

Lockman, Darcy. (2019). All the Rage: Mothers, Fathers and the Myth of Equal Relationships. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

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Darcy Lockman's book "All the Rage: Mothers, Fathers and the Myth of Equal Relationships" is an eye-opening, feminist text that explores the relationship between men and women, and the division of labour based on gender while embarking on parenthood. This book aims to understand why so many women raising children with men bear the majority of the load when it comes to parenting, domestic work, and overall household managing. Lockman begins her research by examining herself and her own marriage to her husband George. She illustrates the relationship she has with her husband and how things have changed over the years while co-parenting two daughters. Lockman then sets out to broaden her research by interviewing more mothers, starting with friends and acquaintances, then reaching out to mothers' groups via Facebook to recruit subjects. Across the interviews, many similarities began to arise. Feelings of inadequacy, exhaustion and resentment due to an unequal division of labour during parenthood and more specifically motherhood, were rampant among the women interviewed. The "division of family labour is the primary source of conflict after couples have children" (p. 40), an unequal division of labour can aide in solidifying unequal roles within the partnership. These feelings and similarities typically transcended age, race, location and the socioeconomic status of those interviewed. A common feeling among these women was that their male partners were not doing

nearly enough to balance their loads. This caused Lockman to then beg the question: Why do men do so little? As Lockman “spoke with mothers and experts, [they] landed on three broad explanatory categories for the problem’s tenacity: biology, cultural mandates around maternal devotion, and the ubiquitous prioritization of men’s need and desires relative to women’s” (p. 16). These three explanations are thoroughly explored over the course of the seven, well-thought out chapters throughout the book.

Before Lockman is able to examine the reasoning behind why couples are unable to parent with an equitable division of labour, we are introduced to the modern, involved father. The modern involved father is the twenty first century man who makes themselves available to be an active participant in parenthood. Compared to the last fifty years, these fathers have significantly become more engaged in the innerworkings of parenthood and family life.

Putting to shame any previous generations’ level of engagement, the modern, involved father still falls short in the area “where men’s actions haven’t totally caught up to women’s expectations.” (p. 24) Therefore still leaving women feeling dissatisfied in their parenting arrangements. Women may use relative-deprivation theory, or the notion that they might not have it as bad as others to justify existing within the status quo of these relationships. Unfortunately, this era of the modern, involved father is far more progressive in ideology than what is put into practice.

It is interesting that among the women interviewed, no matter how egalitarian the relationship was prior to having children, couples found themselves reverting to more traditional gender roles upon the arrival of children. It is questioned that since only women are capable of

bearing children, they are better suited to be the primary parent, and “that women are the sex hormonally primed for parenthood” (p. 82). Gender essentialism assumes “that women share some innate essential property that differentiates them from men”, (p. 59) this may include a knack for organizing and planning, a gentle demeanor and an imbedded maternal instinct. “The idea of maternal instinct doesn’t apply just to birth and its immediate afterward but also everything mothers do to care for their children over the course of a lifetime” (p. 74), these are the type of expectations placed on women beginning in childhood and reinforced throughout a woman’s life. “Often times what seems ‘natural,’ ‘innate,’ or ‘obvious’ is actually just a cultural habit” (p. 60). Lockman doubles down on questioning the existence of the maternal instinct and argues that the “very idea that mothers are instinctively the most capable caregivers that underscores the pervasive inequality in the division of childcare” (p. 70).

Alternatively, to gender essentialism, gender existentialism views gender as a social construct “linked to sex not by biology but by culture” (p. 96). Lockman explains how gender socialization begins at birth and that by the time adults become parents, they have a lifetime of gender stereotypes and expectations influencing their behaviours. The rigidity of gender stereotypes continues to enforce the gap between co-parenting men and women with the division of household labour. It is argued that the only reason “women are primary parents now mostly because they always have been” (p. 103), the socialization of women in caretaking roles just leads to further reinforcement of these gender stereotypes and “the self-fulfilling prophecy plays out and then again” (p. 223). Due to intense expectations for men and women from society, “motherhood has been called the most gender-enforcing experience in a women’s life” (p. 107).

The division of labour between couples includes allocating who does what in terms of housework, childcare and income earning. Another form of labour known as the “parental consciousness” or the “mental load” is often overlooked. “Parental consciousness is the awareness of the needs of children accompanied by the steady process of thinking about those needs” (pp. 139-140), this is a role that primarily falls on women. Women use so much of their mental capacity just managing and organizing those around them and their environments. “One problem with consciousness is that you cannot see it. The mental load’s relentless invisibility makes it hard to co-manage for two unequally motivated parties” (p. 141). The invisibility of consciousness and the expectation of women to be mentally engaged in motherhood at all times is what allows women to continue bearing both the mental load and the physical weight of caring for their children, their homes and themselves.

“Why do men do so little?” a question asked by Darcy Lockman in response to finding out that many women, much like herself are downright exhausted by their maternal role. She wonders why male partners are able to take care of themselves and their needs while allowing their wives to pick up their slack without giving it a second thought. Whether this chalks up to biology or the structure of our society is debated. Lockman notes that it is a great privilege that men have to be able to lack the self-awareness required to create meaningful change. “Implicit biases, stereotypes and demand characteristics are socially acquired impediments to progress” (p. 227) and men work hard to uphold these barriers in order to remain in the positions in society they currently are in.

Over the course of this book Lockman is able to explore each of the three possible explanations as to why women do more work than men. Whether this is a “natural inequity” (p. 277) rooted in biology or a necessary function within society is up for debate. What is not up for debate is the fact that women are taking on significantly more work than their male counterparts.

Darcy Lockman’s’ deep dive into the myth of equal relationships through both the interview process and personal scrutiny perfectly examines both the ‘why’ and ‘how’ there is such a large gendered gap between co-parents. Though Lockman focuses primarily on women in heterosexual relationships, these are not the only arrangements represented. The experiences of queer women, single women and men were also accounted for. A vast and well-rounded account of motherhood is the by-product of Lockman’s exploration. Though I found the book to be quite heteronormative, I understand that it was necessary to uphold the gender binary while exploring its rigidity. The same limitations that exist in society due to gender are outlined throughout this book. While a great resource within academia for those in the sociology or gender studies field, this simultaneously insightful and infuriating read is my recommendation for anyone considering parenthood within the confines of a heterosexual relationship or for anyone looking for another reason to appreciate their mothers.