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‘Third wave feminism has led us to want to be everything, amazing mothers, incredible professionals, perfect partners’: Female Academics in the United Kingdom and the Politics of Reproduction

Becky Buchanan

The female body remains the only place a foetus can develop into a baby so it is the nexus of personal expectations, social discourses of normality, reproductive laws and biopolitics. In this article I explore five key themes in feminist literature of the politics of reproduction: (1) factors contributing to the choice to reproduce; (2) gendered marxist exploitation, (3) subjectivities in biomedical discourse; (4) gendered binaries in relationships; (5) the male and the child point of view. My analysis is based on a questionnaire, including autoethnography from myself, which was completed by three United Kingdom (UK) based female academics in their thirties called Ava, Beatrix, and Joy.¹ Through deductive analysis it investigates how their lived experience resonates with feminist evaluation.

As a job market, academia is notoriously competitive, with an ever expanding pool of contenders and a reduction in state funding for universities through neoliberal austerity drives.² ‘Feminism’ as a critical perspective has its origins in white, middle class, Western perspectives yet even in my sample which matches this context it has had uneven success in achieving gender equality.³ I show persisting constraints around work/home balance and the naturalisation of gender. Opportunities for changing the patriarchal model carry implications of modified constraints being performed, negotiated and subverted, yet social pressure still materialises in ‘ideal self’ expectations.⁴

I define my terminology and review the debate around the themes before introducing the respondents. The qualitative methodology is explicated and the analysis that follows is arranged according

¹ Due to the personal nature of the data all identities have been anonymised through changed names, including my own autoethnography.

² Eleanor Dickey ‘The Impact of the Poor Academic Job Market on PhD Graduates and What We Individual Academics Can Do About It’, *CUCD Bulletin*, 43 (2014), 1-7.

³ Aiwa Ong, ‘Strategic Sisterhood or Sisters in Solidarity? Questions of Communitarianism and Citizenship in Asia’, *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 4.1 (1996), 107-135 (p. 130).

⁴ Lynn Kuechle, ‘Writing the Script Finding a Language for Mothering,’ *Mothers Who Deliver: Feminist Interventions in Public and Interpersonal Discourse*, edited by Jocelyn Fenton Stitt and Pegeen Reichert Powell (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010).

to the numbered areas detailed above. Feminism is still unpacking the implications of motherhood as a patriarchal institution being separated from mothering as an empowering practice whilst coming to terms with embracing the intersectionality of social justice issues and new reproductive technologies.⁵ My research contributes evidence of how theory is steering female choices and how it impacts progression in everyday praxis by focussing on people who are highly educated in feminism.

Politics of Reproduction

The vested interests of capitalist accumulation and patriarchy engage in an interactive power struggle with women who have agency to create the ‘politics’ where the state meets the personal. ‘Reproduction’ extends from human procreation to the renewal of cultural mores and establishment legitimacy.⁶ What appears to be natural and universal is on deeper reflection heteronormative procreation impacted by the UK’s secular (historically Christian) context.⁷ Social trends towards modernisation, urbanisation, and lower mortality have indicated the population phenomenon of the ‘Fertility Transition’.⁸ There are fewer births overall and women face a choice on whether to have children. This occurs in a social milieu with simultaneous expectation and pressure to reproduce, despite up to 17% of women remaining childless, a number which has been increasing year on year.⁹ Mothers are undervalued in almost every arena – economically, politically, culturally – as patriarchal values dominate. Under these constraints:

- (1) children can only be properly cared for by the biological mother;
- (2) this mothering must be provided 24/7;
- (3) the mother must always put children’s needs before her own;
- (4) mothers must turn to experts for instruction;
- (5) the mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed and composed in motherhood;
- (6) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy and money in the rearing of their children;
- (7) the mother has full responsibility, but no power from which to mother;
- (8) motherwork,

⁵ Andrea O’Reilly, ‘Mothering against Motherhood and the Possibility of Empowered Maternity for Mothers and Their Children’, *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich’s of Woman Born*, edited by Andrea O’Reilly (State University of New York Press, 2004); Marilyn Strathern, *Reproducing the Future: Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

⁶ Thomas Laquer, ‘Orgasm, Generation and the Politics of Reproductive Biology’, *The Gender / Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, ed. by Roger Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁷ Jasbir K. Puar, ‘Mapping US Homonormativities’, *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 13:1 (2006), 67-88.

⁸ Vanessa L. Fong, ‘China’s One-Child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters’, *American Anthropologist*, 104.4 (2002), 1098-1109 (p. 1099) <<https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.4.1098>>.

⁹ Office of National Statistics, *Women Shoulder the Responsibility of Unpaid Work* (10 November 16) <<http://visual.ons.gov.uk/the-value-of-your-unpaid-work/>> [accessed 19 December 16] (para. 3 of XXIV).

and childrearing more specifically, are regarded as personal private undertakings with no political import

as summarised by Andrea O'Reilly.¹⁰ Motherhood as an institution is separate from potentially empowering mothering as a feminist practise.

Children are expensive and this cost increases with the upward investment of time and money in the mother's education and subsequent employment opportunities as breaks from work are taken at a critical time relatively early in the career of most women. The original Marxist analysis of workers' exploitation through alienation from the means of production failed to take gender into consideration.¹¹ It is through the unpaid traditional 'women's' work' in the domestic sphere that men were able to pursue a public role. These women and their children were legally the property of the husband, and any roles that threaten this patriarchal power dynamic today (such as homosexual relationships and single motherhood) retain negative connotations.¹²

Today most families need two breadwinners yet women continue to do this 'second shift' at home.¹³ Across class and age ranges, women put in twice as many hours as men cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children.¹⁴ Ramifying this is an unknown amount of time spent doing the mental load of planning and remembering chores. Women continue to support men's freedom to do abstract, intellectual work so over time it becomes accepted, and even predicted, that men are better at this and should be paid more; simultaneously, women are reluctant to let men take on their traditional duties due to their amateurish inefficiencies. This does not benefit anyone, as neither women nor men have the

¹⁰ Andrea O'Reilly, *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practises of Empowered Mothering* (Virginia: Womens Press, 2004).

¹¹ W. Penn Handwerker, *Births & Power: social change and the Politics of Reproduction*, (London: Westview, 1982), p. 82.

¹² Handwerker, pp.21; Kate McCollough, 'Of Woman (but Not Man or the Nuclear Family) Born - Motherhood Outside Institutionalized Heterosexuality', in *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's of Woman Born*, ed. by Andrea O'Reilly, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

¹³ Arlie Hochschild, 'The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home', in *The Second Shift*, ed. by Arlie Hochschild and Ann Machung (New York: Viking Penguin USA, 1989).

¹⁴ Office of National Statistics, 'Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales: 2015' (10 November 16) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2015>> [accessed 21 February 17] (para. 8 of LXXXIV).

chance to develop into responsible well-rounded individuals, a circumstance which ultimately contributes to a weaker society.¹⁵

The biology of reproduction, like any science, is socially constructed as scientists decide what experiments to undertake through subjective human processes. Biology is not an objective, rational knowledge, but rather influenced by the subjective position of the scientist and by cultural trends. Biology as an objective, rational science was forged by the dominant male researchers in a historical context tainted by inequality. Within this discourse, menstruation is described as hormone triggers for the top-down process of uterine waste product disposal of failed reproductive potential, and menopause as atrophying decay.¹⁶ The bias of such rhetoric of intensification is evident when when we consider equivalent processes such as stomach lining renewal, described through more positive images of cyclical revitalisation.¹⁷ The biomedical view of reproduction is that it is a painful and pathological condition that expert (mostly male) doctors need to control, for the protection of the child especially, an experience which can be disempowering.¹⁸ Biomedicine has undeniably come a long way in reducing maternal and infant mortality yet some feminists have responded to disempowering medical control with a movement for self-knowledge and natural birth in a homely environment.¹⁹

Feminist analysis extended our understanding of how patriarchy is articulated by examining the 'common sense' gendered binaries of male/female, culture/nature, active/passive, public/private, logical/irrational, aggressive/nurturing, provider/dependent.²⁰ These normative expectations are restrictive, however the negotiation of everyday life does not replicate dogmatic theory and there is increasing awareness of the necessity for flexible categories.²¹ A eurocentric assumption of a universal phenomenon of 'providers' that subsequently materialise as 'absent fathers' underlies cross-cultural investigations into

¹⁵ Bell Hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (London: Harper Collins, 1999).

¹⁶ Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 51.

¹⁷ Barbara Tomlinson, 'Intensification and the Discourse of Decline: A Rhetoric of Medical Anthropology', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 13.1 (1999), 7-31.

¹⁸ Vandana Shiva, 'The Seed and the Earth: Women, Ecology and Bio Technology', *The Ecologist*, 22.1 (1992), 151-168 (p. 151).

¹⁹ Ina May Gaskin, *Spiritual Midwifery*, 4th ed. (Tennessee: Book Publishing Company, 2002).

²⁰ Shiva, p. 153.

²¹ Sharon Kaufman and Lynn Morgan, 'The Anthropology of the Beginnings and Ends of Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34 (2005), 317-41 (p. 328) <<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.34.081804.120452>>.

rights and responsibilities.²² As men become more involved, from joint decisions to being present at the birth to ‘hands on’ upbringing, their role as it is performed and their expectations of it are changing.

Patriarchy has absorbed liberal feminism and some women strive to define themselves by formerly masculine indicators. An on-going emphasis on productivity can lead to ‘quality over quantity’ parenting and ‘detached mothers’ physically and emotionally distant from their kids as well as from their identities and biology.²³ Mothering can be reclaimed as an empowering act, but what this means in praxis is multivalent.

This paper meets three ‘sisters-in-arms’ whose negotiation of the feminist politics of reproduction constitutes a strategic solidarity that is useful for support.²⁴ Ava (34) is a fellow at a rural college, she has no partner or children but wants to meet a long term girlfriend and have children soon. Beatrix (31) is a part time MA student and a single mum to a 3 year old girl. Joy (36) is a research associate at a top university on maternity leave with her husband of 10 years and their newborn baby.

Methods

This exploratory ethnography gathered data from a sample of three respondents selected on the basis of their occupation, reproductive status and age. They had a range of qualifications and positions in humanities and the arts and were based in different settings across the UK. They all already had children and either planned or desired to have more. They were all aged over 30, the average age of professional first-time mothers in the UK in 2015 and below 46, which is the age at which the Office for National Statistics judges women to be childless.²⁵ Purposeful targetting enabled a breadth of experience to emerge from a small number of case studies. All respondents have been good friends of mine for at

²² Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp, ‘The Politics of Reproduction’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 20 (1991) 311–43 (p.321) <<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.20.100191.001523>>.

²³ Tracey Cassels, ‘How Liberal Feminism and Patriarchy Work Together to Create the Detached Mother’, *Evolutionary Parenting* (2016) <<http://evolutionaryparenting.com/liberal-feminism-patriarchy-detached-mother/>> [accessed 21 February 17] (paras. 25–36 of XLIII).

²⁴ Ong, p. 130.

²⁵ Office of National Statistic, ‘*Births by Parents’ Characteristics England and Wales: 2015*’ (10 November 16) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2015>> [accessed 21 February 17] (para. 31 of XLIX); Office of National Statistics, ‘*Childbearing for Women Born in Different Years, England and Wales: 2015*’ (10 November 16) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2015>> [accessed 21 February 17] (para. 16 of LXXXIV).

least a decade, and this facilitated greater openness and eloquence, as my research built upon previous informal conversation. In an exercise of auto-ethnography I was one of the respondents as this is a very personal subject for me. This highlights the potential of embracing the researcher's positionality to use it as a catalyst for authentic, authoritative and continually reflexive ethnography.²⁶ Below is a table describing the sample, all names have been anonymised.

Respondents' Essential Background Information

Name	Age	Children	Partner	Occupation
Ava	34	N	N	Lecturer
Beatrix	32	Y	N	MA Student
Joy	36	Y	Y	Career Researcher

Table 1

I designed a short questionnaire with open ended queries relating to the experience and emotions arising from reproductive choices, menstruation, support networks and the relevance or otherwise of feminist theory. These questions were drawn from the prevalence of these themes in library-based research that assessed the effectiveness of feminist theory over time for cross-cultural understanding of the politics of reproduction. The questionnaire was distributed via Facebook Messenger, a distribution technique whose informality contributed to the levels of candour possible. I approached the participants' responses through a deductive approach by selecting answers that resonated, were ambivalent towards or disagreed with previous studies that addressed the themes.

This qualitative research allowed a relatively in-depth exploration of how the participants themselves perceive and act within the macro-economic system and countercurrent feminist campaigning on an everyday level, so the detail of their personal choices can be linked back to wider trends. It was not possible to do participant observation or further research to triangulate my evidence due to the brevity of time I had available to dedicate to this research. As the sample is small, white, broadly middle-class, and based upon my acquaintances, there is potential for the answers to be biased. The wider applicability of the data is limited due to this small sample and the recruitment method. Whilst it is not

²⁶ Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard, 'On Souvenirs and Metonymy, Narratives of Memory, Metaphor and Materiality', *Tourist Studies*, 5.1 (2005), 29-53 (pp. 35-36) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797605062714>>.

possible to build a universal theory from the data, it nevertheless showcases cultural trends pertaining to the performance and contestation of gender roles. During the study I have gone through a process of conscientisation from recognising patriarchy in action on myself, to learning and reflecting and finally taking action.²⁷ Initially, I had hoped to understand my circumstances better and reconcile myself to them; instead, as a lived process this research contributed theoretical articulation to my everyday life and fuelled my thirst for social justice as I shared in the experiences of other women. I embraced the figure of the ‘feminist killjoy’ who is unafraid to make a stand for women’s rights in socially-awkward settings.²⁸ I found support and empowerment in exercising my critical awareness and decided to join two women’s groups.²⁹ One is a social discussion group where women share their experiences, and the other is a direct action group lobbying the government for policy change. In future research I would aim to include women from other social classes and nationalities, to enhance our understanding of the relevance of the issues and goals explored in this article beyond the white middle classes from which the current analysis originates. My analysis would also gain greater depth by including participants from ethnic minorities, men, and multigenerations of academics, as well as questions on taking children on fieldwork excursions.³⁰

(1) Reproductive Choices

To discuss ‘choice’ assumes planning, but of course human bodies do not always abide to plans. All of the women in the study experienced surprise and incomplete pregnancies: Beatrix and Joy both had a miscarriage and Ava an abortion. Whilst they agreed with the feminist perspective that it’s a woman’s ‘right to choose’ to terminate a pregnancy, for Beatrix and Ava their experiences were so traumatic that they would not consider having an abortion should the question arise. In developed countries, the personal reproductive decisions are often framed in terms of being fair in a context of over-exploitation

²⁷ Freire Institute, *Concepts used by Paulo Freire* <<http://www.freire.org/component/easytagcloud/118-module/conscientization/>> [accessed 21 February 17] (para. 5 of VII).

²⁸ Sarah Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Croydon: Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁹ Andrea O’Reilly, “‘It Saved My Life’ The National Association of Mothers’ Centers, Matricentric Pedagogy, and Maternal Empowerment”, *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*, 4.1 (2013), 185–209.

³⁰ Joan Cassels, *Children in the Field – Anthropological Experiences* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

of planetary resources balanced against family and the perceived emotional fulfillment of parenting.³¹ The desire to nurture motivated Ava to negotiate her ambivalent urges to widen the concept beyond the traditional kinship line:

I do experience the need to have an outlet for that authentic love and nurturing care, I consider it intertwined with my spiritual development as a human that I would allow myself to mother, but I am not convinced that I need to have my own biological child.

A 50-hour working week is not uncommon as academics, especially those without tenure, strive to distinguish themselves. As Joy recounts, 'I have been offered work but it's far from where we now live [near friends and family]. It feels like a risk – turning down a job to better suit my family. Will I find another?' In these uncertain conditions the support of peers for whatever a woman decides is fundamental, whilst outside of the peer group the decision to not have children may be incomprehensible, as Ava indicates:

[M]aybe I am out enough as a queer woman or appear engaged enough with "getting stuff done" that I seem not to get loads of projected expectation from society in the sense of scrutinizing my choices...outside of Europe everyone always comments that a woman my age can be unmarried without children.

This hints at the ingrained social expectation that heterosexuals who can will reproduce, but homosexuals will not and increasingly in the developed world women might choose careers over babies. The number of children a family has and when is therefore linked to personal and social expectations and employment status. As Joy says: 'I always wanted children but also love my job and have waited until babies were possible. Actually, mainly this was so I could finish a PhD, for which I had no funding'. The system does not support women to become mothers and seriously climb the career ladder simultaneously because it originates in a gendered division of labour that is stubbornly slow to change.

(2) Marxism and the Second Shift

The experiences of my respondents reflected varying levels in how supportive their institutions were to their changing needs. This had the potential to help things run smoothly, or to create anxiety and

³¹ Handwerker, p. 82.

complications. This support was strong for Joy:

Colleagues were excited about my pregnancy and baby and extremely supportive. They have been wonderful about my maternity leave & what I might need. It does feel like this is a change for women and it is noticeable that quite a few women in the department (ahead of me) don't have children.

However for Beatrix there were structural challenges: 'There is no nursery, the guidelines are unclear, there's no kid-friendly areas, I can't work to the best of my abilities.' It is in terms of standardising these unclear guidelines that the government could have the greatest impact. If there were strong policies for fully-funded nursery places or even a universal basic income, then academics such as Beatrix would be able to work effectively, rather than struggling to meet the inflated prices for quality childcare provision in London. A broader solution could encourage flexible working hours to spread the burden of childcare more easily over all those who have parental responsibility.

As she had solo parental responsibility Beatrix did not have personal experience of the second shift/mental load dynamic, yet still highlighted equality as vital: 'I think it would be much easier on female academics and women in general if as well as fighting for women to get equal opportunities into the workplace, men should get equal opportunities in the home'. The sphere of the domestic is beyond what is typically assumed to be the government's remit so this will be further addressed in the section below on the male role in the politics of reproduction.³²

(3) Biomedical Bias

My data shows that the insidiously misogynistic discourse on menstruation described in the 'Politics of Reproduction' section has the potential to become part of women's self-understanding. Upon starting her period Beatrix said, 'It made me feel as if my body was working against me. Society denies when periods happen, makes them seem a weakness, especially irrational PMT'. Ava's response highlighted a

³² By contrast, in Japan a top-down government and media-led initiative to encourage men to consider parenting 'hip' and stay at home more has had some success, but the weight of the daily care continues to be shouldered by women. Kosuke Mizukoshi, Florian Kohlbacher, and Christof Schimkowsky, 'Japan's *Ikumen* Discourse: Macro and Micro Perspectives on Modern Fatherhood', *Japan Forum*, 28.2 (2016), 212-232 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2015.1099558>>.

similar acute awareness of her physicality with a differing emotional interpretation:

It's a disappointing sadness, that yet again my body has been building up a belief conducive to the anticipation of a thing that hasn't occurred. It's an opportunity for feeling renewal and emptiness, the release of that tension that has built up in the body.

This internalization of misogynistic science is not a given outcome, and Joy did not let a negative portrayal impact her own feelings about her body: 'It feels very normal – part of the rhythm of my life and it doesn't bring out much emotion month to month'. All emphasised feeling appreciation of their own fertility, which is harmonious with a feminist reclamation of the dominant biomedical discourse. Most of the time women are actively avoiding pregnancy so it more is appropriate to reconceptualise the successful period itself to be the goal.³³

It is not useful to hold biomedicine as the universally-correct yardstick and indigenous biocultural models as backwards or even as radically opposed, nor to use an orientalist lens to romantically construe them as forgotten, exotic solutions.³⁴ Whilst feminism would not support the fear of pollution ordaining the separation of women (typically during their periods or directly after birth), learning how women in other contexts value themselves by creating sacred spaces can be constructive.³⁵ In her description of seeking more body-positive practises, Beth was explicit in looking to other cultures:

In my mid-twenties I read a book about how Native American women treat their period. The female community supported them in everyday tasks so they can be introspective, they read their dreams and celebrate it as a powerful time of intuition and renewal.

There is a power dynamic inherent in outsiders from a dominant social group taking up decontextualised indigenous rituals without the blessing of the traditional practitioners through cultural appropriation. However, with patriarchy claiming ownership over womens' sexuality and reproductive functions and fostering unhealthy and unrealistic body images, learning with respect and sensitivity can contribute to a greater valuation of indigenous culture and more progressive equality by increasing the potential

³³ Emily Martin, p. 59.

³⁴ Robert Hahn and Arthur Kleinman, 'Biomedical Practice and Anthropological Theory: Frameworks and Directions', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 12 (1983), 305-333 <<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.12.100183.001513>>; Cecelia Van Hollen, 'Invoking Vali: Painful techniques of Modern Birth in South India', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 26 (2003), 293-298 <<https://doi.org/10.1525/maq.2003.17.1.49>>.

³⁵ Camilla Power, 'If the Body Isn't Sacred, Nothing Is: Why Menstrual Taboos Matter', *Guardian* (11 February 17) <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/11/if-the-body-isnt-sacred-nothing-is-why-menstrual-taboos-matter>> [accessed 12 March 17] (para. 3 of XII).

paradigms of understanding.

In addition to experiencing some pathologising of natural occurrences through biomedicine, did the women find medicine overpowering? When telling her birth story Beatrix rejected it but was thankful that it was there.

I choose a midwife led birthing centre, my birth plan was clear: no drugs, interventions, vitamin K. Only aromatherapy, yoga, fairy lights, birth pool, that kind of thing. In the end my labour was 48 hours long and I had to have pethidine half way through to rest enough to enable me to deliver my 9 lb 9 oz, sunnyside up baby!

It doesn't seem here that her agency was subsumed under masculine biomedicine, but rather that it was accepted as a necessary facilitator.

(4) Binaries in Relationships & the Male Role

Both Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and heterosexual relationships are a question of interdependent balancing between individuals to create a stable family that is more than the sum of its parts. Ava is mainly lesbian in sexual orientation. She described spending a lot of the past decade struggling with the best family format for reproduction before deciding on a sperm donor:

My internalized homophobia lived in conflict with having the same hopes for a relationship with a woman (it's hard to reconcile wanting to be in a relationship with a woman and having a baby with a man) eventually (quite recently) I realised: what could be better than a mother? two mothers!!

Heteronormativity is also restrictive for heterosexuals, and Beatrix challenged the binary norms and Madonna/whore archetype which automatically disqualifies single mothers from being good mothers:

[I]t's a lot more socially acceptable to be a single mum now – I can't believe only a generation or so ago I would be sent to a loony bin...some men see me as damaged goods, but I feel like my emotional baggage is just manifest where theirs is hidden.

What did the women experience in terms of gendered stereotypes, and an apt male role? Although my questionnaire was not administered to any men it is possible to glean what the men in the women's lives considered appropriate behaviour 'On the whole, everyone has been very supportive. Friends, family and partner, as you might expect' said Joy. Yet it is useful to recall that Joy's reproductive history was the closest to the societally-endorsed ideal. She was married, on maternity leave whilst her husband

continued to work, and had a planned child after she finished her education. Campaigning for the inclusion of paid paternity leave has commonly been led by female feminists rather than fathers, but since experiments in Norway have proven it helps improve family relations there has been increased discussion in male focussed media.³⁶

Beatrix's ex-partner was not there when needed, 'he cheated on me and tried to pressurise me into having an abortion, which he had done twice with other women before, but now he loves his daughter. I feel a bit bitter about it'. Ava had found men in her social circle hypothetically jumped to reproduce without responsibility,

There are a lot of men friends who seem keen to be sperm donors, this is apparently an irresistible proposition for a man, perhaps there is a recognition that it's easier to be father by proxy, to co parent without the pressure, and just trust that 'mothers' can do it best?

The ongoing challenges these women face in negotiating childcare after decades of feminist campaigning indicate that women can make their best efforts for change, but the current status quo will continue as long as bad behaviour is accepted among men and there is a scarcity of economic incentives and good cultural role models.

(5) Individualism and the Child's Point of View

Without recreating condemnation through the performance of internalized misogyny in expecting 'distant mothers' to take primary responsibility in childcare, and whilst recognising the uncommon privilege of a household being solvent with one person's wage, unchecked individualism can have negative implications for the child. Ava highlighted the way potential avenues for self-realisation, linked to the lag in the development of the male role discussed above, twisted 'liberation' into more pressure:

[T]hird wave feminism have lead us to want to be EVERYTHING, amazing mothers, incredible professionals, perfect partners, but we can't be all these things unless the

³⁶ Since 1993 Norway has offered an optional month of paid paternity leave, and where it has been taken up there has a long term correspondence in impact of 11% fewer conflicts at home and 50% more likely to divide laundry tasks equally in the second shift, as it intervenes at a point when the roles are in flux. Andreas Kotsadam and Henning Finseraas 'The State Intervenes in the Battle of the Sexes: Causal Effects of Paternity Leave', *Social Science Research*, 40 (2011), 1611-1622 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.06.011>>; Rutger Bregman, 'Why Paternity Leave Will Make You a Better Man for Life', *GQ Magazine* (13 March 17) <<http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/paternity-leave-uk-form>> [accessed 07 April 17].

men want to be them also so yes the father/man/husband role has to co-evolve in direct proportion to us.³⁷

Equality does not have to come at the expense of other stakeholder's rights. When different inputs beyond economic are equally valued, then society has the potential to be more balanced. The offspring are vulnerable in that what little agency they have is often overridden. Beatrix was acutely aware of this when sometimes persuading her pre-school daughter to stay at nursery from 8 am until 6 pm; 'I just feel guilty every day for leaving her'. Children's socialisation at an institution with professionals over primary caretakers, at an age when they cannot really meaningfully interact with other kids is deemed necessary whereas spending meaningful time with parents is less so.³⁸ To be trapped between impossible expectations and ambitions is not necessarily healthy yet from a long-term perspective, a successful academic mother can also be a good role model for the child.³⁹

With careful consideration of the requirements and the dangers, Beatrix is planning a research trip to Athens with her daughter and Joy is making funding applications to do fieldwork with her husband and daughter in Latin America. This indicates the possibility of an matricentric feminism that addresses both the male and the child's point of view.

Conclusion

On a daily basis Ava, Beatrix, and Joy negotiate the politics of reproduction and the concurrent demand for equality in the public and private spheres. Their specific situations mean their reflexive responses have individual characteristics whilst they are all engaging with similar themes to those in the literature. The feminist right to choose balances their own desire for a child to love and a successful career, as well as their relationship and support network status. Workplace experiences are mixed, suggesting revised Marxist gendered exploitation continues, exacerbated by short contracts. The time demands of the second shift were highlighted as a space where men could do more. Whilst not everyone was subject to

³⁷ Courtney E. Martin, *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: How the Quest for Perfection is Harming Young Women*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2008).

³⁸ Cassels, Joan (para. 16 of XLIII).

³⁹ Elnora Evans and Caroline Grant, *Mama PhD – Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

'misogynistic' biomedicine, and indeed even appreciated its technology at times, where it existed they had found creative cross-cultural agency strategies that were in line with the ideal of deconstructing patriarchy.

Whilst some negative gendered binaries persist, they are not so dominant as when their existence and impact was first identified, and the male role is slowly evolving to be more involved. Despite this, patriarchy continues to have a adverse impact on the family as a whole, but particularly on mothers. Everyone in the world must balance self-interest and responsibility, so it seems unjust to target women for individualism as social, economic and personal pressures concentrate to stretch them to capacity and beyond. Even with all the desired support structures in place, making time for children and keeping up with an academic career creates feelings of insecurity. While traditional feminism neglects the child's point of view, the women I interviewed are actively aware of their children's needs. As Ava noted 'reproduction is also a basis for an ontological way to re-produce social values' so it is hoped that the agency and strength of these women will contribute to making the world a more just place for their offspring as they continue to enact their own vision of feminism.

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