‘BEING THERE’:

Mothering and absence/presence in the field

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ABSTRACT

*Much has been written about families and their influence on relationships and*

*research in fieldwork, yet seldom has the absence of family in the field received*

*analytical attention. The authors of this paper contribute to an emerging ‘anthropology*

*of absence’ in a number of ways: We direct the focus of absence*

*away from our participants to reflect on our own children’s absences in the*

*field; we attend to the absence of individual persons whereas work in this field*

*predominantly focuses on material objects and ethnic groups; we argue that*

*the embodied traces felt in our children’s absence make mother-child relationships*

*unique to other unaccompanied fieldwork experiences; we illustrate*

*the relational and contingent character of absence as absence/presence as we*

*examine the agency of our children’s absence on the process and product of*

*our field research; and we reflect on how our children’s absence/presence in the*

*field alters our subjectivities as mother-researchers.*

*Keywords*: absence; absence/presence; academic mothers; fieldwork; mothering

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