

Parenting and Professing: Balancing Family Work with an Academic Career

Rachel Hile Bassett.
Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Jenn Stephenson

Taking up this book while on maternity leave and reading it in small bursts while the babies napped, I was dismayed, comforted, and galvanized by the voices in this essay collection. As its central theme, *Parenting and Professing* considers the problem of the perceived value of “ideal-worker behaviour” in two seemingly irreconcilable fields—a value which creates a zero-sum equation pitting the all-consuming experience of being a parent against the equally all-consuming vocation of being a professor. In the first worrying section “Challenges,” several writers confront the practical need to improve the system with more and better family-friendly policies, like paid parental leave and affordable campus daycare, to reduce the tension between these competing roles. But the majority of contributors are more concerned with the intangible yet ingrained cultural attitudes towards mothers in academia.

Some of these tales are surprising in their unpleasantness. Kathryn Jacobs, Gale Walden, and Tarshia L. Stanley, for example, narrate their early struggles and the anti-child biases they encountered. However, each narrative ends on a hopeful note as the writers envision the future they desire. Still on the job search, Walden encounters a website picturing the department chair with her ten-year-old, “and I know immediately to apply. She isn’t hiding her child” (81). Stanley likewise sees a male colleague at work calmly smiling at his little boy in tow: “I am jealous.... It’s definitely what I want to look like when I’m working” (88).

This tenor of hopefulness continues into the second comforting section. Contributors address the benefits that mother/professors and their children might receive from full engagement in both academic and mothering spheres. In the essay “Elemental MoThEr,” chemist Michelle M. Francl-Donnay asks the question, “Can, and does, parenting shape my scholarship?” (122). She observes that “sometimes the most interesting thing in a web is not the spider but the detritus entangled in it” (129). Encouraged by her children to see with their eyes, she is granted a new perspective on her work, arriving at a specific revelation about atomic structures by making cut-out molecules like paper dolls: “Parenting thus feeds my scholarly life in much the same way as a colleague’s artistic work feeds his scholarship in aesthetics” (129). Other writers connect parenting experiences directly to successful research on topics such as the mother-artist in literature and killifish embryos. “Possibilities” also addresses some unconventional strategies for blending the demanding realms of

parenting and professing and perhaps thinking outside the box of a full-time tenure-track job and traditional home life.

The final galvanizing section focuses on the potential for significant cultural change by making parenting more visible, encouraging mothers to stop “hiding the baby,” but also aiming to extend the visible constituency of academics involved in parenting to encompass fathers, student-parents, step-parents, foster parents and other caregivers such as those caring for an aging parent, an ill partner, or friend. As Bassett suggests recounting the stories of academic mothers will provide “a deeper context, a sociological imagination that sees the political in the personal, the communal in the private” (12). And so this collection inspires me, effectively practising what it preaches by using first-person storytelling to change the value system underpinning academic culture as a whole to make it less “greedy” in the interests of achieving work-family balance for all its citizens.

The Development and Treatment of Girlhood Aggression

Debra J. Pepler, Kirsten C. Madsen, Christopher Webster, Kathryn S. Levene, eds.
Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005.

Reviewed by Barbara Schwartz-Bechet

Typically, scientific research related to humans is conducted on males and the results of the research are translated to the female population. To counter this practice, *The Development and Treatment of Girlhood Aggression* provides insight into the most current—although limited—empirical research that studies girlhood aggression. Comparative research between male and female youth is presented alongside research conducted solely on females. The text serves a dual purpose as an exemplary resource for empirical data and as a treatment protocol. It studies the origins of girlhood aggression and progresses toward a continuum of possible treatment methods.

Several central ideas are presented in the five parts of the text. The editors’ first goal is to provide a resource for current empirical research. Their second goal is to identify key components in the identification and treatment of aggression in girls, and their third goal is to encourage further research in the field. A central theme running throughout the text is the importance of relationships and family in the context of girlhood aggression. Each chapter,