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Raeburn, P. (2014). Do Fathers Matter? What Science Is Telling Us About the Parent We've Overlooked. New York: Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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It was becoming a father himself that encouraged Paul Raeburn to start asking important, and until recent decades, repressed questions about fathers, why they mattered and how they contributed to the overall development of their children. Those questions later became the foundation for his scientific exploration into fatherhood. The father of five – three from his first marriage and two from his second – revealed that while years of experience should have prepared him for fatherhood, during the births of his two youngest sons, he only seemed to have more questions. *Do Fathers Matter?* is Raeburn's award winning attempt to answer those questions.

The question posed by the book's title seems rather conclusive, or at least it was to me: of course fathers matter, but why? What is it about the paternal influence that is non-replicable? Raeburn reveals that until recent decades, the abundant research conducted on childhood development focused almost entirely on the child's relationship with his or her mother and effectively excluded the father; fathers were assumed to have little to no effect on the behavioural, physical, emotional, or physiological outcome their children, an assumption that has since been disproven by several studies, some of which have been peppered onto the pages of Raeburn's book and explained in sufficient detail so as not dissuade any potential audiences.

The book does well to explain that the paternal assumptions are likely to stem from a long history of women staying home to care for their children and households while their husbands worked. As more women began entering the workforce in the 1970s, men began to assume more home-based responsibilities including caring for and interacting with their children. This allowed for some depletion of gender roles and encouraged well-rounded households where both parents were actively taking part in the raising of the children, encouraging fatherhood research.

While a father's role indeed begins at conception, it does not pause throughout pregnancy, as I would have thought. Raeburn explains that fathers actually have a real and detectable effect on fetal health, that the environment they surround themselves in, the behaviour they exhibit, and their own personal appearances are all contributing factors to their babies' health throughout the pregnancy (p. 27). Furthermore, as do mothers, fathers exhibit changes both physically and psychologically for the duration of the pregnancy; Raeburn cites the "Becoming a Family Project" – conducted between 1979 and 1990 – to provide real world examples of these changes. The project reported accounts of men losing weight, growing beards, and feeling additional stress to remain strong at a time while vulnerability was heightened (p. 70).

As families grow, it is common for fathers for feel responsible for family financial security, for them to want to provide for their children and contribute to their children's lives. However, Raeburn also reveals that many fathers also hope to be present for their children in ways that fathers from the previous generation were not, as they focused primarily on work. It was particularly interesting to learn that fathers who remained

active and present during pregnancy had school-aged children who felt more nurtured and supported (p. 72).

As children grow, the importance of paternal influence only increases. While mothers are likely to hold infants longer than fathers, and mothers and fathers typically dedicate equal time to play, infants are more likely to attribute time being held by fathers to playtime, this expectation is seen in infants as early as seven to eight months of age (p. 127). As well, fathers contribute more to language development in children than mothers; Raeburn explains that fathers tend to introduce their children to more complex vocabulary than mothers due to the fact that mothers tend to spend more time with the children and therefore utilize the words they know to be simple and familiar (p. 145).

It is also important to note that mothers and fathers showcase parallel concern for their children. In order to accentuate this idea, Raeburn includes an anecdote, a conversation he once had with James E. Swain. When his children were infants, Raeburn recalls what he describes as an obsession where he would check on them several times a night simply to see if they were still breathing (p. 130). The anecdotal material Raeburn sparingly sprinkled into the book became the most intriguing passages for me; while facts and statistics are necessary, they are void of emotion or personal attribution. Anecdotal evidence is what effectively separates this book from a textbook and makes the material accessible to wider audiences because, with these interlaced passages, the words developed a personality.

Eventually, Raeburn takes the time to separate father-daughter relationships from father-son relationships, an act that proves to be quite vital to this narrative. It seems obvious that these relationships would differ, but the ways in which they differ are quite

fascinating. Positive relationships with their fathers allow daughters to build self-esteem and self-security. These daughters are less promiscuous and are at less risk for teen pregnancy (p. 162). Raeburn suggests that this is because daughters with active fathers are more likely to see men as permanent fixtures in their lives rather than unstable factors. He also describes a study conducted involving sisters born, on average, seven years apart with divorced parents. The study found that the older sisters, who had additional years with the fathers present in the home, "… showed the lowest level of risky sexual behaviour," (p. 165) whereas the younger sisters, with fewer years with their father present in the home, "… tended to show the highest level of risky sexual behaviour" (p. 165). Previously, fathers were supposed to be prime examples of masculinity for their sons, to be quintessential male role models. However, Raeburn points out that no concrete connection has been deduced between fathers and sons and masculinity. If sons do exhibit similar behaviours to their fathers, masculinity is irrelevant. Sons tend to mimic their fathers when the fathers have encouraged and provided warm and close relationships with their sons (p. 144).

The element of this book that increases its credibility in my view is that Raeburn never attempts to minimize the importance of mothers. As a father, he could easily take a very bias stance, however, he admits that children are best cared for, most emotionally stable, and independent when both parental units work together as a system and completely and fully accept their children (p. 178). He explains that parents never parent alone, that at the very least two people are always involved in the parenting process: the parent and the child. He admits that parents, both mothers and fathers, especially today, are encouraged to have a little bit of everything, a spouse, a job, and children, and

because few households are maintained by single income families anymore, parenting is no longer viewed primarily as the mother's responsibility. Rather, it has now become a mutual admiration society.

We already know that mothers matter. The importance of fathers, however, has never been as clear. For instance, until reading this book, I did not know that fathers could impact a child's ability to develop empathy (p. 179), and in addition to providing a narrative dedicated to the importance of fathers, I appreciate that Raeburn notes how children affect their fathers well, from causing testosterone levels to drop during pregnancy to informing them about pop culture.

After reading this book, it becomes clear that to disregard the importance of fatherhood would be irresponsible. Fathers have an impact on their child in a myriad of ways, and Raeburn effectively weaves an insightful and informative narrative. His personal anecdotes were scattered throughout and provided relief from fact-ridden passages, some complete with rats and mice that seemed to distract from the human tale I felt he could have effectively told, one imperative for sociologists, child development specialists, family psychologists, and social workers to understand the necessary role of fathers and father figures in a child's life. However, perhaps most crucially, Raeburn's book is one all parents should read, mothers and fathers. After all, whether or not fathers matter may be questioned but whether or not children do never will be.