

Schechter, I.J. (2019). Do You Ever Cry, Dad? Toronto: Dundurn Press.

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In his book “Do You Ever Cry, Dad?” I.J. Schechter delivers a heartbreakingly authentic account of family breakup from a father’s perspective. Schechter recalls the emotional distress he faced following his separation with brutal honesty, wearing his heart on his sleeve for the benefit of other dads. With the promise that time heals all wounds, Schechter offers a guidebook for other fathers on how to navigate the choppy and unpredictable waters of divorce. In addition to his own personal experience, he also provides anecdotes from other divorced dads along with insightful input from experts in the field of family studies. Throughout the majority of the book, Schechter emphasizes the connection a father has with his children and the necessity that this connection be maintained via effective parenting styles. An unexpected find was the indirect address of stereotypes that men face during divorces. Intentional or not, Schechter’s book certainly goes beyond the limits of a father’s self-help book. He teaches fathers how to cope through all the turmoils of divorce while still supporting their children.

Schechter wants nothing more out of life than to show his kids unconditional love, which he makes abundantly clear in this book. He serves his role as a father with intense dedication, putting his kids first in every way. At the beginning of the book, Schechter discusses the first few months following his separation and the newfound difficulties that he had to wade through. Dropping his children off at their mother’s home was a knife to the heart for Schechter:

Typically, after parting ways, I would drive a few blocks, pull over, and cry. Those tears expressed a lot of complicated emotions, but mostly just unmitigated pain. Often, I would think about when my kids were born: the pure love and instinctive connection I'd felt. What I was experiencing after the breakup felt in many ways opposite – the emptiness of saying goodbye to them, the feeling of detachment instead of connection. The first time I had to leave them after the split, I felt like the pain might kill me (p. 10).

This brief passage sets up the core themes that the rest of the book will follow. Schechter is clearly feeling some very intense emotions at this point, but he is hiding them from his kids, prompting them to ask, “Do you ever cry, Dad?” (p. 13). Here, he is demonstrating his instinctive drive to shelter his kids from harm, even if this said harm is his own emotion. Moreover, his willingness to be so raw in discussing his emotions is something most fathers might resist, especially when those words will be accessible to millions, but he does it for the benefit of his children. This profound display of love for his children is incredibly moving, making one realize the intimacy of the father-child relationship. Schechter drives this emotional sentiment home with well-researched facts, objectively proving that children growing up with present fathers may experience a wealth of additional benefits. He cites that children with involved fathers do “better on nearly every cognitive, social, and emotional measure,” are “more sociable, more confident, more curious, [...] and less likely to act out in school or engage in risky behaviours,” and “suffer from fewer psychological problems” (p. 29). With such critical outcomes being prevalent, Schechter makes it clear that children need their fathers.

Having this established, Schechter then spends most of his time discussing how to maintain

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a strong father-child relationship in the midst of a separation. He tells fathers that the most important thing they can do is to treat this abnormal situation as normally as they can. Fathers should not become a 'fun parent' who throws orders and obedience to the wind; rather, they should maintain an authoritative parenting style to demonstrate to their kids that even though their parents do not live together anymore, they are still living the same fundamental lifestyle, routines and all. Schechter acknowledges that this is difficult to do, especially with children being resistant to change. His advice is to tell children what they need to know, but no more than that. For example, kids should be given the information to understand that their parents have split up due to reasons unrelated to them, and that both parents will remain a part of their lives. Parents should not go into detail about why their ex-partner was no longer satisfactory, as this makes children feel they must choose sides between the most important people in their lives. For fathers who are facing extreme and unpredictable emotions, any direction in how to properly maintain the father-child relationship is priceless.

Schechter's greatest success in this book was his seemingly unintentional address of gender stereotypes. People generally see fathers as secondary to the mother, who is perceived as the pinnacle of child-rearing. Traditional gender roles dictate that men are supposed to be emotionless and tough, he argues, which leads many to believe that men are not as troubled by a family breakup as mothers are. In being so honest about his experience with divorce, Schechter shows that this is not the case. Readers who subscribe to implicit gender biases will likely find themselves both surprised and moved by Schechter's revelations. Schechter perfectly contrasts the title of his book by confessing "yes, a lot of stuff makes me cry" (p. 183). If Schechter's candid emotional

confessions were not enough to persuade readers that his divorce was excruciating, he shares many stories from other fathers and words from experts to back him up. It was brave of Schechter to confront gender stereotypes in such a forthright manner, but also entirely necessary to make this book successful. His personal revelations take away all the ambiguity surrounding the father's side in a divorce, exposing dads for what they really are: people who feel emotions and sometimes need help, which is entirely okay.

It goes without saying that Schechter's main goal in writing this book was to give other dads support in handling their own separations. His goals were not only met, but surpassed. He undeniably delivers very helpful information to suffering dads, but his confrontation of gender stereotypes greatly broadens the influence of this book to other audiences. Such valuable insight into fatherhood would be of interest not only to women/mothers, but also a more scientific audience that could include family sociologists, psychologists in the disciplines of child development or gender studies, and even social workers.

Although Schechter has done well at expanding his audience beyond fathers, he is still limiting himself from reaching a more contemporary audience. In assuming that the audience he is addressing are fathers from heterosexual relationships, he fails to be inclusive of homosexual partners. Whether or not homosexual divorces are any different than heterosexual divorces is yet to be determined by researchers, but it would have been considerate for Schechter to be more inclusive with his language. In conjunction with this, it may have also been interesting to read expert advice or objective findings on how a divorce affects adopted children. With increasing numbers of parents choosing to adopt, Schechter is inadvertently excluding another demographic from his book.

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Overall, Schechter has done an excellent job of compiling information for recently divorced fathers. Guidance and/or marriage counsellors should all be aware of this book, as it would be an excellent resource for divorcing clients. I would recommend this book to anyone looking be enlightened about divorce and the trials and tribulations of fatherhood. As an easy and enjoyable read, I can conclude that Schechter has inspired me to feel a new and previously unknown level of sympathy for divorced fathers.