



Rad Dad: Dispatches from the Frontiers of Fatherhood

*Tomas Moniz (Editor) , Steve Almond , Jeff Chang , Cory Doctorow , Paul Kivel , Raj Patel , Matt Meyer ,
Ian Mackaye , more... Jeremy Adam Smith ...less*

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Combining the best of the award-winning magazine *Rad Dad* and the Daddy Dialectic blog, this compilation features the best essays written for fathers by a multitude of dads from different walks of life. Bestselling authors, writers, musicians, and others collaborate on this collection that focuses on some of the modern complexities of fatherhood. Touching on topics such as the brutalities, beauties, and politics of the birth experience; the challenges of parenting on an equal basis with mothers; the tests faced by transgendered and gay fathers; the emotions of sperm donation; and parental confrontations with war, violence, racism, and incarceration, this anthology leaves no stone unturned in the discussion of being a dad. Contributors include: Steve Almond, Jack Amoureaux, Mike Araujo, Mark Andersen, Jeff Chang, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jeff Conant, Jason Denzin, Cory Doctorow, Craig Elliott, Chip Gagnon, Keith Hennessy, David L. Hoyt, Simon Knapus, Ian MacKaye, Tomas Moniz, Zappa Montag, Raj Patel, Jeremy Adam Smith, Jason Sperber, Burke Stansbury, Shawn Taylor, Tata, Jeff West, and Mark Whiteley.

Rad Dad: Dispatches from the Frontiers of Fatherhood Details

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From Reader Review Rad Dad: Dispatches from the Frontiers of Fatherhood for online ebook

Molly Westerman says

This edited collection draws its very brief essays (and a few interviews) from two radical fathering/fatherhood publications, the zine Rad Dad and the blog Daddy Dialectic. Its strength is in its pieces' diversity and earnestness: though it's a quick read, the book offers a lot to think about in terms of how feminist-leaning, anti-capitalist/anti-consumerist, anti-racist fathers' experience their own lives and relationships in a culture where fatherhood is deeply tied up with problematic, limited masculinities and especially the "breadwinner" role of providing families with Stuff and Money.

As in nearly every anthology, the quality is somewhat uneven, but hoo boy the essay "Skate Dad" nearly made me just stop reading: it's a bad low point, with an I-think-I'm-so-cool-and-progressive sexist paternalistic vibe: "Transfer that treatment to when a skater's daughter brings a guy home--that guy is in for a seriously uncomfortable meeting-the-parents experience, several times over, until he proves himself in a big way" (107). Can we please move past the "Anything happens to my daughter, I got a .45 and a shovel, I doubt anybody would miss you" routine, at least in progressive circles, and drop the Big Man act? (And yeah, I'm quoting Clueless.)

I really appreciate Moniz's acknowledgement of his own and many fathers' initial reluctance to write about parenting, because they worry about their own privilege and/or because they're been raised to believe that "fathers don't have much to offer or say about parenting" (10). This discussion frames the book's project effectively.

Also, what a great description of what some of my friends call "the witching hour," from David L. Hoyt:

It was a bitterly cold winter afternoon. Four p.m. and already dark. I was tired, and dreading the two-hour stretch that yawned before me, from the end of Spot's afternoon nap, to Spot's mom coming home from work a little after six.

It is a bleak stretch of time, bleak in my mind like the glare of sodium vapor street lamps over a frozen, salt-crusted alley.

Bleak, I tell you.

C.E. G says

I had pretty high hopes for this book, as it claims to combine two things that I'm really fascinated by: masculinity studies and feminist parenting.

But the majority of the essays didn't live up to the promise of exploring how men can parent in "ultimately revolutionary ways." A lot were written by privileged anarchybros who didn't even begin to take a critical perspective, and I felt slightly to intensely annoyed through most of the book.

There were a few good essays, though, and it's a quick read. So I rate it somewhere between 2 and 2.5 stars.

Hayley says

When they say "rad" they really do mean "radical" -- the majority of the book has an anarchist leaning. This isn't a bad thing in and of itself, but readers who are a bit less geared specifically towards that social circle might not find it as engaging as those within that sphere. So if you're looking for an offbeat guide, this in and of itself may not be the best choice. *However*, as a book to include in a variety of books on feminist fatherhood, I would say it'd be a good addition to a collection.

The book is comprised of many very short (2-4 page long) zine essays. It's definitely a fast read.

A few quotes:

"When Mayor Gavin Newsom -- for whom I did not vote -- legalized same-sex marriage in San Francisco in 2004, I was entirely a bystander. Yet I was still moved by the spectacle of beaming gay and lesbian couples lining up in front of the San Francisco Hall, sometimes hemmed in on all sides by unpleasant people with ugly signs. Walking by City Hall one afternoon on my way to the library, I saw two slim women dressed in white, sitting on the grass, their hands folded on each other's laps, their foreheads touching. I assumed that they had just been married. For the rest of the day I felt strangely peaceful, perhaps even slightly stoned. My son was born -- after a sixty-minute labor! -- in July 2004. And in the months that followed, my resistance to marriage started to melt away. Yes, both Olli and I thought marriage would be convenient, now that we were parents. But in my eyes at least, it was also true that San Francisco's season of same-sex marriage weddings had raised the value of marriage. I remembered that couple in white, sitting in the grass; perhaps I hoped marriage would give me the peace it seemed to give them." -- Jeremy Adam Smith

"...for some reason, there seems to be a sort of denigration of parenthood. When you tell some people that you're gonna have a kid, they say things along the lines of, 'See you in eighteen years' or 'Well, you won't be sleeping anytime soon.' My favorite one is, 'Things are really gonna change.' Well, of course they're going to fucking change! That's the whole point! You don't want life to be a static experience. Change is the idea. That's why we're here." -- Ian MacKaye

"Whether it's TV or whether it's the media, there's just a whole shitload of things out there that feels beyond our control. And so, this overwhelming feeling sets up an individualistic mode of radical parenting, which believes that, 'I'm going to shield my kid from television' and 'We're going to go nowhere near a McDonald's.' And of course that's important, but it is a very neoliberal attitude in the sense of thinking that, 'It's just me and my family unit against The Man all by ourselves.' That's very individualistic. We need movements. That's why I'm excited to be part of the food justice movement where we're saying what we want to do is stop the capitalist advertising of food to kids; that's a campaign. It's not just an individual action -- though of course individual action matters -- but getting involved in campaigns means building a community of parents who also don't want their kids poisoned by the fast-food industry or poisoned by certain sexist or racist representations." -- Raj Patel

A few eyebrow-raising bits:

I did find it a little problematic that at one point, one of the writers actively encourages people to use public assistance and to work part-time in order to stay home with children. I found the idea that one should use assistance to live one's chosen lifestyle easily problematic, as it infringes on benefits that are meant for the

needy, not the unwilling. However, this is also a problem with our larger system: one cannot often have a supported family AND someone staying home. So I'm torn. I will simply say that I found it eyebrow-raising.

Throughout the stories, the fathers allude to their sons getting into trouble with the law and bad grades (1.3 GPA) etc. On one hand, yes, we have a legal system that preys on minority youths. On the other hand, it's difficult to read about a kid graduating with a 1.3 GPA and not wonder about the parenting styles and their effectiveness for future adult success. (Aside: read that while also flipping through Amy Chua's "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" = hilarious juxtaposition)

Dominic says

Reading this book made me realize that raising my daughter or son is going to be the ultimate test of my feminism, that fatherhood can be (and is) a political act. While I know I can't control who my children will grow up to be (nor how "just" the world can be), I *can* show them how important it is that they fight for a better world and a better self.

As a man and a feminist, I've come to understand my role in making that better world--and that it is found in my day-to-day interactions with young people--whether they are my students, neighborhood children, my niece, or my future kids. Since our culture is in dire need of new myths of gender that will counteract the ones that tell little girls they need to "look pretty" to be good or that tell little boys that being aggressive is just "being a man," *Rad Dad* and the similar books that will soon follow are essential. Books like this one redesign who a father is and dispels the notion that fathers should be hands-off breadwinners or diaper-fumbling dopes.

This book is equally about dispelling what feminism is, at a time when so many young adults continue to view feminism as some undesirable extreme. But no, being a feminist (and a man, and a father) is about believing in the possibilities of a more equitable, more just, more free world. I think I have found a new community to join. Viva la *Rad Dad*!

Neilina Corbeau says

This is probably the best book on parenting that I've yet to read. It was in no way a "how to" guide. It was a sharing of stories. Stories that I can more closely relate to than those commonly found in the bulk of parenting literature out there. Radical perspectives, often overlapping with my own. It pulled at my heartstrings.

Jennifer Devlin says

I would write all of the wonderful things I have to say about this book here, but there is not enough space. To the authors and editors of this book: Thank you so much, please keep writing, storytelling, discussing, and sharing. We need more books like this.

Joe says

2.5 Stars (with scattered 4 star moments)

I love the subject matter this book tries to confront. As my wife and I are beginning to think about starting a family, I want to hear from like-minded souls who have been through this experience. However, I'd much rather read a more in-depth, fully-formed book -- rather than this collection of blog entries.

There's a fair amount of "I was an established radical queer tranny vegan anarchist commie before I ever started to have kids..." -- which can be a bit much at times. But, generally, I really appreciated each individual sharing their perspective/story/idea/thought.

X says

Rad Dad (2011) is an important anthology made up of "the best" contributions from the two editors' projects, Tomas Moniz's Rad Dad Zine and Jeremy Smith's Daddy Dialectic blog. I mostly liked the contributions, although there were still some issues with sexism and patriarchy in some of the pieces, even though the writers attempted to consciously challenge these same issues. In other words, some of the pieces seemed overtly self-righteous, especially because they did not engage with issues like class, gender, etc and how that impacts parenting and fathering choices, or more likely, how it **restricts** these choices. Yet, I learned a lot, especially from the pieces written by a sperm donor, a transgender father, queer/gay fathers, and Black fathers, and others, and especially the essay in which a father (who is a cis het man married to a cis het woman) acknowledged that having a child meant that his wife has less power and his struggle with dismantling that power dynamic--everything from an uneven division of household labor to her career that was negatively affected. There is such a lack of resources for radical fathering that I would still recommend this anthology to others, but I do see it as a beginning, and that fathers can and should do better, both through their writing like this AND taking direct political action in their communities and on the streets and beyond.

jess says

I read a couple of the essays and returned it to the library. There was some good stuff but I couldn't get over my hatred for anthologized work.

Max says

I enjoyed this book, but was somewhat frustrated throughout. Recently becoming a father myself and having always wanted to be, I was interested to read other people's account of fatherhood and learn from others experiences. Some of the notions in the book I found difficult to grasp as I live in New Zealand which seems to have a very different culture to America. I could not associate with the level of racism that some people felt subjected to and therefore found it difficult to connect with the stories of ethnic identity as in some stories. I thought (maybe naively) that this pushing of ethnic identity at every level (especially not purchasing white dolls for your child) enforces social segregation and thus seems to be building more barriers rather than breaking them down.

What I find contradictory throughout is how many of the stories relate to a parents fear of the manipulation of their child by market forces and advertising. Yet the parents own hardline approach to solve this issue is to control just what their child has and what they can be interested in. Surely this is just mimicking the the very attitudes of society which they themselves are repulsed and angered by and that they wish their child not to be influenced by.

Surely a more reasonable approach is to show your child everything and let them pick what they wish, give them the warning of certain avenues, and let them make their own decisions, mistakes and successes. If you are an anarchist, who fights for what you believe is right, and you believe that this fighting spirit is a part of who you are and is in your blood then it will be in theirs too. And if you keep giving your child rules, it will be you that they fight against, not the oppressive world of vociferous consumerism.

An eye opening, yet frustrating read.

Tomas Moniz says

Um, probably the best book i ever read...

Jenny says

I bought this as a gift for a rad dad friend and I had to read it before I gave it to him. This book is edited by the founder of Rad Dad zine, Tomas Moniz, and most of the dads who contributed to the book are or were activists in one way or another. They write about the difficulty in raising children according to their non-sexist, non-racist, non-homophobic, non-violent, and non-consumerist ideals. Much of my exposure to parenting young children is through my extended family and it's refreshing to read about a kind of parenting that aligns more with my own values.

Some ideas that I will carry with me when I raise kids are: raising children is a political act, while you can raise your children using your ideals as models your children are still individuals and will often make choices you do not agree with like sticking to conventional gender binaries or not being an anarchist, it's okay if you don't agree with their choices because the really important stuff, like their values, are what matter most and if you are a halfway decent parent your children aren't going to grow up to be heartless jerks.

My favorite essay was "A Day at the Park" in which a black father talks about taking his multiracial daughter to the park and the hurt that occurs when everyone assumes his daughter is his niece. He thinks it's because A) black fathers are supposed to be absent from their children's lives and B) fathers are supposed to be at jobs during the day to provide for their families. That essay really hits at the heart of the sexism, racism, and classicism within our culture. Most of the essays are written by Tomas and while I did like his essays I wish more voices could have been included. A few of the essays felt a little self-congratulatory and I think I like the zine more but I did learn it is possible to have a rad kid even if that kid likes Disney movies and Justin Bieber.

Marc Lucke says

I welcome any attempt to discuss fatherhood in the context of politically-engaged, progressive, activist

households. The men who contributed to this book run the gamut in their activism and they have all tried, to one degree or another, to incorporate their politics into their parenting. They have also struggled with the demands that parenthood places upon their time and the extent to which being responsible for another life affects not only one's ability to be politically engaged and active, but also one's perspective on events, issues and actions.

I think this is a useful book and should sit on the shelf of anyone who struggles to parent politically. That said...

That said, this book is ultimately -- as others have said in their reviews -- a collection of blog posts, so many of the pieces feel shallow and seem to end just as (or before) they get to the good stuff. Almost every contribution skirts serious analysis and theoretical engagement in favour of anecdotal "gee this is a weird experience" musings. This might be a good thing, as the target audience for this book doesn't have a lot of time on their hands anyway.

More seriously, there is a definite bias towards a particular kind of experience of fatherhood present in this book: we're given the stories of white, heterosexual, young, abled men with bucketloads of unexamined privilege. This gets bloody tiresome after a while and undermines the book's usefulness considerably. There are a few authors who buck this trend but on the whole it remains a maintains a cloistered, insular, self-congratulatory tone.

On the whole, I'm glad it's out there and I'd recommend it to anyone with an interest in progressive/radical parenting and slightly different ways of being a dad. Just don't get your hopes too high.

Rus Funk says

Really disappointed. While there were some moments in this books that were fabuous, overall it was weak and shallow. Not much of any analysis going on here. Although it had real potential, and many of the short pieces could have easily been developed into something really meaningful.

T.R. says

I finished this a few month's back but I do remember clearly that Tomas' articles are the freshest of this collection. His honest struggles and humor offer some clear wisdom is trying to raise children against the grain.
