

Book Reviews

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

Reviewed by: Zynab Al Adhban, MacEwan University

Paul Raeburn's book, "Do Fathers Matter?" is a personal empirical investigation and analysis of academic literature from various fields such as anthropology, genetics, zoology, neuroscience, evolution, psychology, genetics, and sociology to explore the science and role of fatherhood. The methodology used in the literature is mainly based on experimental research from animal studies, particularly rodents, and to a lesser extent from human developmental studies. The underestimation of fatherhood is evident in media, social norms, and the low frequency of academic research involving fatherhood (p. 233). There is evidence of paternal involvement in primate studies and even isolated human studies, which implies that the stereotypes and misconceptions are created socially rather than displaying a scientific basis. For instance, the offspring of titti monkeys are more attached to their fathers than their mothers (p. 19), and in some isolated populations (i.e. Aka tribe), fathers play a large role in their child's upbringing (p. 24). From an evolutionary perspective, fathers were the breadwinners, while mothers were left to tend for the young, but the gender roles have changed today, with women increasingly joining the workforce (p. 22). Therefore, fathers' roles should reflect these changes, and their involvement with the child should increase. Raeburn examines the physiological effects on fathers prior to having a child, and the impact a father's age and presence has on the overall development of the child. The chapters are organized chronologically and parallel the stages of fatherhood from conception to adolescence.

It is well known that mothers undergo physical and physiological changes when they are expecting a child, but what comes as surprising to mainstream societal views of fatherhood is that men too exhibit physiological changes. For instance, their levels of testosterone decreases, while their levels of prolactin increases. Prolactin is a hormone associated with nursing in mothers and testosterone is usually associated with aggression and competitiveness. Hormonal changes have also been found in animal studies, such as primates, birds, and rodents. From an evolutionary perspective, these hormonal changes are beneficial to the rearing of a child because they facilitate and encourage fathers to support and raise the child. Father's with higher testosterone invest less effort to the rearing of their child (p. 73-75).

Raeburn investigates the effects of father's positive interaction with the child, and how that can affect the child's academic achievement/learning and their social skills. Based on the research analyzed by Raeburn, fathers play a "larger" role in the child's expressive language development than do mothers. It is a common conception that mothers have an influence on child language development because of their high involvement and interaction with their children. However, it appears that because mothers interact with their children a great deal they understand their language progress and usually use words known by the child, but fathers do not do this and consequently use expansive and complex terms, which contributes to enlargement of the child's vocabulary skills. Supportive fathers even play a role in their child's intellectual development. For instance, father's intellectual stimulation towards the child further determines that child's performance on intelligence tests (p. 147). It is common to observe fathers play with their children, but what is uncommon is the belief that interactions that are playful, affectionate, and engaging are linked with the child's popularity in school and ability to make friends.

Specifically, the higher the positive interactions between the father and the child, the higher the popularity the child will have at school (p. 152).

Raeburn examines research that highlights the father's impact on a child's overall health. For instance, more than half of fathers who are obese (with higher fat distributions around the abdominal area) had infants that were low in birth weight, irrespective of the mother's weight (p. 78). In addition, mothers and fathers with depression caused adverse effects in their children (increased crying in infants) (p. 87). Contrary to popular belief, fathers can also have post-partum depression (p. 118). Furthermore, fathers who interact and read to their children can decrease the probability of depression in their children (p. 151).

Raeburn states that although fathers are not "essential" for their children's overall development, their presence results in many benefits for the child (p. 158). For instance, a father's positive presence plays a role in their daughter's sexual development. Those without fathers or with unresponsive fathers exhibit rapid sexual development and are also more likely to partake in risky sexual behaviours. This phenomenon can be explained from an evolutionary perspective, that father's absence indicates to the daughter that males do not stay for long, and as a result her sexual maturation speeds up to increase mating and conception opportunities. Raeburn further analyzes research that investigates daughters' unpleasant emotions, and how that contributes to positive perspectives of sexual risk taking. Moreover, fathers' negative presence/physical absence in the first five to seven years of the daughter's life is associated with early sexual development, which means early puberty and higher incidence of teen pregnancies. Raeburn also explores a biological/physiological perspective on the importance of the presence of fathers. Particularly, pheromones (chemical messengers released by animals) can be picked up by other animals and as a result can impact their behaviour. Raeburn indicates that research

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about pheromones implies that pheromones released by fathers leads to a decrease in the daughter's pubertal development (p. 161-166).

The notion that the age of the mother can have negative effects on child development is widespread in contemporary society, and although this notion does have merit, it neglects the importance of the father's age on child's development. Raeburn investigates past research to examine the effects older fathers have on the health of a child. He found that being an older father (above the age of forty) was associated with higher risks of having a child with physical abnormalities, autism, dwarfism, schizophrenia, a bipolar disorder (p. 182), and lower non-verbal intellectual ability (p. 192). However, older fathers can also have positive effects on the child's development. For instance, older father pass down longer telomeres to their offspring, which is linked with health and longevity (p. 202).

Through Raeburn's in-depth and extensive investigation, it is made apparent to the reader that fathers do matter, and are as important as mothers in the upbringing of a child. The research discussed in the book implies that fatherhood plays a large factor in the child's overall development and this association should not be overturned because of the preconceived roles society attributes to fatherhood. Raeburn further concludes that the absence of a father may have detrimental consequences for the child. For instance, premature sexual development and teen pregnancy in daughters', and the child's lower academic achievement, depression, and poverty (p. 221-226).

Raeburn's intention upon writing the book, "Do Fathers Matter," was to empirically investigate the role and science of fatherhood and to compare that with the non-scientific depiction of fatherhood. The goal Raeburn's book accomplishes is that it successfully debunks societal held conceptions of fatherhood by drawing on research from various fields and by

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exploring the various stages of fatherhood. Raeburn effectively simplified rather complex scientific terms, allowing individuals without scientific backgrounds to appreciate/understand the book. However, he often uses informal language, and poor grammatical choices. For instance, he uses the word “kid” instead of “child” throughout the book, and displays a typo by using the word “the” instead of “that” (p. 95). Considering this is a scientific approach, it is assumed that the author would use formal/academic language. Readers from the scientific community may be deterred due to the over-simplification of empirical research and its negation of some concepts. Thus, suggestions would be to provide more data regarding sample size, more criticism of the research, to offer more counterarguments, and to use formal language.

The academic audience include social workers (which may use this book to inform parents of the importance of fatherhood), child developmental psychologists, gender studies (examining gender roles), genetic engineering studies (impacts of having no father, sperm donors, etc.), and the general public. Raeburn presents a large personal bias to the analysis of the research because he is a father himself. Although, Raeburn does mention that some successful individuals have been raised without a father (i.e. Obama) (p. 221), he still lacks research on single mothers and their influence on a child’s development. Moreover, Raeburn’s over-emphasis on the similarities between rodents and human anatomy is problematic because it implies that if it exists in rodents, it will exist in humans (p. 92).

The message Raeburn intends to accomplish with his book is that fathers do matter and are important factors in a child’s overall development, not just as a source of income. However, he tends to “over-emphasize” the role of fatherhood. For instance, his assumption that fathers play a larger role in expressive language development than mothers tends to dismiss/decrease the mother’s contribution on language development (p. 145). Raeburn focuses heavily on why

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fathers matter and the detrimental consequences if they are absent, and less on the detrimental impact if fathers are abusive. Raeburn does not acknowledge other non-molecular families, such as the parenting styles of homosexual families, and single parents. Overall, I found “Do Fathers Matter” simple to read, informative, and is able to attract various types of audiences.