

Social Development

Psychological Growth and the Parent-Child Relationship



Eleanor E. Maccoby

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Stanford University



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To Mac, Jan, Sarah, and Mark

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Preface

MANY teachers of developmental psychology courses have been frustrated by the lack of suitable reading materials in social and personality development. Good materials are available on the development of language and cognition. But when it comes to such major topics as attachment, aggression, sex typing, moral development, and parent-child interaction, there is a gap. The handbook chapters are too technical, too long, and often dull. The treatment in the introductory texts is usually not in sufficient depth. In many writings, too, the effort to do justice to different points of view results in an "on the one hand, on the other hand" treatment that leaves the beginning reader confused and unable to form conclusions. What is needed is a thoughtful presentation of the important questions and the research designed to answer them—an account that does not get bogged down in methodological detail but that achieves readability without sacrifice of rigor. It ought to be possible, too, to present differences in viewpoints and contradictory findings without obscuring the substantial agreement that exists and the many valid conclusions that can be drawn from the existing evidence.

Filling the gap is a tall order, but this book makes the attempt. I have tried to minimize jargon and capture some of the vividness that is inherent in children's actions, thoughts, and feelings, while at the same time taking seriously the complexity of the processes that are described. The book is intended to be used as a core text in courses in social development, socialization, and family interaction. It can also be used in general child psychology courses, either as a supplement or jointly with a book on cognitive development. Instructors in education, home economics, human development, human services, family studies, and parent education may also find the book relevant to their students' interests. I hope that the book will also find readers among those most deeply involved with young children—namely, parents.

A central theme of this book is socialization—the process whereby children acquire the habits, values, goals, and knowledge that will enable them to function satisfactorily when they become adult members of society. More specifically, the book deals with the family's contribution to socialization. No one doubts that parents influence their children. Finding out what these influences are should be a simple matter. But when one attempts to discover whether some precise thing a parent does makes a child act in a certain way, the apparent simplicity melts away. Effects are sometimes delayed, sometimes disguised. Dif-

ferent children react in different ways to parental treatments that, on the surface, seem the same. The same child will react differently on one day than on another. Direct effects are sometimes accompanied by subtle and unexpected side effects. Most important, powerful growth forces within children make them more open to certain kinds of parental influences during some periods of childhood than during others. And to complicate matters further, the influence flows in two directions—children also influence their parents.

There have been many studies of the methods parents use to bring up their children and the relationship of these methods to the way the children behave and the personalities they develop. Much is known, and the available information is summarized and reported here. But the conceptualization of much of this research is not entirely satisfactory. Much of it has been done from the standpoint of social learning theory, which emphasizes the impact on children of other people's positive and negative reactions to their behavior and which also stresses the importance of the kinds of models adults provide for children to imitate. In my view, this concept of socialization is not wrong, but it is incomplete. It leaves out the developmental forces that determine how children will react to the socialization experiences they have. When I have tried to make this point to colleagues, the reaction has often been a blank stare or polite inattention. From such experiences I have come to realize that many people think of developmental change simply as an outcome of socialization experiences. It is by no means easy to convey the idea that development has dynamics of its own that intersect with the inputs from the environment to determine a child's response. One of my primary objectives in this book is to give substance to this interactive point of view.

The book is organized topically. Separate chapters deal with attachment, aggression, impulsiveness, sex typing, self-concepts, and moral development. The chapters have a rough chronological order. Attachment is treated first because it deals with the infant's initial social relationships and because it has been claimed that the attachments of infancy lay the groundwork for later interpersonal relationships. Aggression begins to be an issue in the third and fourth years, and problems of self-definition become paramount somewhat later. The chronological order should not be taken too seriously. Obviously, children's affectional relationships with their parents continue to be important after the peak period of clinging and proximity seeking has passed. In the same way, each behavioral domain has a time course that overlaps the others. As each domain is explored, we first consider the developmental pattern typical of most children. This information then serves as background for discussions of the parents' contribution to developmental change. It will be seen that under some circumstances parents can do little more than facilitate or impede developmental changes that inevitably occur. In other respects parental influence is deeper, impelling a child toward one developmental path

rather than another. In most families, whatever the style of child rearing the parents adopt, there is a gradual transfer of the management and guidance processes from parent to child. We will consider the fact that parents manage this transfer in different ways and inquire whether this makes a difference in children's willingness to accept responsibility for their own behavior.

The title *Social Development* deserves some comment. The word *personality* might have been included, since the book is concerned with stable individual differences in the way children relate to other people and how such individuality comes about. The title cannot be *Child Development*, however, since the book does not attempt to encompass the large fund of theory and research about children's intellectual development, except in terms of the impact this development has on children's relationships with other people. Nevertheless, the close reciprocal link between social and cognitive development is repeatedly stressed. Clearly, children's ability to interact effectively with others depends on their understanding and interpretation of other people's knowledge, feelings, goals, and probable reactions. *Social cognition*, then, is a central theme.

Because the book focuses on development within the context of the family, the emphasis is on early and middle childhood rather than on later periods of the life span. Of course, socialization continues after children leave the family circle. And as the child grows older, forces outside the family, such as friends and school teachers, have a greater and greater influence. However, summarizing and analyzing what is known about the role of the family in children's social development is a sufficient task for a single book.

Although the words *mother*, *father*, and *parents* are used throughout, the discussion is meant to apply to all parent figures rearing children in nuclear families. At many points the need for information about a wider range of family types and a greater variety of cultural settings will be evident. To date, however, most studies have looked at the behavior of middle-class parents and children in Western industrialized societies. Wherever possible, reference is made to wider cross-cultural work, but the bias in available information cannot easily be overcome. It is not known how fully the conclusions apply to other populations. Much still remains to be learned about the urban poor, children in developing countries, the handicapped, and children whose care is extensively supplemented by day care or hired caretakers.

I would like to acknowledge the help of many people who have given generously of their time and brainstorming skills to help improve the quality of this book. First and foremost, my thanks go to Judith Greissman, editor *extraordinaire*, without whose encouragement, needling, and shameless flattery the book would probably never have been written. I cannot acknowledge sufficiently my intellectual indebtedness to Robert R. Sears and Pauline S. Sears and to John W. M. Whiting and Beatrice B. Whiting. My interest in the socialization pro-

cess and my respect for the importance and difficulty of devising rigorous methods to study it developed through their influence during several years as an apprentice at the Laboratory of Human Development at Harvard. Another intellectual debt is to Lawrence Kohlberg. Over the years, I have found his writings to be singularly provocative; they have demanded considerable accommodation and change in my earlier views. Repeated discussion sessions with several graduate students—Megan R. Gunnar, Catherine Lewis, John A. Martin, John U. Zussman, Charlotte J. Patterson, and Janet DiPietro—helped to form some of the ideas that have guided the structure of this book. Comments on the first draft of the manuscript by the publisher's two primary reviewers, Jerome Kagan and W. Andrew Collins, were enormously helpful, as were those by Marian Radke-Yarrow and Tom Lickona, who agreed to do somewhat more limited reviews. Other colleagues have suggested source materials, reviewed early drafts of individual chapters, or responded to appeals for discussion of issues, and their helpful comments are gratefully acknowledged: S. Shirley Feldman, John H. Flavell, Albert H. Hastorf, E. Mavis Hetherington, Carol Nagy Jacklin, Mark R. Lepper, Zella Luria, Walter Mischel, Jerry Patterson, and Robert Sears. Membership in two interdisciplinary discussion groups at Stanford, one at the Boys Town Center for Youth Development and the other at the Center for Research on Women, has sharpened my awareness that the psychological perspective on socialization is only one of several possible perspectives. And although the treatment in this book primarily reflects psychological thinking and research, the viewpoint of other disciplines is not entirely ignored.

During the revision process, many muddy portions of the first draft were greatly clarified by Phyllis Fisher, my manuscript editor. My thanks go to her for her remarkably thoughtful attention to all aspects of the substance and structure of the text. The book has also profited from the skills of Sandra Lifland, copy editor, and Janou Pakter, art editor.

Susanne Marie Taylor, Ruth E. Prehn, and Patricia D. Hallenbeck have contributed more than their expert typing and their good cheer under the pressure of deadlines. All three are parents, and their comments on the substance of the text have kept the parental perspective in the forefront of my thinking.

Finally, my thanks go to my husband, Nathan Maccoby, for many things: for the ongoing intellectual exchange that has spanned four decades; for full participation in the joint enterprises of rearing our own family and managing our household; for his patience with my preoccupation during the preparation of this book and his willingness to discuss its substance at any hour of the day or night; and finally for his strong and consistent support of the two-career family idea at a time when this was uncommon.

Eleanor E. Maccoby

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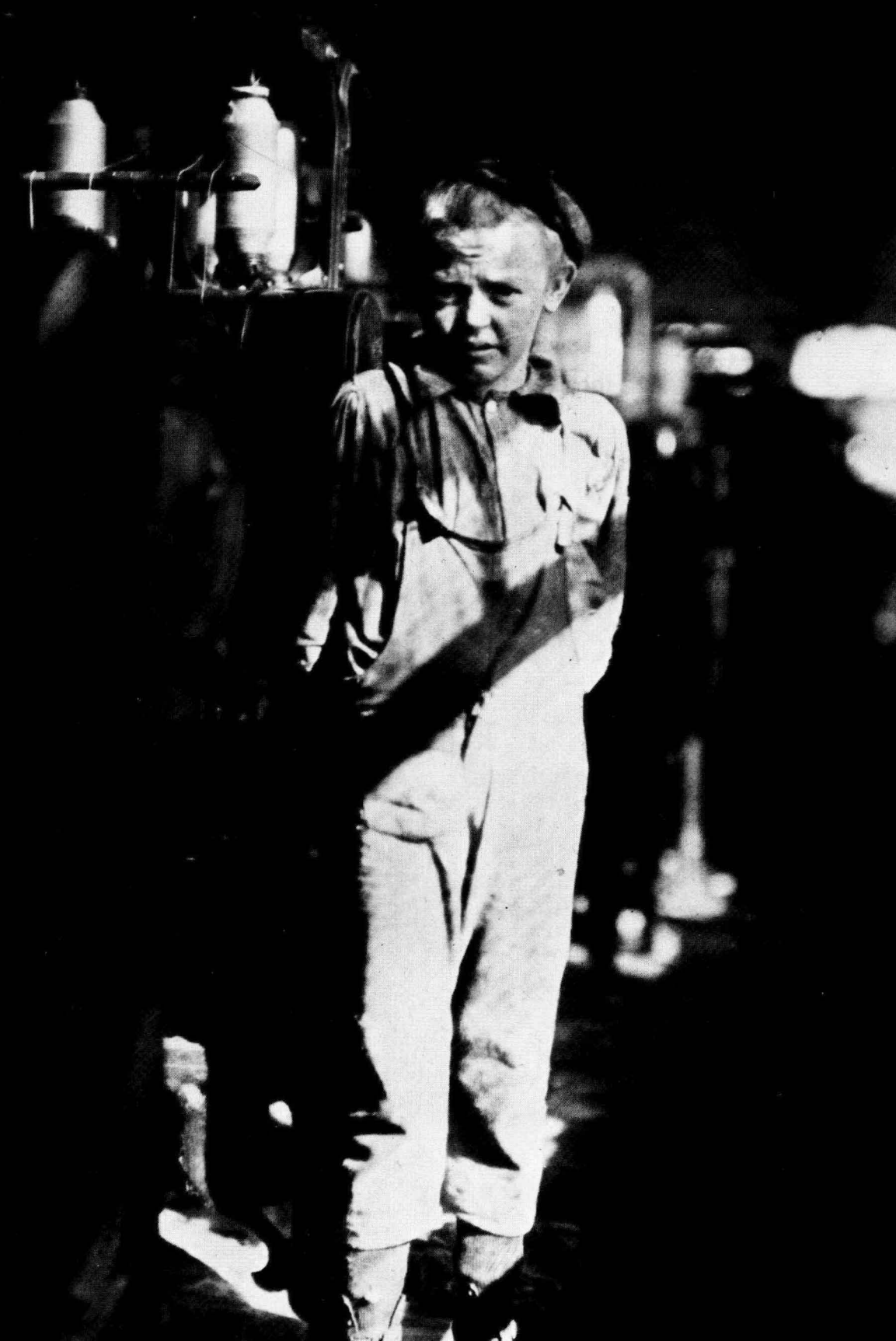
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Introduction and Historical Overview

HOW CAN we understand the development of a child? The fact that children undergo vast changes between infancy and adulthood is clear enough to the most casual observer. *Why* and *how* these changes occur, and the forces that make different children develop in different ways, are not so obvious. In popular wisdom there are different, contradictory viewpoints about the nature of childhood. Sometimes a young child is seen as a bundle of animal appetites in need of control, sometimes as a being whose fate has been preordained. On the other hand, a newborn child may be seen as an organism with few predispositions—a blank slate on which experience will write. The contradictory viewpoints lead to questions about how children should be raised. Should they be guided and carefully taught or left to grow with little pressure and control? The arguments are endless. The points of view have changed again and again over the centuries. The differences of opinion have been reflected in child-rearing practices, philosophic treatises, and, more recently, in the research and theories of child psychologists.

The following pages will survey early attitudes toward children and examine some child-rearing practices that developed from those

The brief historical account given here draws on the following sources: Aries (1965), deMause (1974), Kessen (1965), and Stone (1977).

views. Scholars' ideas about childhood will then be presented, starting with John Locke's and Jean Jacques Rousseau's. We will look at key issues in the development of the modern study of child behavior, focusing on the influence of past theory and research on child study today. The discussion will include the work of the behaviorists and psychoanalysts of the 1920s, the ideas of the learning theorists who dominated American psychology from the 1930s through the 1950s, the insights of the cognitive-developmental revolution of the past decades, and the contributions of other social and behavioral sciences.

THE CHILD AS VICTIM: EARLY IDEAS AND PRACTICES

Bow down his neck while he is young, and beat him on his sides while he is a child, lest he wax stubborn and be disobedient unto thee, and so bring sorrow to thy heart. (passage included in Sir Thomas Bacon's catechism, 1550; quoted in Stone, 1977, p. 176)

Let us begin our story by looking at child-rearing practices that prevailed in England and in the American colonies from about 1500 to about the mid-1700s. The typical child living in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was frequently beaten. At home and at school, errors and infractions—large and small—provoked physical punishment. Schoolmasters felt justified in beating children (even those of college age) on the hands, lips, or buttocks for mistakes, laziness, or lack of deference. Children were supposed to stand when adults entered a room and remain standing silently until given leave to sit or speak. Not uncommonly, children had to kneel before their parents and ask their blessing at least once a day. John Calvin decreed the death penalty for juveniles who were chronically disobedient toward their parents, and laws with like penalties were passed in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Infants were tightly swaddled and hung like bundles on the wall while adults went about their tasks, and the swaddling cloths were not always changed regularly. Infants and young children were frequently given alcohol or opiates to keep them quiet. Some parents considered creeping or crawling to be animal-like. And from the time their children began to stand, some parents made them wear special garments reinforced with iron and whalebone, which forced the children into adult postures. In 1665, a two-year-old child died from such confinement. The physician told her father, "Her iron bodice was her pain, and had hindered the lungs to grow." A surgeon who examined her body said he found "her breast bone pressed very deeply inwardly. . . . two of her ribs were broken, and the straightness of the bodice upon the vitals occasioned this difficulty of breathing and her death" (quoted in Stone, 1977, p. 162). The

use of these devices probably was most frequent among the more affluent middle and upper classes, but the attitudes that led to the practices were probably widespread.

Commonly at this time, children were sent away from home to work as servants when they were as young as six or seven years of age. Many such children were badly treated in their new households. In 1665 Samuel Pepys wrote, "I . . . made my wife, to the disturbance of our house and neighbors, to beat our little girl [a maidservant], and then we shut her down into the cellar, and there she lay all night" (quoted in Stone, 1977, p. 167). Adults were preoccupied with breaking the child's will, and the interesting question is, why? Three factors, specific to the period, probably affected parents' behavior and attitudes: widespread acceptance of Puritan religious values, limited medical knowledge, and lack of real understanding of children and childhood.

The Puritan influence

The Puritan fundamentalist religion of the time played an important role in adults' harsh behavior. Parents self-righteously believed that they were stamping out sin in their children. Consider the disciplinary action taken by an American Puritan father who was teaching his four-year-old son to read. The child could not read something the father expected him to know, and the father thought he detected defiance in the child. He took the child to the cellar, stripped him of his clothes, tied him, and beat him. He described the self-pity and suffering he felt as he carried out his duty.

During this most self-denying and disagreeable work, I made frequent stops, commanding and trying to persuade, silencing excuses, answering objections. I felt all the force of divine authority and express command that I ever felt in all my life. But under the influence of such a degree of angry passion and obstinacy that my son had manifested, no wonder he thought he should beat me out, feeble and tremulous as I was, and knowing as he did that it made me almost sick to whip him. At that time he could neither pity me nor himself (quoted in deMause, 1974, pp. 8-9)

Adults of this period saw their children's defiance, or even accidents that befell them, as punishment for the *parents'* sins. Cotton Mather, the evangelical New England Puritan preacher, said, when his small daughter fell into the fire and burned herself badly, "Alas, for my sins the just God throws my child into the fire" (quoted in deMause, 1974, p. 9). Lloyd deMause interprets these parental attitudes as examples of the psychodynamic defense mechanism of *projection*—that is, unconsciously, unacceptable thoughts and feelings were rejected by the parents and attributed to the children. The sins and

weaknesses that these parents projected onto their children then justified the severe punishments they meted out.

The role of Calvinist beliefs should not be overemphasized, however. While less information is available about the situation in continental Europe at this time, there is reason to believe that the treatment of children was also highly punitive and authoritarian in countries like France, where Puritan ideas did not take root. It seems clear that by present-day standards, many—perhaps most—of the children growing up at that time were victims of parental abuse.

Infant mortality

If people in continental Europe did not share religious beliefs with people in England and in the American colonies, they did have in common a profound lack of knowledge about proper care and feeding of infants and control of epidemic diseases. Their ignorance resulted in a mortality rate among infants and children that was very high indeed. Before about 1750 an estimated 25 percent of children born in London survived to the age of five. The chances of survival were somewhat better in the villages and in the countryside, but even there early death was very common. In cities, survival was compromised by the unwillingness of most mothers to breast-feed their babies. Breast-feeding was considered vulgar, somehow degrading and animal-like, as well as being an interference with a woman's other activities. Safe substitutes for breast milk were not available, so mothers who could pay entrusted their infants to the care of wet nurses. Urban infants were generally sent to wet nurses in the countryside. As late as 1780, the police chief of the city of Paris estimated that 17,000 infants, out of about 21,000 born there each year, were sent to wet nurses in the country. Among those remaining in Paris, only a small minority were nursed by their mothers. Wet nurses were poorly paid and frequently attempted to nurse too many infants (including their own) or concealed the fact that their milk was giving out. Thus the food supply of many infants was inadequate.

Wet-nursing was not confined to the well-to-do. The poor left thousands of unwanted infants at churches and gates of foundling homes, and these children had to be fed. An enormous foundling home in St. Petersburg that took in 5,000 infants a year had 600 wet nurses on duty. After six weeks of nursing, the children were sent to peasant women in the countryside. About a third of these children survived to the age of six—a very good record for the time. In England in the 1700s, the survival rate for foundlings was much lower.

Aside from the problems surrounding the feeding of infants, there were the ever-present dangers of disease, which took a high toll of adults and an even higher one of children. During the late 1600s and