

It appears that many of the debates over fatherlessness are just new ways of avoiding necessary structural changes. As the final, fine essay of the book "Fatherhood and Its Discontents: Men, Patriarchy, and Freedom" by Drucilla Cornell makes clear, we need public policy that acknowledges and supports the multiple family forms that respond to economic hardships and puts the focus where public policy should be: on children and their care.

No Parent is an Island

Paula Johanson, Illustrated by Julie Van Alstine
Calgary, Alberta: Temeron Books Inc, 1995

Reviewed by Farah M Shroff

This collection of short stories is a fun and at times, touching look at the lives of the author's family. Paula Johanson writes about being the mother of twins in two very different parts of Canada: downtown Victoria, British Columbia and a remote farm north of Edmonton, Alberta. The book contains autobiographical stories that reflect upon Johanson's everyday experiences of mothering.

Many of the stories are humorous. Once, Johanson finds her children covered in Vaseline. They had tried to crawl away but had covered themselves and the floor in Vaseline and could not make a get-away. She describes many other such mischievous moments and has a page called "My Christmas Wish List" that includes business cards that read, "Don't tell me I'm a good parent-offer to BABYSIT." Most new mothers would benefit from a stack of Johanson's business cards.

Johanson's chapter on the birth of her children echoes much of the literature on hospital birth: traumatic, overly controlled by uncaring obstetricians, unnecessarily invasive. Having her partner and a friend with her during the intense and painful delivery makes an enormous difference. Nevertheless, shortly following the birth of her babies, she experiences severe depression which she attributes in part to insensitive hospital care. She also describes her experience as a new mother as being in "splendid isolation," meaning that for weeks in a row she would speak to only three adults. Many of her friends ignore her and others speak patronizingly to her. She describes being treated as someone with a very low IQ. In Johanson's case, these forms of mother-mistreatment result in clinically diagnosable mental health concerns, for which she seeks therapy over the course of one year.

For the first few years of her children's lives, Johanson is a stay-at-home

parent and she writes about being misunderstood. Friends could not comprehend how a dynamic professional could have a strange new focus- “babbling all day and hanging around parks.” She found a support group of other mothers in which she was able to find her voice and share her concerns and joys. One of the biggest topics of discussion was about paid labour.

Johanson soon starts writing about her experiences as a parent and begins to sell her stories. She leads writing workshops and slowly moves herself back into the paid workforce. Her children then move into daycare.

Johanson’s partner, especially his sense of humor, is a constant feature of her stories, from the time of their separation to their reunion, although the status of their relationship is never made clear. Most feminists will appreciate the story of her partner’s vasectomy, as he acts on his belief that birth control is not just a woman’s concern. In fact, Johanson’s partner writes the last story in the book “Bernie Gets the Last Word.”

Canadian Families: Diversity, Conflict and Change, Second Edition

Nancy Mandell and Ann Duffy, eds.
Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company Canada, 2000

Reviewed by Lorna A. Turnbull

This collection of articles provides a thorough, critical assessment of the situation of families in Canada today. It will provide an excellent classroom resource for courses across a range of disciplines. Organized in three parts, the book traces the history of family diversity, current family situations, and future challenges faced by families in our ever-changing world.

The first part of the book, “Families in Historical and Social Context,” challenges the myth of the husband/breadwinner and wife/homemaker model of the family. Chapter One demonstrates how the traditional family is a historical anomaly of the post Second World War period and how diversity is, in fact, the norm. The authors note the significant number of single parent families that existed historically because of the impact of death and desertion. They also note the impact of classism in defining family norms, showing how, among poorer and non-white families, both husband and wife were commonly employed outside of the home. Chapter Two includes an examination of the role of the child in the parent-child relationship, recognizing that contrary to traditional theories of socialization, children have an impact upon their parents