But the book's style can get a bit cheesy and I did get put off by her own accounts of mothering. Early on, she describes getting up in the night and standing by the cot 'Tense on the balls of my feet. Happy. Exhausted' (p. 4), and soon after she tells us how she spends half hours at a time gossiping with her mum about the girls and their antics. I don't mind these intimate details for being unashamed, I mind them for being unrepresentative. I didn't find it jolly or rewarding being woken at night, and I don't know any mothers who do. Lucky her for the supportive mother, they aren't givens either. But I notice that Benn does an odd thing of distancing herself from the grim side of mothering by describing herself as a 'professional'; she has a 'professional' interest in housework, she talks about her 'professional' understanding of feminism, and I wonder why? The personal is OK as long as it doesn't taint you? The essential Melissa Benn is actually a writer who happens to have kids? And then there's a curious chapter where she introduces a fictionalized true life story, a composite of many women she's met. Why then is this Everywoman someone who also works in the media and has two small girls. All a bit un-self-reflecting. Or too self-reflecting in fact.

The biggest disappointment, though, is not Benn's fault. Her point that the last 30 years has taught us that the so-called natural division of labour is really a range of skills that can be 'redistributed by those who have a will to do it' (p. 243) should make us happy, but the fact is that 'the boredom, chaos, invisibility and sheer lack of value associated with being with young children over long periods of time is too hard for most men to overcome' (p. 244). Why foresee any will to change the status quo then? In fact, her analysis begs a crucial question. When she identifies as obstacles to a meaningful committed fatherhood men's sense of primary allegiance to the workplace (or other activities outside the home), is she identifying some utterly basic instinct? Some hunter gatherer drive? Or is it just socially sanctioned selfishness? (I think we could do with a bit of angry polemic myself.)

Jo Evans

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Ideologies of breast cancer: feminist perspectives

Laura K. Potts (Ed.); Macmillan Press, London, 2000, ISBN: 0-333-75419-0 Hbk, 0-333-75420-4 Pbk

Breast cancer occupies an ambivalent position in the popular imagination. It has an extraordinarily high profile relative to other cancers, and is profoundly newsworthy, although often in highly sexualized ways, as explored by Cherise Saywell, Lesley Henderson and Liza Beattie. It is also the focus of a broad range of popular participation fund-raising and awareness-raising events, as is discussed in

Maren Klawiter's excellent chapter on different cultures of action in the Bay Area in relation to breast cancer. However, particularly with the contemporary fascination with all things genetic, and a more endemic biomedical focus on cure over prevention, it is also the case that, as both Klawiter's chapter and that by Jennifer Fishman illustrate, crucial issues such as the relationship between exposure to toxic substances and breast cancer are significantly understated. 'Race' and class are central dimensions to this toxic exposure, and Fishman offers the shocking fact that women with breast cancer in Bayview Hunters Point – a district in San Francisco with a predominantly non-white population experiencing high levels of poverty – are 87% more likely to die of the disease than those living elsewhere in the city (p. 187).

The hypervisibility of breast cancer in some contexts and its invisibility in others comes across strongly in this edited collection – a contradiction that is brought out by the focus of the book on ideologies (and their relationship to the 'real'). Through this focus, the collection as a whole brings to the surface a number of tiresomely familiar narratives about women and their bodies: the marginalization of women's own understandings of their bodily experiences in relation to biomedical interpretations; the construction of health, risk management and prevention as the responsibility of individual women; the close disciplinary surveillance of women's bodies; and the assumed primacy of aesthetic considerations over health concerns for women. In a social and cultural context, which remains enthralled by the new genetic technologies and their future (and over-hyped?) promise of treatment and cure, it is important to keep thinking about these more familiar and intractable stories and the new ways in which they have been taken up. But the collection also highlights the significant woman-driven and feminist activism that is taking place in this area, including the narration of personal experiences of breast cancer; mass walks/runs to raise money and awareness; and targeted local activism against polluting industries. The collection itself can be seen as an extension of this activism through its critical focus on the relationship between the ideological construction of breast cancer and the complex lived reality within which that process of meaning construction both takes place and is resisted.

If I have one criticism of the book, it was that the structuring of the chapters into two categories – 'meanings of breast cancer' and 'discourses of risk and breast cancer' – felt slightly contrived, and obscured the substantial overlaps between the two sections to some extent. But this is a small criticism of what is a thought-provoking and rich edited collection.

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