

WHAT DO MOTHERS WANT FROM FATHERS?

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Chaired by Stuart Valentine



Conversation Stream:

What do mothers want from fathers?

‘Sharing of care and domestic responsibilities: What factors influence ‘equity’ in parental practises?’

Year of the Dad Conference, Edinburgh, February 12th 2016

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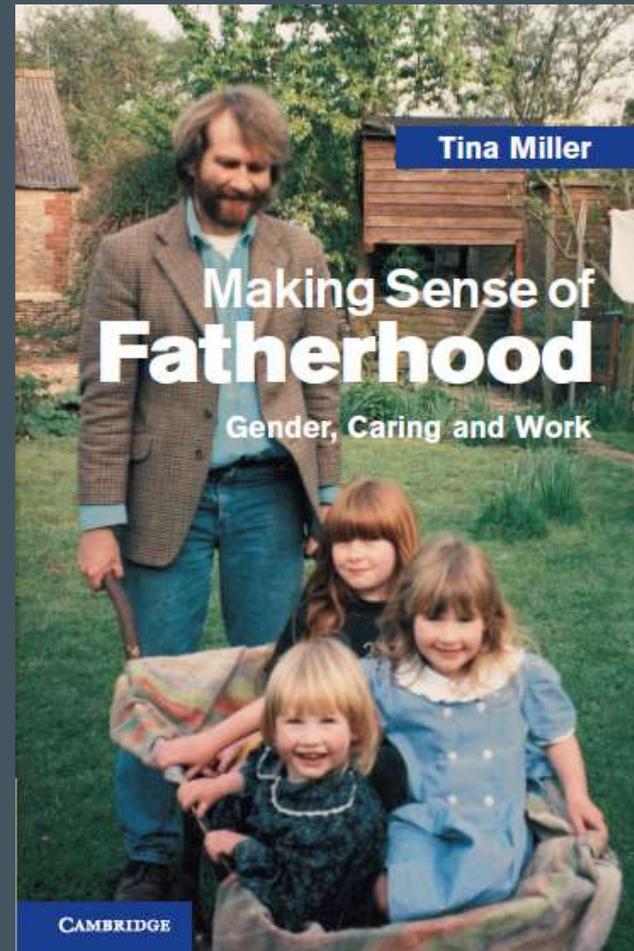
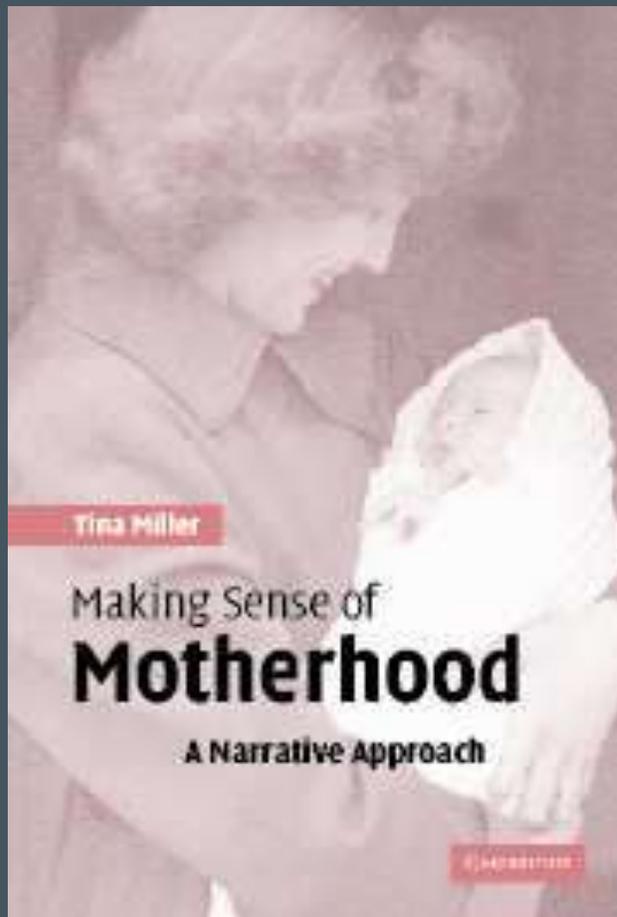
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Setting the changing Western context

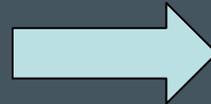
- Contemporary practises of caring/involvement in the domestic sphere and notions of equality require us to consider social, cultural and historical change



Exploring - first-time motherhood (2005) and fatherhood (2010). Comparing experiences.



‘it is literally 24 hours a day’ (James)



What's hard about 'equally' sharing caring – and the domestic sphere?

- Fathers are more 'involved' than at anytime in recent history
- But historically this has been a maternally etched arena
- Fathers less involved in 'domestic chores'
- Policy changes (paternity leave and shared parental leave), but policies can only *signal* change
- Lessons to be learnt from other countries e.g. Sweden
- Broader changes e.g. gender & 'caring masculinities'

Anticipating first-time Fatherhood: Intentions

“Initially the only thing that I think that I probably can’t do is breastfeed [but] I don’t see myself as not doing anything and in real terms Ella wanted to express (breast milk) anyway, so at some point I’ll be able to feed ... **But I don’t see that there’s going to be anything particularly that I won’t do.** Obviously Ella hopefully will be having nine months (maternity leave), **so there will be far more that she’ll be doing anyway, just because of time.** [But] changing nappies and bathing, I’ll try and have a go and get involved and do these things”

(Sean)

Early Fathering experiences

“I thought I wouldn’t settle into it as quickly as I have ... because I see babies as so delicate I thought I wouldn’t necessarily know what to do with it. But it’s kind of **instinctive** ... Yeah I think we take it **pretty evenly**, I mean until Susan starts expressing (milk) I can’t do the feeding ***but I do everything else***” (Chris).



‘men can’t do practical things’

“I’m doing plenty of childcare [but] Ros is taking responsibility for the baby’s future orientation of where we will be going next ... **It’s not that I couldn’t do that but I’m not doing that** ... *men can’t do it because men can’t do practical things*, actually it is easy to feed the baby but knowing *what* to feed her tomorrow is difficult” (Richard, Late postnatal interview)

Reflecting on 18 years of mothering (Motherhood study)

'You know with hindsight, you think oh did I do that right. Like with the responsibility thing that is the first thing I said to you I think **maybe I've taken too much responsibility, maybe I could have shared the responsibility more** I think that is probably my nature and with hindsight I think there probably were people around. **I'm sure [husband] would probably have taken more responsibility if I made him...**if I was doing it again...I would have given away some of that responsibility...because I think **that weighed me down in a way that I felt was essential at the time...**I don't know why I did not just share it, but maybe that was just me, **maybe I just needed to take 24 hour responsibility'** (Gillian)

Some concluding thoughts: moving towards equity in family caring

Patterns of care are established in early weeks/months – and can be difficult to disrupt

Factors facilitating more equitable sharing include:

Levels of pay, child-care, workplace flexibility, employer support, visibility of male caring, less ‘task-based-only’ father involvement, male involvement in domestic chores, societal valuing of caring.....



Further reading:

Miller, T. (2010) *Making sense of Motherhood: A narrative approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Miller, T. (2010) *Making sense of Fatherhood: Gender, caring and work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dermott and Miller, T. (2015) More than the sum of its parts? Contemporary fatherhood policy, practice and discourse. *Families, Relationships and Societies*. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1332/204674315X14212269138324>)

Miller, T. (2013) Shifting out of neutral on parental leave: Making fathers' involvement explicit. *Juncture*. IPPR 19 (4): 258-262.

Miller, T. (2011) Falling back into gender?: Men's narratives and practices around first-time fatherhood. *Sociology* Vol. 45 (6): 1094-1109

MEN CAN DO IT!

GIDEON BURROWS
AUTHOR



WHAT DO MOTHERS WANT?

LIZ MEENAGH

WOMEN FOR INDEPENDENCE



DISCUSSION

