

Reading the Memoirs of American Caregiving Daughters: A Care-Focused Feminist Approach

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Abstract : This paper will explore how gender and care discourse are intersected, reformulated and contested in American daughters' caregiving memoirs. In particular, it will attempt to show how gender structure has worked to regulate a daughter's response to her mother's illness. In other words, how do certain cultural notions and class difference affect the ways in which the daughter enacts her caregiving response to her mother's illness? What is the interrelation of female subjectivity and care practice? To understand care and gender politics in the memoirs, this paper will engage in close readings of five texts: Sandra Bullock Smith's *Trading Places: Becoming My Mother's Mother: A Daughter's Memoir* (2015), Martha Stettinius's *Inside the Dementia Epidemic: A Daughter's Memoir* (2012), Patricia Thompson Collamer's *Grace on the Ledge: a Caregiver's Memoir*, Judith Henry's *The Dutiful Daughter's Guide to Caregiving: A Practical Memoir* (2015), and *The Daughter's Dilemma: A Survival Guide to Caring for an Aging, Abusive Parent* by Emily Wanderer Cohen (2018). By analyzing these texts, this paper will show why adult daughters become the primary caregivers, how gender norms and care practices influence a daughter's thoughts and actions, and how it affects her self-understanding. Taken as a whole, then, the paper will provide an important examination not only of care and gender politics, but also a contribution to the intersecting discourses of illness, death, and mother-daughter relationship.

Keywords : care ethics, daughter-mother relationship, gender politics, memoirs

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