is going to take what responsibility for what on any given day,” says one equally sharing father (64). Perhaps Deutsch needs one additional category: the reluctant equal sharer! In fact, for many of the mothers and fathers in this book parenting seems to be an unpleasant chore to be performed as efficiently as possible, so that each parent can go on to pursue their true interests, unencumbered by children. As a feminist and a stay-at-home mother, I asked myself throughout my reading: Where is the love, commitment, and connection among parents and their children? Will equally shared parenting so alter the nature of parenting that children will end up, not with the ideal attachment to two parents, but with no attachment at all to parents? “Equality works” (236) Deutsch claims, and her study shows that it does for many parents. But someone must study the long-term effects of equally shared parenting on children.