

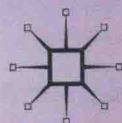
'Sober, trenchant, witty and important.'— Zoe Williams, *The Guardian*

PARENTING CULTURE STUDIES

ELLIE LEE, JENNIE BRISTOW,
CHARLOTTE FAIRCLOTH AND JAN MACVARISH



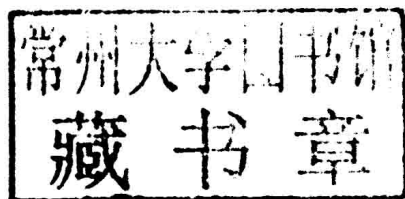
FOREWORD BY
FRANK FUREDI



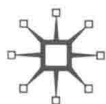
Parenting Culture Studies

Ellie Lee, Jennie Bristow, Charlotte Faircloth and
Jan Macvarish

School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, University of Kent, UK



palgrave
macmillan



© Ellie Lee, Jennie Bristow, Charlotte Faircloth and Jan Macvarish 2014
Foreword © Frank Furedi 2014

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The authors have asserted their rights to be identified as the authors of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978–1–137–30460–5 hardback

ISBN 978–1–137–30463–6 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

I.1	Books about parenting, 1900–2000	5
E3.1	Front cover of the official report, Early Intervention: Smart investment, massive savings (Allen, 2011b)	175

Table

E2.1	The tools of AP (Sears and Sears, 2001, p. 4)	153
------	---	-----

Foreword

Parenting has emerged as one of the most hotly debated issues of the twenty-first century. Western culture attaches such significance to parenting because it is represented as the source of virtually every social problem that afflicts our communities. Poor parenting, or the absence of so-called parenting skills, is held responsible for the cultivation of dysfunctional children who in turn become maladjusted grown-ups. From this fatalistic perspective, the 'parenting deficit' is blamed for children's mental health problems, educational difficulties, anti-social behaviour, and poor coping skills, and the destructive consequences of bad parenting lasts throughout a person's life. According to the wisdom that prevails amongst policymakers and experts, everything from crime and drug addiction to teenage pregnancy and self-harm can be traced back to the way that mothers and fathers brought up their children.

Parenting as such is rarely depicted explicitly as one of the major problems of our times. Indeed, politicians and commentators often take care to state that most parents are doing a fine job of raising their children: before proposing another new policy or initiative that implicates inadequate parenting as the source of many of society's ills. Back in September 2006, the then prime minister, Tony Blair, made a remarkable statement about the necessity for policing parents who were likely to produce children and who had the potential to become a 'menace to society'. His demand to spot potential problem parents before birth was coupled to an argument for intervening in potential problem families before the children were even born. That only a handful of public figures challenged this statement is testimony to the prevalence of the belief in parental determinism.

The belief that the child will be punished for the sins of the parents has its origins in biblical times. Exodus 20:5 warns people that the Lord is a 'jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children'. However, in today's secular world the term 'sin' has been demoralized and transformed into a deficit. Divine intervention is not necessary where children are seen to be punished by the mere act of bad parenting.

The pathologization of parenting should not be construed as merely the secular variant of a very old religious theme. God's warning was addressed to those fathers and mothers who actually committed a sin.

In present times, it is not just a small group of irresponsible mothers and fathers who are seen to constitute a problem but *all* parents. In its pure form, the condemnation of the parent as a problem was first crystallized in the writing of eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's belief that people had to be saved from the detrimental effects of customs and traditions underlay his hostility to the authority of the father and the mother, for 'parents are the agents who transmit false traditions and habits from one generation to the next' (Shklar, 1987, p. 170).

The theme of curbing the influence that mothers and fathers exercise over their children has recurred periodically throughout modern times. However, it is only since the 1970s that parenting has come to be seen as one of the central issues facing policymakers and their experts. The remarkable expansion of public interest in childrearing is underpinned by the assumption that there is a direct causal link between the quality of parenting and social outcomes. This proposition has been particularly welcomed by policymakers, who find intervention in the sphere of parenting far more straightforward than engaging with wider social issues.

Over recent decades, the tendency to link social problems to childrearing practices has led to its elaboration as a causal relationship. The idea of a one-dimensional, causal relationship between parenting and socioeconomic outcomes tends to be conveyed through discrete and specific claims, such as the allegation that a lack of proper nurturing has a significant influence on the development of children's brains.

The transformation of parenting into a self-contained cause of childhood dysfunction has led to its politicization. However, parenting is not simply politicized; it is also transformed into a cultural accomplishment that can be cultivated to produce positive outcomes. So parents supposedly have the power either to damage their child, or to improve their life chances, through the exercise of such everyday practices as how one reads to one's child, or the form of discipline that is used. With so much at stake, it is not surprising that parenting is more and more regarded as a subject that requires the constant attention of policymakers and experts.

As the contributors to this book indicate, parenting is no longer an issue that confines itself to the relationship between mothers and fathers and their children. Parental determinism has its focus not only on the child but also on the society as a whole. Like the economic determinism or the biological determinism of the past, parental determinism is alleged to explain a bewildering variety of behaviours. When leading politicians on both sides of the Atlantic can argue that bad

parenting harms more children than poverty, then it becomes evident that parental determinism has become the mirror image of economic determinism.

The essays in this book provide an innovative approach towards the conceptualization of what is distinctive about contemporary parenting culture. Their arguments suggest that this issue is too important to be monopolized by one academic discipline. This book provides a compelling case for a new orientation towards what I very much hope will become a new field of scholarship.

Frank Furedi
Professor Emeritus
University of Kent

Acknowledgements

This book is the product of research, discussions, and debates that have been organized through the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies (CPCS) over the past six years. During this time hundreds of people have come along to our events, discussed ideas, and shared their own research with us, and we want to thank all those who have taken an interest in what CPCS has been doing. We would like to offer particular thanks to the following, many of whom are Associates of the Centre, whose work and support has been invaluable: Geraldine Brady, Sue Davis, Esther Dermott, Stuart Derbyshire, Ros Edwards, Sarah Evans, Frank Furedi, Val Gillies, Janet Golden, Helene Guldborg, Emma Head, Jennifer Howze, Gary Hughes, Tracey Jensen, Mary-Ann Kanieski, Stephanie Knaak, Rebecca Kukla, Pam Lowe, Nancy McDermott, Sally Millard, Elizabeth Murphy, Heather Piper, Stefan Ramaekers, Helen Reece, Jane Sandeman, Sally Sheldon, Stuart Waiton, Glenda Wall, Zoe Williams, and Joan Wolf. We would also like to thank those who have funded our work in recent years, especially the Economic and Social Research Council, the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness, the Leverhulme Trust, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Faraday Institute, and thanks also to the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent for providing a home for CPCS.

Finally, inevitably our 'other halves' (Amol, Ben, Mark, and Tony) and our own children (Annia, Emma, Reuben, Louis, Paul, and Lauren) have played their part in helping us understand better the problems of today's parenting culture, and we thank them, most of all, for their love.

About the Authors

Ellie Lee is Reader in Social Policy at the University of Kent, and Director of the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies (CPCS). She established CPCS as a Research Centre based at the University of Kent with the other authors of this book in 2010. Her research to date has been about abortion, teenage pregnancy, feeding babies, 'welfare of the child' assessments in infertility clinics, drinking and pregnancy, and neuroscience and family policy. She has published books and papers about this research, and also frequently discusses her views in the print and broadcast media.

Jennie Bristow is a PhD candidate and Allcorn Box Memorial Fund Scholar at the University of Kent. Her research is in the sociology of generations and specifically in the construction of the Baby Boomer as a social problem in Britain. Jennie is the author of *Standing Up to Supernanny* (2009) and the co-author, with Frank Furedi, of *Licensed to Hug* (2008) and *The Social Cost of Litigation* (2012). She is also the Editor of the online journal *Reproductive Review*.

Charlotte Faircloth is a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow in the Centre for Parenting Culture Studies at the University of Kent, where her research explores gender, intimacy and equality. She is author of *Militant Lactivism? Attachment Parenting and Intensive Motherhood in the UK and France* as well as co-editor (with Diane Hoffman and Linda Layne) of *Parenting in Global Perspective: Negotiating ideologies of kinship, self and politics*, both of which were published in 2013.

Jan Macvarish is Research Fellow at the Centre for Health Services Studies at the University of Kent. Her research interests are the culture and politics of family and intimacy, in particular, contemporary singles culture, teenage pregnancy and parenthood, issues in fertility services, and the influence of neuroscience. She is currently working in a study titled, 'Biologising parenting: Neuroscience discourse and English social and public health policy', as part of the Faraday Institute's Uses and Abuses of Biology research programme.

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
<i>Foreword by Frank Furedi</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>About the Authors</i>	xii
Introduction	1
<i>Ellie Lee</i>	
Part I Parenting Culture	
1 Intensive Parenting and the Expansion of Parenting <i>Charlotte Faircloth</i>	25
2 Experts and Parenting Culture <i>Ellie Lee</i>	51
3 The Politics of Parenting <i>Jan Macvarish</i>	76
4 Who Cares for Children? The Problem of Intergenerational Contact <i>Jennie Bristow</i>	102
Part II Essays on Parental Determinism	
Essay 1 Policing Pregnancy: The Pregnant Woman Who Drinks <i>Ellie Lee</i>	129
Essay 2 The Problem of 'Attachment': The 'Detached' Parent <i>Charlotte Faircloth</i>	147
Essay 3 Babies' Brains and Parenting Policy: The Insensitive Mother <i>Jan Macvarish</i>	165
Essay 4 Intensive Fatherhood? The (Un)involved Dad <i>Charlotte Faircloth</i>	184

Essay 5	The Double Bind of Parenting Culture: Helicopter Parents and Cotton Wool Kids <i>Jennie Bristow</i>	200
Conclusion	<i>Ellie Lee</i>	216
<i>Bibliography</i>		223
<i>Index</i>		246

Introduction

Ellie Lee

The origin of this book lies back in the mid-2000s, when Charlotte Faircloth and I became involved in separate research projects about a very necessary, but ostensibly mundane, aspect of being a parent: feeding babies. We both spent time interviewing and talking with mothers, reading and reviewing existing research about this topic from disciplines including sociology, political science, anthropology, philosophy, and history, and carried out desk research about the history of infant feeding policy. As we wrote up and published our work (for example, Faircloth, 2010, 2013; Lee, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011; Lee and Bristow, 2009), we also developed an active dialogue with colleagues doing similar research to our own (Blum, 1999; Knaak, 2005, 2010; Kukla, 2005, 2006, 2008; Murphy, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004; Wall, 2001; Wolf, 2007, 2011) and discussed our research in many non-academic forums (with healthcare providers, advocacy groups, in newspapers, and in TV and radio debates).

These are typical comments sent to us, in response to observations we have made in such public forums:

Let me get it out there – I am a non-breastfeeding mum. I breastfed my daughter for six long weeks. Long for me and long for her. It's simple. Breast milk did not agree with her. But, here I am, yet again, finding myself explaining why I did not breastfeed for the recommended six months. It's like I have to give an excuse, a plausible one at that, as to why I failed my daughter. And failure it is considered. (Emily)

I am a mother of a seven-month-old and I have chosen to formula feed. I have been amazed at the amount of pressure placed on women to breastfeed. In the early days following my daughter's birth, I felt

under a huge amount of pressure to attempt breastfeeding at a time when I was too tired and emotionally vulnerable to protest. (Sabina)

The conclusions we drew from this research experience inform the central propositions of this book. These can be summarized as follows:

- We live at a time when mothers will inevitably be informed, more or less explicitly, that they are mistaken if they think that the work of raising a child involves making straightforward decisions. So Emily, for example, soon discovered that what she thought was a 'simple' decision was certainly not viewed that way by others.
- Mothers will encounter the idea that they need to understand that what they do is far more complicated and much more important than they might imagine. Furthermore, they will receive the message that a great deal is at stake that they may not recognize when they make what seem to them to be practical, simple decisions.
- In sum, the message to mothers (and also fathers) is that the health, welfare, and success (or lack of it) of their children can be directly attributed to the decisions they make about matters like feeding their children; 'parenting', parents are told, is both the hardest and most important job in the world. Tomorrow depends on it.

Parental action, in most areas of everyday life, is now considered to have a determining impact on a child's future happiness, healthiness, and success. It is because of this that Sabina found there was manifest 'pressure to breastfeed'; others communicated to her there was a great deal at stake if she opted against breastfeeding and so she should do all she could to feed her baby from the breast. This was also why Emily found herself needing to 'account' repeatedly for what she ended up doing, when she found breastfeeding did not work out. Both these women indicate they experienced not breastfeeding as a measure of failure; indeed Emily states she had to 'give an excuse ... as to why I *failed my daughter*'. The relation between success, failure, and how a baby is fed is, this suggests, deemed to be a direct one, and so Emily's decision about this is not viewed by others as a practical or pragmatic matter. Rather, it is deemed powerfully and casually linked to the future well-being of her child.

As historical studies indicate, how babies are fed has long been construed as a matter of public debate and public interest (Kukla, 2005; Murphy, 2003). Yet as the accounts from Sabina and Emily show, public surveillance and monitoring of maternal decisions has certainly not receded, regardless of drastic declines in infant mortality and morbidity

associated with very early childhood in the past. This monitoring is stronger than ever, and as we indicate in other parts of this book, has become connected to an ever-widening set of claims about children's 'success' or 'failure'. For example, the biological core of a person – their brain – has come to be viewed as profoundly and directly impacted by the way that person was fed as a baby (O'Connor and Joffe, 2013).

Research also shows how even ostensibly 'doing the right thing' does not offer protection from monitoring and surveillance. The accounts above bring to light something of the way the mantra that characterizes official views – that 'breast is best' – works itself out. However *breast-feeding* (especially if a mother decides to carry on giving her baby milk this way for a lengthy time) can *also* be viewed as a matter of concern for others (Faircloth, 2013). Far from being an 'expert-free cultural space', this way of feeding a baby is medicalized and professionalized (Avishai, 2011, p. 27). Indeed a whole new professional sector, that of the 'lactation specialist', has emerged over the past 40 years, with its own publications, 'academic' journals, and claims to be heard by both policymakers and parents, on the grounds that there is such a thing as breastfeeding expertise.

This book has four authors, each of whom has researched different, but related, aspects of parenting culture over the past few years. Our aim in writing the book is to explain why the everyday and routine matters of being a parent, typified by the example of feeding babies, have become the 'big issues' they now appear to be. Centrally, we highlight the main development in parenting culture, which is the growth and influence of what Furedi (2002/2008a) has termed 'parental determinism', a form of deterministic thinking that construes the everyday activities of parents as directly and causally associated with 'failing' or harming children, and so the wider society. The project of Parenting Culture Studies¹ is grounded in an attempt to understand better the roots and trajectory of parental determinism, and overall, this project is informed by two central propositions.

First, in common with the tradition of Family Studies (Ribbens-McCarthy and Edwards, 2011), a genuinely interdisciplinary approach is of most value, starting less with discipline-based concerns than with an interest in bringing together insights from any scholarship that can help shed light on the development and contours of this form of determinism. As such, Parenting Culture Studies seeks to draw upon scholarship that is attentive to the need to try and answer the question of how and why the task that should properly be shared by *all* adults – that of shaping and developing the next generation – has come to be thought of and

fetishized as 'parenting'. While the approach taken by this book's authors is primarily sociological, we have pursued the development of Parenting Culture Studies by engaging with and debating academics from other disciplines, such as the philosophy of education, anthropology, psychology, law, and history, and from many countries other than England. We hope that is reflected in what you read here.

Second, a key challenge is to develop the best understanding we can of the relationship between continuity and change. The proposition that the sociocultural context in which parents raise their children has changed in recent years seems, to us, to be strongly supported by the evidence. For example, as we discuss below, a distinct and specific terminology is now used to discuss (and make problematic) what parents do, and this is most clear in the way that raising children is now called 'parenting'. The verb 'to parent' is itself relatively new, and Figure I.1 below shows how interest in this new practice of 'parenting' has escalated in recent decades.

A useful starting point is to ask questions about the new language for describing the task of raising children and explore what appears to be new. However, as Frank Furedi suggests in his Foreword, and the chapters that follow make clear, important continuities with the past also emerge. For example, for many centuries there have been 'child experts' or self-proclaimed 'authorities' who set out their views on the mistakes they think parents make. The relation between past and present is thus posed as a key question for the study of parenting culture, leading to the matter of the future, that is, how might our parenting culture develop and change for the better? How might the concept of parental determinism best be interrogated and challenged? We return to these questions at the end of the book.

Here, we make a few further preliminary comments about our general approach. Two written works in particular have inspired our efforts to develop the study of parenting culture; these are Sharon Hays' 1996 work, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* and Frank Furedi's *Paranoid Parenting*. (This was published first in 2001. A revised edition with new introduction appeared in 2008, and an American version was published in 2002. We make it clear in the text to which of these versions we refer.) Both Hays' and Furedi's texts stand as influential works, each having been cited hundreds of times. The terms developed in these books to capture contemporary experience – 'intensive motherhood' in the former and 'paranoid parenting' in the latter – have become reference points within and beyond the world of scholarship. This book, and the wider project of Parenting Culture Studies, aims to take forward

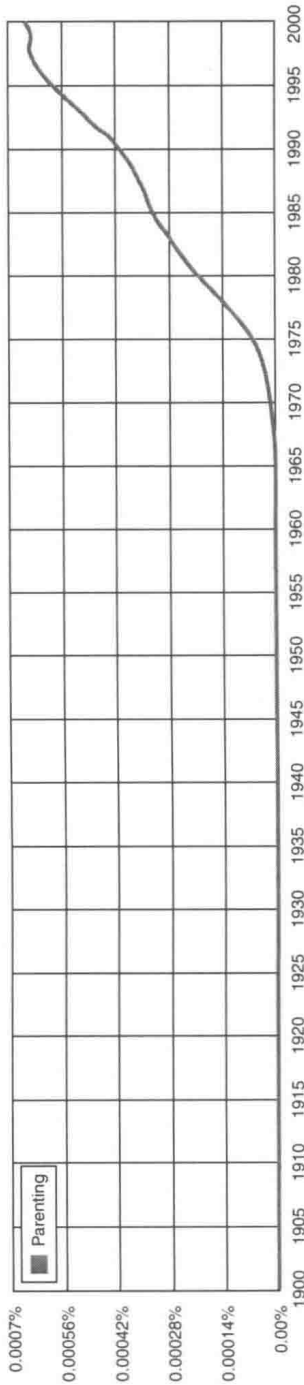


Figure I.1 Books about parenting, 1900–2000
 Note: Graph generated by Google Books Ngram viewer.

an ongoing conversation about these two terms and explore what they capture about the emphasis now placed on 'parenting'.

There are three related ideas that, in the view of the authors of this book, emerge from *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* and *Paranoid Parenting* as especially important, and all the chapters that follow engage with them in different ways. One is the **historical specificity** of contemporary parenting culture; 'intensive motherhood' or 'paranoid parenting' are contemporary phenomena. While their history can be traced, and their roots and antecedents identified, they constitute a novel cultural development. The second is the usefulness of the concept **risk consciousness** for understanding the development of parental determinism. The third idea is the emphasis that Hays and Furedi place on viewing 'parenting' (in its 'intensive' or 'paranoid' form) as **socially constructed**. Later chapters further engage and explore these ideas: here, we offer some preliminary comments to highlight the core themes of the book.

'Parenting': what's new?

It will become rapidly apparent to those who start to research the way that any routine aspect of bringing up children is now talked about that a particular language is used to describe these activities. Central to this language is the term 'parenting'. If one looks, for example, at the question of how to discipline children, it will become clear this is rarely discussed as a community task or the responsibility of adult society as a whole. Rather, discipline is discussed as a 'parenting strategy', focused primarily on changing parental behaviour so as to discourage spanking or shouting at children, which is often expressed in the advocacy of 'positive parenting' (Daly, 2013; Reece, 2013). There are 'parenting manuals', 'parenting guides', 'parenting classes', and 'parenting education' that all purport to be able to improve matters in this area of the everyday life of parents (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). The same is true for every aspect of raising a child. Feeding children, talking to them, sleeping with (or separate from) them, and even playing with children have become areas of action subsumed under the overall umbrella term 'parenting', and there is 'parenting advice' relating to all of them.

A central source of scholarship for Parenting Cultures Studies is that which has made efforts to understand the development of this terminology and its usage and meaning. In the first instance *Paranoid Parenting* provides us with this account:

Child-rearing is not the same as parenting. In most human societies there is no distinct activity that today we associate with the term