

Raising Children the American Way:
Court-Mandated Parenting Education in Alameda, California

by
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Abstract:

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Based on ethnographic research in Alameda County, California, this dissertation examines the parenting practices and knowledge that are taught in court-mandated parenting classes along with those of parents enrolled in these classes. In California, two of the primary reasons that parents would be mandated to take classes are because of involvement with Child and Family Services (CFS) or in a custody dispute that reaches the courts. I argue that the different forms of knowledge and the practices advanced in the classes, at times consistent with, at times in conflict with those of the parents, reflect the demands and social responsibility of our current political and economic setting in the United States. The demands of a global market-driven economy require citizens who are self-disciplined, prepared to be flexible for the job market, schooled in the ways of a consumer society, and ready to accept responsibility for their own health and well-being ((Katz 2004), (Rose 1999), (Petersen and Lupton 1996)). I also suggest that this ideology rests on the authority of scientific and psychological research that is far from conclusive; it is the authority, rather than the information, that informs the values behind parenting

advice. Further, I argue that the prevalent parenting approach, which is time-intensive and expensive, works to reinforce structural inequalities.

Parents are the focus of much attention as the means to reverse many social problems including poverty, crime, ill health, and illiteracy. If parents could raise children with the appropriate morals, ambitions, and abilities, the thinking goes, children could grow up to be responsible, healthy, and middle class. As Sociologist Val Gillies phrases it, this assumption results in “a stream of initiatives designed to regulate childrearing as part of an almost evangelical drive to equip working-class parents with the skills to raise middle-class children” (Gillies 2005, 838). I have tried to show in this dissertation how parenting education is integral to this overall drive.

I base my writing on two years of ethnographic research on parenting education in Alameda County, California. I attended classes of three different parenting organizations and conducted in-depth interviews with class participants, teachers, and program directors. I also read hundreds of parenting magazines and books, and had countless conversations with other parents, looking for advice for raising my own three-year-old daughter.

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I would first like to thank the many people who participated in my research project. Many parents took time out of their busy lives to discuss their children, their experiences as parents, and often the painful circumstances that brought them to these parenting classes in the first place. Organization directors, teachers, and experts in divorce and child welfare shared their knowledge and passionate commitment to helping parents and their children. The staff at the Oakland CASA program provided me with outstanding training and support, enabling me to act as a court appointed special advocate for a foster child.

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As my research on parenting education took place in and around my hometown, and during my own introduction to motherhood, I drew on the insights of my friends and family in thinking about the consuming and confusing topic of parenting in our contemporary culture. Amy Wilensky has read and edited pretty much every word I have written since freshman year of college and has been my cheerleader every step of the way, even as she challenges my ideas in ways that both infuriate and inspire me. My sister-in-law Kiley has applied her excellent talent as an editor/therapist on a number of crucial and panicked moments. Many other friends and family helped me in myriad and incalculable ways along the way. There are too many to mention, but I would like especially to like to thank Nicole Levine, Benicia Gantner, Anna Yatroussis, Jennifer Silverman, Tobin O'Donnell, Gayle and Dan Turner, Lucas, Gregorio and Tony Perez and Anne Brenaman.

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Raising Children the American Way:

Introduction

. "I am talking about these people who cry when their son is standing there in an orange suit, he said "Where were you when he was 2? Where were you when he was 12? Where were you when he was 18, and how come you didn't know that he had a pistol? And where is the father? ...You can't keep saying that God will find a way. God is tired of you."- Bill Cosby, prominent African-American comedian, in a speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education (Knight 2004).

Parents' Heavy Load

There are high expectations for parents in the 21st Century, United States. There is almost a sense of urgency about doing everything possible to minimize the risks children encounter, and to maximize their potential as future adults. These expectations do not fall simply in the realm of keeping children as healthy as possible through correct nutrition and exercise, but also about the right kind of environment: full of love and encouragement, stimulating toys and books, and free of criticism and punishment. A combination of often referenced and rarely understood psychological and neurological research provides enough scientific authority to make decisions about parenting approaches seem crucial and without much room for lateral interpretation.

We are also in an age when concerns about the instability of families due to shifting gender roles, high rates of divorced and single parents, long working hours and increased mobility, leave us anxious about protecting childhood. In this post-industrial global economy, “good” jobs and the qualifications they demand change quickly; parents struggle to prepare their children for this uncertain future. These elements combine to create a template for parenting -- promoted through magazines, videos, television, parenting classes, and reinforced by schools, health-care providers, and social workers -- that is time-consuming, expensive, and exhausting.

Children are often used as political capital by politicians and activists touting the need to care for and protect our children. But over the last two and a half decades, public programs that either directly or indirectly support children and their families have been scaled back or phased out. Beginning in the 1970s, businesses that had provided stable jobs to workers in the United States began to look elsewhere for cheaper labor. And as their obligations to local workers diminished, political commitment to the welfare state also waned, contributing to the withdrawal of support for welfare, public health care, public education and other social services (Goode and Maskovsky 2001), (Katz 2004). At the same time, demands on parents to pick up the slack have increased. When schools are failing, for example, there is a demand for more parent involvement. If young adults are graduating without sufficient training and preparation for the workforce, parents are encouraged to read more to their children at home and to ensure that they have healthy self-esteem.

In 2004, African-American comedian Bill Cosby caused an uproar when he demanded accountability from parents for the high drop-out and incarceration rates of

young African Americans with the inflammatory comment at the opening of this chapter. Debates about racism and poverty, parenting and responsibility cropped up in newspapers throughout the country in the months following his speech. During a visit to San Francisco several months later, Cosby reiterated his opinion. "It's time for people to just stop seeing themselves so much as victims, so much in poverty, and realize what education does and fight for it like you're fighting for your life -- and you are because that's what our children are" (Knight 2004).

Cosby's words, notable both for their message and the fact that they were uttered by a prominent man about fellow African Americans, highlight a popular view that it is parents, not society or governments or social structures, that determine the success or failure of their children. Cosby's reliance on education as a way out echoes another popular sentiment in this country that education is the cure-all. This view is manifest in the growing trend to solve many social ills by promoting parenting classes.

Over the past twenty years, parenting classes have gained popularity both for parents who seek assistance on their own accord, and for parents who have been determined in need of parenting help by any number of institutions or organizations: Child and Family Services, drug rehab programs, family court, and domestic violence programs, to name a few. In California, two of the primary reasons that parents would be mandated to take classes are because of involvement with Child and Family Services (CFS) or in a custody dispute that reaches the courts.¹ Though CFS and Family Court are completely separate systems, the fact that both have turned increasingly to parenting

¹ In California, divorce and custody cases are handled either out of court or with a mediator. Only the most contentious divorces end up in court. Mediators can also recommend that parents attend parenting classes.

classes is no coincidence. There is an extraordinary faith in education in the United States to solve any number of social problems, most prominently (as Bill Cosby's speech exemplifies) economic inequalities² ((Katz 1986), (Stearns 2003)).

Aims

This dissertation will examine the parenting practices and knowledge that are taught in these classes along with those of parents enrolled in these classes. I argue that the different forms of knowledge and the practices advanced in the classes, at times consistent with, at times in conflict with those of the parents, reflect the demands and social responsibility of our current political and economic setting in the United States. The demands of a global market-driven economy require citizens who are self-disciplined, prepared to be flexible for the job market, schooled in the ways of a consumer society, and ready to accept responsibility for their own health and well-being ((Katz 2004), (Rose 1999), (Petersen and Lupton 1996)). I also suggest that this ideology rests on the authority of scientific and psychological research that is far from conclusive; it is the authority, rather than the information, that informs the values behind parenting advice. Further, I will argue that the prevalent parenting approach, which is time-intensive and expensive, works to reinforce structural inequalities.

I base my writing on two years of ethnographic research on parenting education in Alameda County, California. I attended classes of three different parenting organizations and conducted in-depth interviews with class participants, teachers, and

² Historian Michael Katz has noted that Americans, in contrast to Europeans, firmly believe in the permeability of class lines. Upward mobility, however, is believed to come from an individual's hard work and achievement. Because Americans have been unwilling to make any fundamental changes in the capitalist system that creates class divisions, he argues, education is treated as the panacea for personal advancement, if not the erasure of class differences. This point is discussed further in Chapter 7 (Katz 1986).

program directors. I also read hundreds of parenting magazines and books, and had countless conversations with other parents, looking for advice for raising my own three-year-old daughter.

It is not my intention to suggest that contemporary parenting approaches should be rejected, or to suggest that parenting classes have no value. In fact, the classes I observed, even before I was pregnant, have informed my own choices and practices as a mother. And I eagerly seek out suggestions and scientific or psychological information about any number of what feel like pressing concerns, including sleeping patterns, food choices, potty training, language development, and preschool options. Nor is my intention to denigrate middle-class parents for the choices they make or the values they seek to instill in their own children. We are raising our children within a specific social, political, and economic milieu, and we want our children to succeed (whatever that may mean) within that context. What I hope to do is to illuminate some of the reasons that certain practices or approaches are valued over others at this moment, how they fit into wider historical, socio-cultural, and political settings, and why they may be inaccessible for those within lower socio-economic contexts, even furthering those inequalities.

Why parent education?

Parenting education began to make appearances in the context of social services about twenty years ago. Since that time it has proliferated and is now a prominent feature in service plans to families in many different contexts. Relevant to this study, court proceedings involving children and families increasingly incorporate parent education components: over a seven-year period, the use of court-ordered parent education for divorce cases tripled in the United States (Clement 1999). Parent education is also one of

the top three services provided to parents involved with child protective services.

Furthermore, privately, parents seek out classes at unprecedented levels to answer their own questions about raising their children. The way we learn about parenting and the relationship between parents and their children has changed fundamentally as our society has shifted in several ways: 1) more single families as a result of divorce and separation; 2) families move around more to pursue educational and employment opportunities, so people are not near extended families to help care for children; 3) both mothers and fathers are working more, so there is more of a reliance on external caregivers; and 4) for many reasons, including means of transportation and communication, people have communities that cover a much wider geographic range. Neighbors are no longer a strong support for other parents, and consequently it is easy for parents to become isolated (Smith, et al. 2000). These changes combined with the ever-increasing reliance on expert opinion and the seeming urgency of “getting it right” mean that parents, especially those in the middle class, seek information from magazines, books, and classes. And parents who have not sought out the latest parenting trends and who end up under public scrutiny can be mandated to take classes.

The earliest parenting classes on record were groups called maternal associations, starting in the 1820s and involving groups of mothers who met to discuss the religious and moral upbringing of their children (Croake and Glover 1977). Around the turn of the century, parent education was used to teach poor and immigrant parents to raise their children according to “American” conventions, and to reinforce contemporary ideals of family (Ladd-Taylor 1995), (Mink 1995). As “instinct and tradition in childrearing were replaced by all-important medical and scientific advice,” (Apple 2006b, 2) all parents

required the knowledge of experts to raise their families appropriately and healthfully.

The sales of parenting literature and enrollment in parenting classes expanded throughout the century. The mandated classes that I researched build both on the tradition of seeking proper medical and scientific advice, and teaching “American” conventions, and often these goals are rolled into one. By teaching parents current standards of child rearing, it is hoped that they will raise children who will be able to succeed in school, work, and society according to middle-class standards. Like education, proper parenting is viewed as a means of producing successful children, regardless of their material and economic circumstances. This follows a particular neo-liberal logic: in order to support children who continue to be regarded as important recipients of state support, parents will be taught to care for them properly. In this way it is individual parents, and not society or the state, who are personally responsible for children’s success or failure.

Fieldwork Discoveries and Adjustments

As research projects often do, this dissertation changed shape in a couple of fundamental ways as it progressed. First, I set out to study court-mandated parenting classes for parents involved with Children and Family Services (the Department of Child Protective Services in California). Feminist legal scholar Dorothy Roberts (Roberts 2002) has convincingly argued that the child welfare system in the United States is fundamentally racist and acts to break up families in the name of protecting children. I wanted to examine how these institutional biases operated and understand how the political, social, and economic interests shaped our categories of good and bad parents. When I started taking and observing these classes, however, I found that many of the people in the class had been sent there because they were getting divorced and were

involved in a custody dispute. I changed my study to include these divorcing parents as well and have struggled to fit these two groups – those involved in Children and Family Services (CFS) and parents involved in custody disputes – into a coherent discussion. This is a topic I will take up in detail in Chapter 3.

As I looked into the statistics on the parents who ended up in child custody mediation in Alameda County -- cases with disputed visitation or custody arrangements -- I found that there were racial and economic biases. There is a disproportionate number of African Americans in custody mediation cases, and more than half of the mothers and one quarter of the fathers sent to mediation were unemployed or earned wages below the poverty line (Vickrey 2003). My initial focus on the racial bias of the child welfare system has thus been complicated by the complex ways in which class affects parenting and parental status in contemporary U.S. society.

Mothering, Fathering and Parenting

The second major change that I made was very much related to the first. My research was to be centered on mothers sent to parenting classes, because mothers are more often the ones involved in trying to keep children or get them back from child protective services. But the situation looks very different when considering divorcing parents. Custody laws have changed significantly since the 1970s. While in the past, custody was most often awarded to the mother. Now, in California, parents are encouraged to have joint physical custody over their children.³ So there are as many fathers as mothers in classes for divorcing parents. And when I solicited interviews from class participants, I got responses from as many men as women. Furthermore, these

³ I will discuss this in Chapter 3.

classes are referred to as “parenting” classes, not mothering or fathering, unless classes or books or magazines are consciously addressing either mothers or fathers.

However, parenting is still largely done by mothers. While there is much talk about mothers and fathers taking on equal roles, mothers continue to be the primary caregivers. It should be acknowledged that there are increasing numbers of fathers who are the primary caretakers, but they are still the exception. The 2002 U.S. Census reported just shy of 200,000 stay-at-home fathers, a number that many say is deceptive because of the limited government definition of father (Hartlaub 2006).

Mothers continue to spend four times as much time with their children as fathers. The *New York Times Magazine*, citing the work of Sampson Lee Blair, asserts that the wife-to-husband ratio for child care is almost five to one (Belkin 2008). And this ratio does not change significantly depending on who works outside of the house. In families where the mother stays home to care for the children, she spends 15 hours per week caring for children (defined as attending to the physical needs of the child – dressing, feeding, and cleaning them) and he spends two. In couples where each parent works for a paycheck, the mother’s average time for caretaking is 11 and the father’s is three per week. In the 1950s -- the age of June Cleaver, who we thought we had left far behind -- women similarly spent between 12 to 15 hours per week caring for children (Belkin 2008). A recent Australian survey found the gendered experience of providing care is different in kind and quality, and that women do more of it. Gender is a predictor of a different kind of child care even when both parents are working full time. Fathers enjoy proportionately more play time than mothers, but are rarely alone with the children. While mothers have more interactive time overall, it is a lower percentage of their total

time. Mothers do more physical care: in relative terms they do more of the “work” (Craig 2006).

Linguist Jane Sunderland published a discourse analysis of parenting magazines, noting that a whole host of “parenting” magazines are in circulation, with only three magazines out of 15 in the UK, U.S. and Canada with a title that focuses on the mother. “From a socially naïve perspective, magazines with ‘gender neutral’ titles, particularly those including the word *parent*, might be expected to address and represent mothers and fathers alike” (Sunderland 2006, 504). However, she found that explicit mentions of fathers occurred in only one-third of the childcare advice articles she analyzed, and that fathers, for the most part are represented as part-time child care givers.

Bearing in mind that gender roles have not changed as much as we are often led to believe, I will use the words “parent” or “parenting” in this dissertation. I will attempt to address the ways in which gender differences appear in the classes and to discuss how certain ideals affect men and women differently. But I will continue to use the words ‘parenting’ and ‘parents’ unless I am making a distinction between mothers and fathers. Barbara Katz Rothman cautions against using the term mothering, and I would think parenting, because it reduces the experience of motherhood to an act of production. “The new language sees mothering as an activity, as service, as work – and children as the product produced by the labor of mothering” (Katz Rothman 2000). I acknowledge that “parenting” does indeed imply laboring toward an end product, which is exactly how the experience of parenthood is construed in present day United States. Classes such as those discussed in this dissertation emphasize that parents are have a job to produce well adjusted, prepared, independent and self-reliant children.

State Sponsored Model of Parenting?

The third major change in my research involved the clarity of the link I thought I would be able to draw between the ideals being presented in the classes and the ideals upheld by the state. Legislated norms (thus state norms) for parenting are generally established negatively – determining what is not acceptable. Parenting classes, I reasoned, would offer an ideal site for looking at how a national (or at least state-wide) discourse on child rearing is written into parenting education curricula. I thought I would be looking at an articulated state promotion of good parenting that would reflect national values, to the exclusion of others.

However, there were not clear specifications on the part of the government as to what needed to be taught in these classes. In fact, people were free to choose any parenting class they could find, as long as they could get a letter confirming they had taken a certain number of hours of classes. Each class had a different curriculum and though all of them received government funding of some type, only one program had shaped its curriculum based on the recommendations of its state funder. There was a wide variety of classes available from which people could more or less choose; these classes had very different approaches and were taught by teachers with a broad range of interests and experiences. There are parenting classes in Spanish and classes on African American parenting that presumably offer different cultural orientations. They are offered through a range of institutions and organizations and costs for the classes vary greatly. This was not the level of control or uniformity that I expected to find.

However, in spite of these differences and the distinct trajectories each program took in the development of its curriculum, the elements of each class I observed were remarkably similar. Certainly, some of these elements did come directly from

government sources. The Help for Parents program had a contract with CFS. Several of the topics covered in the classes are what CFS “wanted” for their clients. Additionally, First 5 California, a program which was devoted to early childhood development, had released a set of videos on parenting that were widely distributed. These videos were viewed in the classes at Oakland Families and Youth.⁴

Other classes did not rely on any government based guidelines in developing its curriculum; nonetheless, certain principles of parenting were promoted across the classes. The main principle emphasized in all three classes was the idea that we elicit good behavior from children, not through punishment, but “positive discipline,” or encouraging children when they are behaving well. I will discuss the requirements and content of the classes in greater detail in the body of this dissertation, but the point I want to address here is that while there was little oversight as to what is taught in parenting classes, they offered very similar advice. And the advice that they offered was very similar to that found in the videos produced as a part of First 5 California, in parenting magazines, and in other media outlets.

So could California state officials or officers of the court assume that any parenting class would provide skills for good parenting?⁵ This assumption would indicate that enough agreement exists about approaches to parenting so it is not necessary to regulate the material being taught to rehabilitate (or at least offer guidance to) parents who were seen as potentially harmful to their children. In a state as diverse culturally and ethnically as California, it is especially remarkable that there is not more variation in the

⁴ I will discuss CFS’s curriculum requests and the videos in the following chapter.

⁵ It is also possible that the state only feels it needs to make a gesture of addressing what it views as a problem. By referring parents to classes, they can say that something has been done. I will address this further in Chapter 3.

messages. As Foucault has noted, the most important assumptions shaping societies are those that are not discussed, that silences are “an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (Foucault 1978, 27). I believe the supposition that any parenting class would give good parenting advice speaks to the power of the discursive processes by which certain truths, knowledge, and practices become understood as correct.

In the case of parenting norms, our reliance as a society on medical and scientific knowledge as unbiased obfuscates the extent to which parenting is based on values and beliefs. While there might be room for some variation, such as the holidays you celebrate, the food you eat (as long as it is healthy), the religion you practice, there is not a lot of wiggle room in terms of corporal punishment or involvement in and promotion of education, for example. Some cultural, generational, or class differences in parenting may be allowed and even encouraged, but there are certain values that are promoted at this moment in history in contemporary United States as fundamental. These values are linked to the key power structures governing our political economy and are reinforced through such expert advice on such aspects of daily life as parenting ((Petersen and Lupton 1996), (Rose and Miller 1992)).

My intention in this dissertation is to explore the processes that made certain aspects of parenting in contemporary United States seem natural and ubiquitous in the context of court-mandated parenting classes in Alameda County, California. At the same time, I intend to point out the ways in which these socially-constructed aspects of parenting can be exclusionary and stratifying.

Dissertation's Structure

I have broken this dissertation into two sections. The first section sets forth the ideas and gives context to the content of the study. This includes a theoretical discussion to anchor my arguments, a description of the classes I observed and the parents who took them, and an analysis of California statewide parenting campaign in order to give the full dimension of the public discourse on parenting. In the second section I choose three themes that were the focus of discussion in the parenting classes I observed, and provide some detail about each of them, examining their historical origins and what they can tell us about contemporary preoccupations, priorities, and political and economic processes. These three themes are discipline, parent involvement in schools, and self-care.

Chapter 2 addresses some of the major theoretical themes that occur throughout this dissertation, including the social construction of parenting, a Foucaultian discussion of the neo-liberal era and its emphasis on responsibility and self-control, and structural inequalities and parenting.

Chapter 3 addresses the question of who, in California, is mandated to take parenting classes and why. I discuss how parenting classes have come to be a component of CFS and divorce custody cases, and why parents from these two seemingly different realms are in classes together. I also offer a brief history of parenting education and a description of the classes I attended and the organizations that offered them.

Chapter 4 examines First 5, the California statewide campaign to disseminate parenting information. This program, and indeed much discourse about parenting, places great emphasis on brain research and child development, so I give a brief description of the brain research most frequently cited. Finally, I use this campaign as an opportunity to examine the state role in promoting a certain model of a good parent.

Chapter 5 marks the beginning of Section 2 and addresses the way discipline has replaced punishment as the key approach in parenting over the last hundred years. I discuss what are promoted as discipline techniques and how these techniques reflect certain core values of the U.S. democracy and the logic of the global economy.

Chapter 6 asks what the role of the parent is in relationship to schools and how parents are expected to prepare children and assist with homework. Also discussed is the impact of business interests on education nationally in the form of President Bush's program No Child Left Behind.

Chapter 7 looks at the double bind of parents, who are finding themselves responsible for their own physical and mental health so they are equipped to care for their family. This responsibility for personal health and stress management is one way to shift what was once considered the responsibility of the state to care for its citizens, back to the citizens themselves.

The final chapter brings together the major themes that have emerged in this dissertation.

Project Description

Site

This study takes place in Alameda County in Northern California, a racially and economically diverse region that has large African-American, Asian, White, and Latino populations. With a population of nearly a million and a half, making it the seventh largest county in the state, Alameda occupies most of the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area, including the prominent cities of Berkeley and Oakland. According

to the 2005 census, Alameda County had a population that was 38.0% non-Hispanic Whites. African Americans constituted 13.8%, Asians 24.2%⁶, Hispanics 20.8%, and both Native Americans⁷, and Pacific Islanders 0.7% of the population. In 2000 there were 523,366 households, out of which 32.60% had children under the age of 18 living within them, 47.00% married couples living together, 13.00% had a female householder with no husband present, and 35.20% were non-families. The median income for a household in the county was \$55,946, and the median income for a family was \$65,857. About 7.70% of families and 11.00% of the population were below the poverty line.

The county ranges from rural dairy farms, to suburbs, to the busy port of Oakland. My research was conducted principally in the Cities of Oakland and Easton,⁸ though class participants lived in towns and cities through out the county. Oakland, which has a major West Coast port and the terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad, is the eighth largest

⁶ I should note that while there is a significant Asian population, there were very few Asians in the classes I attended, and Asians represent a relatively small percentage of the clients in custody mediation. While 11% of the California population in 2000 was Asian or Pacific Islander, only 4% of the clients in custody mediation were Asian (Will 2001). This is similarly true of clients in child protective services with only 3.9% of foster care placements in California (Needell, et al. 2007). One explanation for this is that two thirds of all Asians in California are foreign born, creating both cultural and linguistic barriers to accessing the courts or becoming involved with social services.

⁷ Native Americans were slightly over-represented in custody mediation cases, making up 2% of the clients in custody mediation in California and only 1% of the population (Will 2001). Native Americans, who have a long history of being removed from their families in order to promote acculturation, are also overrepresented in foster care placements in California, representing 1.4% of foster care placements in California. In spite of this overrepresentation, the actual numbers of Native Americans in both custody mediation and child protective services are quite small, so it is not surprising that they were not a visible population in the classes I attended. Furthermore, there are parenting classes given at a clinic/social services organization targeting Native Americans in Oakland that I was not able to observe.

⁸ Easton is a name I have given one of the suburbs of Oakland where I attended a class in order to protect the identity of the organization, teacher, and participants. Because Oakland is a larger city and there are more organizations I do not feel it is necessary to hide its identity.

city in California. According the 2000 census it was one of the two most diverse cities in the country, with over 150 languages spoken. Oakland's population is just over 400,000, and U.S. Census Bureau in 2006 show estimates 34.1% White, 30.3% African American, 0.9% Native American, 15.6% Asian American, 0.7% Pacific Islander, 14.6% from other races, and 3.8% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 25.9% of the population. The percentage of Blacks is almost double that of the county at large, though since 2000 Oakland has lost between 18,000 and 34,800 African Americans. Whites only now slightly outnumber Blacks in the city for the first time, according to estimates from the U.S. Census. An economic boom post World War I and again post World War II brought major growth and job opportunities to the town, which was establishing itself as the West Coast cultural center for Blacks with a thriving jazz and blues scene and significant political activity. This combination of factors made it a very attractive destination for African Americans. The recent Black exodus is largely fueled by rising crime and home prices (Stuhldreher 2007).

Out of 150,790 households 28.6 % had children under the age of 18 living with them; 34.0% were married couples living together; 17.7% had a female householder with no husband present; and 42.7% were non-families. Therefore, in Oakland, there are about 4% fewer households with children, 13% fewer married couples and 4% more female headed households than the county average. The median income for a household in the city was \$40,055, and the median income for a family was \$44,384: in both cases about \$15,000 less than the average for Alameda. About 16.2% of families and 19.4% of the population were below the poverty line, compared with 7.7% and 11% for the county.

Easton is one of the largest suburbs of Oakland with a population of about 150,000. The racial makeup of the city in 2000 was 32.95% White, 20.98% Black or African American, 0.84% Native American, 18.98% Asian, 1.91% Pacific Islander,

16.81% from other races, and 7.52% from two or more races; 34.17% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race. Easton has more Hispanics than Oakland by 10% and fewer Blacks by 10 %. There were 44,804 households out of which 37.0% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 50.3% were married couples living together, 14.5% had a female householder with no husband present. This is quite different from the 34% of married couples in Oakland and 17% female headed households. The median income for a household in the city was \$51,177, and the median income for a family was \$54,712, which is just above the county average and significantly above the average in Oakland. About 7.2% of families and 10.0% of the population were below the poverty line. The number of families living in poverty in Easton is under half of those in Oakland. These differences make Easton and Oakland good contrasting locales to represent the diversity of Alameda County in my research project.

Data Collection

My research consisted of three main lines of inquiry. I first explored the interplay between local organizations offering parenting education and county, state, and federal policies and funding around parent education. Second, I examined the organizations themselves and the classes they offer. Finally, I interviewed parents to better understand their experience with parenting classes and with parenting in general. While parents involved with CFS and those in a custody dispute may seem at first glance to represent very different populations, I found that they were frequently referred to and were present in the same classes.

Policies on Parent Education

To map out the links between parent education organizations and local, state, and federal policy and funding, I researched the state and local requirements for parenting classes and the funding received by parent education organizations. I then interviewed authorities on child welfare and authorities on child custody and divorce. To answer basic questions about funding, the population served, and the development and evaluation of the curriculum used, I met with representatives of ten organizations that provide parent education in Alameda County. I also volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for a foster child. The experience allowed me to experience the complexities of child welfare policies and to benefit from the extensive training and information about child welfare provided by CASA.

Parent Education Programs

Among the organizations I contacted, I identified three organizations willing to work with me, and whose clientele are representative of the county demographics. One is an adult school that serves mostly Whites and Latinos, the second is a multi-service organization that serves mostly African Americans, and the third is a parenting organization that offers a hotline and counseling as well as a parenting class. This last organization is perhaps the best known of the three and it attracts a range of clients, but the class I attended had a majority of African American students. All three cater to low-income clients, which is in keeping with the reported demographics of custody mediation and CFS clientele.

I conducted in-depth interviews with the directors and teachers of these organizations and attended classes over a four month period. This enabled me to learn about their history and mission, course content and delivery, classroom dynamics,

teachers' approaches, and class participants. I also examined how their curricula were developed, what elements are required, and how they are evaluated.

I conducted a total of eighteen in-depth interviews with class participants addressing general parenting philosophies, specific parenting experiences, evaluations of the class, and circumstances that led them to the class.

Perspective

My interest in this project grew out of a study I worked on for Dr. Susan Barrow at the New York State Psychiatric Institute on mothers living in single women's homeless shelters in New York City. Many of the women in the study had issues with mental illness and the staff expressed frustration at not being able to get anyone to give parenting classes to these women. The feeling was that no one wanted to be accountable for women who were considered unfit mothers from the start. My interest in parenting education emerged from this idea that certain people could be tooled into appropriate parents and others could not.

Halfway through my field work my interest took on a personal bent. When I found out I was pregnant with my first child, my perspective changed. I started to assimilate information for my own purposes while continuing to assess it with a critical eye. Certain topics caught my attention more than others, based on my pending responsibilities and duties as a mother. By the end of my pregnancy, as I scrambled to finish my interviews and my belly preceded me into every room, I found that I elicited a different response from potential respondents. No longer was I there as a childless woman, purely a researcher, but now as a fellow parent (to be). Participants offered me advice and felt perhaps that they could teach me. And I was met with many more people

willing to speak with me. I find now, as a parent, that there is a certain barrier of understanding between parents and non-parents, and that many parents believe you can never comprehend raising children until you have experienced it. I had a hard time in the early months of my research recruiting parents involved with Child Protective Services. It is no surprise to me that it would be difficult to expose yourself in an interview to someone who did not have children, especially for those who had been accused of child abuse and neglect. It is difficult to say how this mid-project change affected my research, but I am certain that it has in subtle ways. I find I am less judgmental as a mother of other parents' approaches now than I was before I had children. However, I take certain approaches in my own parenting that may be different from those of some parents in this study. My hope is that this work will not read as an indictment of any style of parenting, but instead as an examination of what are presented as choices in parenting, and an attempt to understand what has led us to these preferred approaches.

Section 1:

Themes and Context

Chapter 2: Parenting in Context

This chapter will address three of the major themes that occur throughout this dissertation, reviewing the relevant literature in each section. The first theme is the social construction of parenting. This section will discuss how evolving historical, economic, political, and social contexts shape what is considered ideal parenting in different circumstances. The second section will discuss the particular historical context that shapes prevalent parenting norms in contemporary United States, building on Foucaultian notions of self-discipline. I will outline the economic, social, and political changes that have contributed to the parenting approaches presented in court-mandated parenting classes. Thirdly, I will address the structural inequality that these parenting approaches help to reinforce, focusing on the intersection of race, class, and gender.

The Social Construction of Parenting

Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) propose that cultures are produced as people “imagine or enable” the formation of a new generation through the nurturance of children. But this imagining takes place amidst complicated social, economic and political processes. The values and expectations that shape the way we envision our children as adults and the knowledge and practices that we employ to push them toward our desired outcomes are themselves beholden to forces that are not always apparent. Parenting practices and knowledge can take on vital importance because of their role in “imagining and enabling,” such that threats against these practices and knowledge can imply threats

against the values and envisioned futures on which they are premised. In order to protect these values, parenting practices in any given context are often construed as absolute, leaving little room for variation.

Of mothering in the United States, Sociologist Sharon Hays, author of *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, writes:

Although most Americans recognize that certain aspects of mothering follow from socially developed ideas, many also believe that other aspects are sacred, inviolable, or at least commonsensical and that they follow from the natural propensities of mothers or the absolute needs of children. People's strong reactions have to do with the cultural power of the concept of mothering. (Hays 1996, x)

This cultural power is indeed very strong; in this section I will address how the concept of mothering or parenting is socially constructed in various contexts.

Anthropology has a long history of analyzing and recording parenting practices cross-culturally. While the theoretical approaches of early anthropologists do not bear directly on my own research, it is interesting to note, for example, that Mead (1973) and Malinowski (1984 (1922)) both wrote about cultural variations in child rearing and experiences of childhood, building on an anthropological concern with cultural relativism. In fact, many anthropologists began to engage with developmental psychology, creating a critical body of literature that countered many of the universal principles proposed by psychology.⁹ Scholars studying childhood remain dedicated to contesting childhood as a universal category and examining the constructedness of

⁹ See Robert LeVine (2007) for more detailed history and bibliography of these numerous studies.

childhood in different settings.¹⁰ In the North American (and African) context, Cindi Katz's work (2004) is an excellent example of the impact of current economic models on childhood. She studied the impact of globalization and development policies on children in New York City and Sudan, showing how economic shifts have altered the conditions of childhood and the possibilities for these children as they come of age.

In her ethnography detailing work with women and children in Brazilian ghettos, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) contests the notion that mothers unconditionally and whole-heartedly love their children. "My argument is a materialist one: mother love as defined in the psychological, social-historical, and sociological literatures is far from universal or innate and represents instead an ideological, symbolic representation grounded in the basic material conditions that define women's reproductive lives" (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 401). She found that in the community she studied, where people were living in extreme poverty, where child mortality was very high, mothers did not experience the "deep grieving or profound sense of loss accompanying" the loss of a child, indicating a different quality to the mother-child relationship in this context than in the North American ideal (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 402).

Jane Collier describes the effect of economic changes on parenting styles in a Spanish village where she had done field work for several decades, in her book *From Duty to Desire* (Collier 1997). She noticed that in the 1960s, when she was there with her own young children, there seemed to be a single uniform approach to child rearing. For example, when a baby cried, there was a certain way of bouncing the child that was intended to be soothing. This bouncing was used no matter whether the particular child

¹⁰ See, for example, the 2007 volume 109 of *American Anthropologist on Childhood*, or edited volumes by Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) and (Stephens 1995)

found it comforting or not. When she returned in the 1980s, she found that things had changed substantially. There was much more attention paid to desires, interests and talents of individual children. The shift, she writes, paralleled a change in the socio-economic basis of the town. In the 1960s, parents wanted children to adhere to social norms and conditions, a characteristic that would enable them to maintain their status and carry on their family's social and economic position, while in the 1980's a family's position no longer guaranteed stability. It was more important for children to develop children's specific talents, which might help them distinguish themselves in the job market, in order to make a living and be successful. This shift in parenting, from drilling proper social behavior into children and not accepting different individual desires, to encouraging children to be themselves and develop their own talents, reflected this social and economic change. We can see a similar push for children of middle-class families in the U.S. whose position is far from certain in our own rapidly shifting economy.

Historians have also clearly established links between child-rearing practices and national political and economic priorities. Hunt (1997), for example, demonstrates how the Belgians instituted mother-child programs involving scheduled breast feedings in the Belgian Congo, is said to have encouraged a more disciplined workforce beneficial to an industrial schedule. In one case a Mining company instituted strict feeding practices for the workers and their babies to ensure a proper feeding schedule and appropriate weaning of the children. This policy change followed a trend in Europe toward providing mothercraft classes and well-baby clinics to help modernize the practices of motherhood.

In Postwar West Germany, Moeller (1993) found that in an effort to stabilize the country, policy debates frequently centered around the family and women's roles. The

traditional family of a husband, wife and children, came to stand as a symbol of the stability of West Germany and its ability to recover. Politicians promoted policies such as family allowances that would protect a woman's right to stay home and care for her family. Dixon Whitaker (2000) found that faced with the lowest birthrate in Europe, Mussolini brought motherhood to the center of Italy's domestic politics. Combining his efforts to "modernize" Italy and strengthen and increase the Italian population, he promoted medicalized conceptualizations of motherhood, urging, for example, adhering to a breast-feeding schedule and weighing babies before and after breast feeding to get a precise reading of the amount of milk consumed. All of these examples show the way that child rearing practices are linked to larger national or economic projects and passed on to families. In the case of my own research, these practices, laden with social and economic influences, are passed on through parenting classes.

Feminist scholars in the 1970s had begun to question the seemingly natural state of motherhood (Rich 1986), (Chodorow 1978). This work set the stage for a whole range of studies on motherhood and reproduction, questioning the social, economic and political contexts that produced certain ideologies that shaped these arenas (see (Arendell 2000) for review on studies of Motherhood. (Also, e.g. (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995), (Glenn 1994), (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998), (Ragoné and Twine 2000)). In spite of this breadth of scholarship, the idea of the naturalness of parenting in general, and mothering in particular persists. The "naturalness" of reproduction in this conceptualization occurs outside the sphere of work. Sharon Hays (1996) argues that the sphere of motherhood is ideologically separated from the larger social world, so that "women are responsible for unselfish nurturing while men are responsible for self

interested profit maximization” (Hays 1996, 175). The ideology frames mothering as the natural responsibility of the mother, quite apart from the world of paid labor – unpaid domestic labor’s character as work disappears and becomes merely the expression of proper maternal and family feelings.¹¹

Ian Hacking writes that child development as a notion has come to determine in specific detail how we organize our thinking about children. The first thing we announce is the weight of the baby as if it were a sacred number.

[It is] conveyed to family and friends, announced in the workplace, as a holy number, as if it were the essence of the child. It is the signal that from now on the child will develop. Every feature of the child's physical, intellectual, and moral development is to be measured by standards of normalcy, starting with its weight. (Hacking 2002, 20)

A scientific theory of development, he is arguing, forms the idea of what a child is and what should constitute child rearing today. It informs the games and toys we buy and how we encourage our children in different ways. Parenting practices have become increasingly medicalized and scientized over the last century (Litt 2000), (Apple 2006b), as Hacking’s description of the standards of normalcy indicate. Numbers are placed on every aspect of a child’s development to indicate a degree of “normalcy”. Recent child development studies show how best to maximize a child’s brain development, to honor the “nature” of her¹² body (Wall 2005). The irony is that being true to the “nature” or our bodies and our children’s bodies requires an enormous amount of gathering and sorting out of information to be sure that it is being done right.

¹¹ Thanks to Kate Crehan for clarifying and emphasizing this point.

¹² I switch back and forth in this dissertation between his/ her, he/she in order to avoid the awkward construction his and her, or he and she.

While there has been considerable work done on the construction of good and bad mothers, and of the notion of childhood, there has been little work in the anthropology of North America on the actual practices of parenting or mothering. This dissertation draws on the practices and knowledge of parenting that are advocated (though indirectly) by the state, and provides an opportunity to examine the motives and assumptions behind these practices.

Self-control and Individual Responsibility

The ideas of self-control and individual responsibility are central to the principles guiding contemporary child rearing in the U.S. This section will discuss the social and economic contexts that gave these ideas the importance they currently hold. Foucault's concept of governmentality has been instrumental in shedding light on how such aspects of social life as parenting become socially constructed and imbued also with power relations. Foucault (1991) argued that power does not emanate solely, or even mostly, from the state, but is present in all areas of social life. In his discussion of governmentality, for example, he notes that governmentality represents a plurality of interests (Lupton 1995). The state, then, is not an omnipotent authority that seeks to limit the liberty of its citizens. In fact, the condition of the emergence of governmentality is tied to the development of a liberal state in Western Europe and North America, which has emphasized individual freedom and rights against excessive intervention by the state. The state is one key structure of power within a given society, but so too are the many institutions, social groups, and interconnections on a local level, whose interests are sometimes coherent and sometimes in conflict. Social institutions, ranging from the family and the school system to the mass media and the legislature, participate in forms

of regulation, but one of the key components of the liberal state is that it does not dominate, but allows for the freedom of its citizens. Thus, “The characteristic outcome of power is not a relationship of domination but probability that the normalized subject will habitually obey” (Johnson 1993, 142), cited in (Lupton 1995). Normalized subjects thus constrain themselves rather than being disciplined by external forces in order to conform to what is considered a “good person” in a given social context (Lupton 1995).

This self-disciplined Western subject is said to have emerged with the advent of the liberal state in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which sought to limit direct control by the state. At the same time, however, government became responsible for fostering “the self-organizing capacities of the markets, citizens and civil society, now seen as natural spheres, with their own characteristics, upon whose well-being good government would demand” (Rose 1993, 290). This had various implications, among others, the reliance of the government on experts to track and manage populations, and the necessity to provide and maintain a work force in the face of an emergent and often damaging industrial economic base (Rose 1993).

Experts in areas such as epidemiology, sociology, and psychology increasingly became important after the late nineteenth century in ordering, categorizing, tracking, and defining citizens. “The vital links between socio-political objectives and the minutiae of daily existence in home and factory were to be established by expertise” (Rose and Miller 1992, 188). Experts thereby allied themselves with political authorities, translating problems about economic productivity, social stability, law and order into a vocabulary of management, accounting, medicine and social science and psychology. This expertise makes individuals uncertain about the “correct” way to do things and ironically provides

the answers about daily concerns such as child rearing, investment, factory organization, or diet (Petersen and Lupton 1996). The knowledge produced by experts helped to shape ideas about the “good” and “normal,” which in turn became important criteria in shaping subjectivities of individuals in the liberal state.

At the same time, this knowledge created responsibilities for the government to uphold certain standards of normalcy for its citizenry. The ‘welfare state’ emerged out of a struggle between industrialists and labor over responsibility for workers in the face of often damaging and dangerous conditions in industrial-age work conditions. Capital was determined to minimize their responsibility for workers and labor was increasingly unable to rely on older forms of support. “The state was to become the guarantor of both the freedom of the individual and the freedom of the capitalist enterprise” (Rose 1993, 293). Practically, this entailed social insurance in the form of workers compensation, unemployment benefits, health care, and public education, to name a few, as well as an emergence of the field of social work. Social work acted by “enjoining the responsibilities of citizenship upon incapable or aberrant members of society” (Rose 1993, 293). Social work was directed at the problematic cases of people who needed guidance in adhering to the normal standards. This welfare state which formed a key part of what has been called Fordism (Harvey 1990), drew on elements of social insurance and social work, which was beneficial to both the citizens and to economic interests.

By the late 1970’s, however, economic conditions were changing. Industry began seeking lower-wage workers both at home and abroad. “While, like all capitalisms, transnational capitalism was directed toward the accumulation of capital, its reworked form encouraged and was sustained by a global strategy of investment less and less

hindered by national loyalties or regulation” (Katz 2004, 158). As business became less obliged to take care of workers at home, because corporations were hiring workers abroad, political commitment to the welfare state also waned. Organized labor lost some of its power because of a combination of factors including its unwillingness to embrace immigrants, minorities, and women and its inflexibility in the face of changing work conditions (Harvey 1990). The corporate sector engaged in coordinated political activity and lobbying, which contributed to the withdrawal of support for welfare, public health care, public education and other social services, beginning in the 1970s (Goode and Maskovsky 2001).

Both Democrats and Republicans have gained political legitimacy for roll backs and privatization in the name of “cost-effectiveness,” “competition,” and “efficiency,” buzzwords designed to legitimate a model of economic restructuring that favors private-sector solutions over the public sector, now vilified as wasteful “big government.” (Goode and Maskovsky 2001, 5)

So in the United States, and to a lesser degree in Western Europe, a new political and economic logic has taken hold, which rejects government intervention wherever possible. This logic corresponds with a change in individual subjectivities, in which citizens have re-conceptualized their own relationship to the state in terms of their responsibilities and rights. In this neo-liberal formulation, tied to the logic of the global market, the citizen has become a producer and a consumer, an entrepreneurial individual constantly reproducing and improving his or her own human capital (Gordon 1991). This implies an assumption of responsibility for one’s own actions and decisions, and for one’s failure and success in the market, regardless of the structural inequalities that exist. Children are, however, still considered exempt from this responsibility. Where possible, their well-

being is considered the responsibility of their parents, but there is some political capital for programs such as health insurance for poor children.

This responsibility for our own actions is implicit in strategies for childrearing, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I will argue that a message to parents to manage their stress and focus on relaxation carries the message that citizens need to be responsible for their own health and well-being rather than relying on the state for assistance or support or questioning the basic conditions that help to produce that stress. I will build also on work that has focused on public health and health communication to see what sorts of directives have targeted parents and how this reflects the political, social, and economic logics at work.

No longer is citizenship construed in terms of solidarity, contentment, welfare and a sense of security established through bonds of organizational and social life. Citizenship is to be active and individualistic rather than passive and dependent. The political subject is henceforth to be an individual whose citizenship is manifested through the free exercise of personal choice amongst a variety of options.
(Rose and Miller 1992, 83)

This focus on individual responsibility is reflected in the changed relationship between experts and the state. Experts continue to play an important role in neo-liberal rationalities, but rather than focusing on how the state can create conditions that will shape citizen's choices, much contemporary expertise targets individuals by shaping peoples' own expectations of themselves. The knowledge produced by experts then is among the most important resources for aligning a citizen's desires and choices with those of the state with little or no coercion (Petersen and Lupton 1996).

Risk, Health Promotion, and Parenting

Two related theoretical approaches are taken by scholars in exploring the ramifications and manifestations of an advanced liberal rationality that are particularly useful for thinking about parenting. The first is a consideration of health promotion and public health as an area of expertise that contributes to the promotion of certain ideals for individuals. This is relevant to parenting first because of the many health campaigns targeted at parents about the health of their children (eg. SIDS and childhood obesity), and second because of the ways in which so many aspects of parenting have been construed as related to physical development. I refer in this latter point to the emphasis on brain research in shaping many areas of childrearing, which promotes maximizing a child's development, such that child development and child health have become so closely linked. The second, and related, area is an exploration of how risk is constructed through expert knowledge to shape individuals choices, especially in the area of health promotion. This is pertinent in thinking about parenting because seemingly every aspect of child rearing is imbued with a sense of danger and caution related to possible outcomes for children. In fact, some have argued that childhood itself has come to be seen as a precious realm under siege (Jackson and Scott 1999).

The rhetoric of the healthy citizen has become a powerful one in contemporary U.S. society. Nikolas Rose uses the term "biological citizenship" to highlight the ways that citizenship has been shaped to some extent by certain conceptions of physical characteristics of human beings, and has also been the focus of medical practices in the West since at least the eighteenth century (Rose 2007). Many "citizenship projects" since

the eighteenth century in the United States, as well as in Europe and Great Britain, have focused on teaching people to care for their bodies, for example teaching tooth brushing, and proper cleanliness (Rose 2007). And many such programs targeted mothers. For example, maternal health campaigns around the turn of the nineteenth century sought to teach immigrant mothers in crowded urban settings to provide proper food and hygiene for their families. In an effort to decrease infant mortality among immigrant populations in New York City, health workers were particularly concerned with irregular or artificial infant feeding, and gamey, garlicky, spicy or cabbage-based cooking. Garlic was considered an especially dangerous aphrodisiac and cabbage was at the top of the list of questionable foreign vegetables (Mink 1995). Workers provided instruction and made efforts to teach the mothers the “proper” ways of feeding their infants and the appropriate foods for the rest of their families.

The citizen here was not merely a passive recipient of social rights, but was also obliged to tend to his or her own body and, for a woman, those of her spouse and offspring. While the state would engage in measures for preserving and managing the collective health of the population, whether this be in seeking to shape reproduction or trying to eliminate toxins, individuals must exercise biological prudence, for their own sake, that of their families, that of their own lineage, and that of their nation as a whole (Rose 2007, 24).

While the advice may have changed – garlic and cabbage are no longer viewed as dangerous – the responsibility of citizens for their own health has intensified, and in the case of women, for the health of her family. There is great pressure for people in this country to engage in what Rose refers to as “the ethic of active citizenship,” involving the “maximization of lifestyle, potential, health, and quality of life” (Rose 2007, 25). This ethic is driven in part through regulation – seat belt and helmet laws, immunizations,

regulating healthy food options in schools – but mostly through campaigns to emphasize the benefit of good health and well-being, and the irresponsibility of ignoring these things. Put very simply, “A useful citizen engages in work, participates in social relationships and reproduces; he or she even goes to war to defend the country if prevailed upon to do so. Good health is deemed to be vital to achieving these activities” (Petersen and Lupton 1996, 61).

As Rose states, women are held responsible for the health of their families as well as their own health. Or in the words of Petersen and Lupton, “The woman as ‘healthy’ citizen, therefore, is understood as a resource for the reproduction and maintenance of other ‘healthy’ citizens” (Petersen and Lupton 1996, 72). Furthermore, the line between biology and behavior has been blurred such that values become inscribed within biological rationales. For example, much has been made of “brain research” indicating that children under the age of five fare better with abundant stimulation and exposure to different experiences (Wall 2005). Much of this research, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4, is premised on animal research and research done with orphans in institutions in Romania, showing the developmental delays attributed to severe deprivation of stimulation. There is not specific research showing that extra stimulation provides added developmental benefits. In fact almost all children receive an adequate amount of stimulation in everyday life to ensure “normal” development, but this research is cited to encourage parents to do everything possible to ensure that their children are learning enough (reading to children, talking to them continuously, providing educational toys). Parents are assumed to have incredible control over how children turn out, and the risk of not doing everything possible to ensure a positive outcome is too great.

Much of the language used to communicate ideas of “proper” or even necessary actions involves risk. If reading to your child starting at an early age will improve his school readiness and maximize his brain potential, then you risk putting your child at a serious disadvantage by not doing so. Though this is a minor example, risk is the ever present consideration that should guide behavior.

Petersen and Lupton (1996), following writers such as Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavski (1983), and others, discuss the notion of risk as a sociocultural construction. Risks “are always political in their construction, use and effects; and inevitably include moral judgments of blame” (Petersen and Lupton 1996, 287). They emphasize that this does not indicate that there are no “real” dangers, but that it is our understanding of them that defines them as “risks.” Risk thus is seen as one of the strategies of disciplinary power by which individuals are monitored and managed (Lupton 1999). Building on the work of Robert Castel (1991), Alan Petersen describes preventive techniques in health promotion as “techniques of social administration that target the individual-as-enterprise who is expected to manage his or her own relationship to risk,” (Petersen 1996, 45) a task which includes identifying, controlling or eliminating sources of risk from their own lives.

Furthermore, rather than acting to control a dangerous or aberrant individual we witness a shift to preventive measures, determined by using abstract risk factors, culled from statistical correlations (Castel 1991). This allows a much larger swath of population for preventive intervention (Petersen 1996). Those who vary significantly from the normal are identified as “at risk” and targeted for intervention. “The implication of this rationalized discourse again is that risk is ultimately controllable, as long as expert

knowledge can be brought to bear upon it” (Lupton 1999). I suggest that it is in following this logic that the courts have been mandating parents to parenting classes at increasing rates. I will discuss this point further in the following chapter. Those who are mandated to parenting classes are identified as parents of children “at risk.” By teaching parents proper means of child rearing based on expert advice, children at risk might be saved.

Risk and the management of risk is at play in almost all areas of parenting in a general way, in that parents are urged to understand the possible outcomes of their actions. For example, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, parents are encouraged to read to and constantly speak to their children lest they enter school less prepared and risk falling behind the children of others, or not succeeding in their future endeavors.

Structural Inequalities

When I started to analyze my fieldnotes and structure my dissertation I wrote out the words “race”, “class”, and “gender” on a big piece of paper to start mapping out connections and ideas. All anthropology projects set in North America must address these three looming subjects, which have become the analytic triad for this region, but I quickly became intimidated by the task, and I pushed them aside. I continued to ignore them for as long as possible, instead referring more vaguely to “inequalities” and “socio-economic differences” in my writing. When it could be avoided no longer and I went back to the stacks of articles addressing these fields, I realized that I had been trying to separate them out into distinct categories and to analyze (or avoid analyzing) each one separately. But the people I interviewed did not break down easily into neat categories.

These categories were not sufficient to account for all the differences I encountered. If reproduction and the nurturance of children helps to produce cultures as Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) assert, then surely cultural differences must appear in parenting practices in such a diverse place as California¹³.

Luis, for example, owned a successful landscaping company with his father. He lived with his parents in a comfortable suburban home, though he was trying to tie up loose ends so that he could join his wife, step-son, and infant son in Canada. He was very pleased with what he was learning in the parenting class he was attending voluntarily,¹⁴ though it confirmed his feeling that his own parents had not parented him properly. They had been too strict and unforgiving in their approach. “They didn’t know much about parenting. They thought they knew, so they stuck to it. They didn’t go to school, they didn’t even speak English. They tried to apply life in Mexico.” His parents had emigrated with their children from rural Mexico, and as Luis says, they brought what they had learned as proper parenting with them. So can we attribute Luis’ difference of opinion to cultural differences? Generational differences? Or perhaps to class differences? Luis attended high school and some college and lived comfortably in a very different setting than his parents had been raised in. Surely it must be some tangled combination of all of these.

Mary, an African American woman in her 30’s, also had different ideas from her mother about how to discipline her children. As a mother of two young children, she went back to school at U.C. Berkeley and began taking classes in early childhood development. She decided to stop spanking her children and to try a new approach. Her

¹³ Thank you to Shirley Lindenbaum for helping me to draw out this point.

¹⁴ He was one of three people in the study who had not been mandated to take classes.

family criticized her saying she was trying to be White. So is it race that governs how children are disciplined, or is it class (Mary was the most educated member of her family)? Or could it be a cultural difference attributed to a racial group? As a mother should she be a disciplinarian or offer gentle guidance?

In the introduction I referred to the uproar caused by Bill Cosby when he questioned the commitment of inner city Black parents to their children. Following his comments, middle-class African Americans countered by defending those people Cosby had attacked. Privately, Jamal Watson writes, “at social dinner parties, civil rights conventions and sorority and fraternity events, [middle-class Blacks] bemoaned the fact that the Black underclass is in serious trouble” (Watson 2004). This debate also highlights the intersections between race and class and gender in the United States today. While Cosby is denigrating African Americans, he is talking about poor African Americans. It is class that structures the differences in Cosby’s outlook and those targeted by his attacks.

Leith Mullings writes, “It is important to make the point that race, class, and gender are not additive categories; rather they are interlocking, interactive, and above all relational ones” (Mullings 1997b, 6). So it is difficult to isolate one variable to see its effect. My work is informed by the notion of stratified reproduction: how race, gender, class, and culture act to privilege the reproduction and child rearing of some women over others ((Colen 1995), (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995), (Mullings 1997a), (Ragoné and Twine 2000)). I would like to clarify here what I mean by these different terms.

I have discussed the role of gender in contemporary parenting more thoroughly in the introduction. Let me emphasize again, however, the centrality of gender as a concept

in understanding structures of inequality. In the words of Lamphere, Ragone, and Zavella, “Gender is historically contingent and constructed, simultaneously embedded in material relations, social institutions, and cultural meanings. Finally, gender is intimately bound up with inequalities, not only in the often dominant relation of men to women but also to those of class and race” (Lamphere, et al. 1997, 4). It is mothers more often than fathers who are held accountable for children and for child rearing, and this is especially true when taking into account the compounding variables of race and class (Mullings 1997a).

It is also clear that racism plays a role in structuring people’s access, opportunities, experience. Racism, as Mullings writes, is “linked to structures of power that emerge through processes of accumulation and dispossession within local and transnational contexts” (Mullings 2005, 671). Mullings cites Stavenhagan in stating that “race does not beget racism, but rather racism generates race,” (Stavenhagan 1999,8) by way of asserting that race is both socially constructed and has a social reality that has negatively affected millions of lives (Mullings 2005). As I will discuss in the following chapter, the child welfare system is an example of one institution that reflects a deeply set racism targeted at poor Black families, resulting in a disproportionate number of Black children being removed from their homes (Roberts 2002).

In California, it is important to note that racism is often applied not just against African Americans, but also Asians¹⁵ and Latinos, especially recent immigrants. The

¹⁵ There were very few Asians in the classes I attended, and no Asians in my sample. In July 2001 only 3 percent of open child welfare cases were Asian (Research 2001) and 4 percent of the custody mediation population in 2003 was Asian or Pacific Islander (Administrative Office of the Courts 2005). These percentages are much lower than the 12% of the state’s population that is Asian or Pacific Islander.

California population is now one third Latinos. Alameda County, according to the 2005 census has 38.0% non-Hispanic Whites, 13.8% African Americans, 24.2% Asians, 20.8% Hispanics, and 0.7% both Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. Villenas (2001) addresses the subtle forms of racism faced by recent Latino immigrants. She shows how Latina women in North Carolina counter negative stereotypes of uneducated and ignorant Latinas by defending their own skills and correctness as mothers in contrast to those of White women. Again I would like to point out that cultural differences are at work here. While racism produces the negative stereotypes, the skills and correctness they are defending have to do with cultural values.

Much work has addressed the challenges faced by poor women of color in raising their families. Solinger (1994), for example, analyzes the limited options available to Black and White unmarried, pregnant women in the decades following WWII. White unmarried women came to be viewed as less morally tainted, but rather psychologically flawed, and redeemable. Black single mothers, however, were seen as biologically and culturally flawed, following from their assumed unrestrained sexuality and love of babies. Black single mothers were also accused of seeing babies as a way of receiving welfare money. Dill (1999) elaborates on the many complications presented by work, motherhood and prejudice for women of color based on the idea that the presence of women of color was important to the growth of the nation as workers, breeders, and entertainers – not as family members. Ethnographers such as Stack (1974), Scharff (1998), Bourgois (1995), and Mullings and Wali (2001) give vivid accounts of the lives of poor families affected by neo-liberal political and economic processes. All of these accounts discuss the lives of women of color, but also the lives of poor women, as

unfortunately these two have often gone hand in hand due to political, economic, and social constraints. These accounts also offer, in addition to the structural inequalities that shape people's lives, a glimpse at the many cultural differences apparent among groups. These include different concepts of relationality and selfhood, for example obligations to family.

In the dissertation I frequently talk about information being generated by and for the 'middle class,' often at the expense of, or resulting in difficulty for the "poor or working class." I use these not as specifically measured demarcations, but as general terms to contrast people's economic and social resources. The issue of defining class is one that has filled the pages of many books. For the purpose of describing the participants in my research and attempting to understand the ways in which class shapes their experiences, I conceive of class in the following way. I view class as organized by material circumstances, such as income and access to education. However, to try to determine an individual's class based solely on these traditional markers is inadequate. The social markers of class – speech, clothing, aspirations, and interests can be easily shed or adopted. Bourdieu argues that people are socialized differently based on their class location, and this socialization process informs the way people present themselves (for example in speech, clothing, or other aesthetic expressions) and interact with their environment. He calls this sense of what is comfortable or natural resulting from a person's socialization "habitus." "The dialectic of conditions and habitus is the basis of an alchemy which transforms the distribution of capital, the balance-sheet of a power relation, into a system of perceived differences, distinctive properties, that is, a distribution of symbolic capital, legitimate capital, whose objective truth is

misrecognized” (Bourdieu 1984, 172). Because one’s habitus is experienced as natural, he asserts, its true nature as a part of a system of differences is misrecognized.

I found in trying to classify the participants in my study that it was very difficult to categorize specific individuals according to class. Mike for example, is an African American man in his mid-30’s who grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Oakland. Neither of his parents attended college. He attended high school, but did not go on to college, either. He built a successful and well-paid career, however, in a high tech industry. His job enabled him to live abroad for a few years and allowed him a very comfortable life. So if I were to try to classify Mike according to his income he would likely be considered middle to upper middle class. If I take into account his background however, the picture is more complicated, especially if I am trying to determine how his class position has shaped his approach to parenting. This complexity points to the difficulty and perhaps inadvisability of trying to label individuals as belonging to a specific class. Class is a useful analytic category to understand structural inequalities within which individuals exist rather than as a means of categorizing specific individuals¹⁶.

In her book on class, race, and child rearing, Lareau discusses differing “cultural logics of child rearing” according to families’ social class (Lareau 2003). Social structures work to enforce inequalities, but there are complex interactions between class and aspirations that complicate matters. “Indeed Bourdieu sees a pattern of domination and inequality at the heart of the social structure. His work suggests the importance of studying the strategies individuals use to maintain or improve their social position, as

¹⁶ Thanks to my committee for helping me make sense of this.

well as their children's position" (Lareau 2003, 275). However, these social structures work to maintain inequality in such a way that only small number can be at the top. The subtle distinctions in taste and presentation shift if they become too popular or accessible. "He would never suggest, for example, that more parents could improve their children's school success by adopting particular practices...[A]ny effort to spread an elite practice to all members of the society would result in the practice being devalued and replaced by a different sorting mechanism" (Lareau 2003, 277).

We can consider the ever changing model's of "good parenting" in this light. What is thought of as responsible and natural is partially intended to act as a "sorting mechanism" such that only certain members of society can meet that ideal.

Writing about middle-class parenting ideals, Hays explains,

Although this model has never been followed in practice by the majority parents, the model of the white, native-born middle class has long been, and continues to be, the most powerful, visible, and self-consciously articulated, while the child-rearing ideas of new immigrant groups, slaves, American Indians, and the poor and working classes have received relatively little positive press." (Hays 1996, 21)

So while a certain model is the most visible and most powerful, it is never intended to be the most accessible. Middle-class parents tend to adjust their behaviors in parenting and other areas, according to expert advice more quickly and thoroughly than do working-class or poor parents (Lareau 2003). And according to Bourdieu's logic, this is precisely how it is intended to be.

Media Representations: Reinforcing Parenting Standards

As far as talking about class, it is important to acknowledge the role of the media in making upper middle-class lifestyles disproportionately influential on U.S. culture.

The impact of television after the 1970s influenced the form and content of the rest of mass media, which had to compete on televisions' terms. This led to a greater concentration in newspaper and magazine ownership, and a tendency to merge news and entertainment, and generally dumb-down content (Parton 2006) citing Franklin, B. 1997). Consumption patterns and lifestyles that once belonged to the upper class now are more available for everyone to see, perpetuating the idea that children should be surrounded with expensive goods. News and events, accompanied by attitudes and values that may have at one time depended on shared local and direct experience are now widely transmitted through the media. "Television now conveyed a sense of immediacy and intimacy and increasingly emphasized the personalities involved and the emotive and intimate aspects of events" (Parton 2006, 53), and magazines, newspapers and internet sites seek to do the same. The celebrity "bump-watch" and general tabloid obsession with pictures and stories about pregnant celebrities and celebrities with their children is the latest installment of this desire to be intimately connected with celebrities. Beautiful images of well behaved children and dedicated parents in peaceful and enriching environments grace the pages magazines about, home and garden, fashion, news, entertainment, not to mention parenting. And advertising in magazines and on TV promote similar images.

In her book about the extreme pressure mothers place on themselves to ensure that their children have every opportunity, journalist Judith Warner writes, "The upper middle class is our reference point for what the American good life is supposed to look like and contain...It is because of our over identification with the upper middle class that so many of us came out of the boom years of the late 1990's so terribly in debt. It is also

why so many of us turn ourselves inside out trying to parent to perfection, so that our children will be “winners” (Warner 2005, 20-21). Warner counts herself among the White upper middle class, and writes from that particular perspective. It is not clear that these same media reference points are as influential among people living in poverty, especially minorities who may not identify with the wealthy White culture that is dominant on television and in magazines¹⁷. In poor Black communities, for example, there may be more identification with Hip Hop celebrities, for example. However, these reference points are likely to impact those in positions of power, including teachers, doctors and bureaucrats who in turn have influence and power over the lives of parents.

TV does not only promote child related consumption, but also the kind of family relations that are desirable. I was surprised by how often parents I interviewed referenced *Leave it to Beaver* or the *Cosby Show* in an attempt to explain the kind of parents they would like to be. One mother described the kind of mother she wanted to be as, “Leave it to Beaver - white picket fence, dad goes to work, mom is the soft one, dad is hard. Loving and warm. Be the house that all the kids go to because the mom is cool. A loving home.” The 1950s image of the gentle, loving mother represented by June Cleaver still is

¹⁷ Though working-class parents may not identify specifically with the products and services associated with celebrities, there has been a great increase in the spending associated with having children. In the late 1950s parents spent about half (in today’s dollars) what they do now on goods and services during a baby’s first year (Paul 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which tracks spending on family life, the cost of raising a child in 2006 until their eighteenth birthday is \$143,790 for parents in the lowest income bracket (households earning less than \$44500 per year) and \$289,390 in the highest income bracket (households earning more than \$74900). And many believe that these figures give very low estimates of the cost of education, childcare, food, clothing, housing and transportation. For example they estimate that in the first two years the highest income group will spend \$2,850 on childcare and education. The National Association of Child Care Resources estimates between \$3803 and \$13,480 per year (Paul 2008).

one that women identify with as the perfect family. Another woman described a family she knew, saying “I thought I was watching the Cosby show at their house. I liked watching them as husband and wife and kids. They got married, spent time alone, bought a house then planned kids. They had given thought to parenting and it showed.” This recitation of the “proper” way of addressing parenthood was linked in her mind to Dr. Huxtable and his wife on the Cosby show. Media representations of seamless family relationships and the companionate marriages idealized in U.S. culture offer parents a picture of what they could or should have. Bill Cosby’s crusade to provide these “proper” role models¹⁸ is a good example of this, especially because like the shows and media representations he seems less interested in the factors that structure inequality than the role individuals play in shaping their own futures.

This dissertation will attempt to address not so much the way representations of parenting or parents reinforce inequalities, but how the actual practices of parenting, promoted through parenting classes, reinforce the interlocking structures of inequality.

Conclusion

Parenting is socially constructed, so that what is considered good or proper parenting varies according to the time and place. Parenting practices in contemporary U.S. society are thus produced out of its particular historical, economic, political and social contexts. Parenting is born out of the dominant neo-liberal regime, tied to logic of the global market. In this environment individuals as much as corporations must embrace the entrepreneurial spirit in order to constantly reproduce and improve their (human)

¹⁸ It should be said that Cosby has been careful about attempting to provide positive portrayals of African Americans, to counter the often derogatory images that prevail. He took care in his shows to include references to African-American artists, entertainers, and intellectuals, for example (Coates 2008).

capital. This translates into childrearing because children are a product of this milieu and must be prepared to shape themselves to succeed in such a society. Experts play an important role in shaping the modes of reproduction according to this cultural logic by shaping people's own expectations of themselves and their practices, including the realm of childrearing. Risk is one of the guiding principles used to manage expectations and behaviors, especially as it relates to health and proper care of one's own body and the bodies of children.

Parenting also occurs within a social structure that maintains certain hierarchies based on gender, class, and race, among other factors. These structural inequalities interact in complicated ways to limit access to the top of the hierarchy. Children are born into these structures and parents act within them, often fighting against them, to improve, or at the very least maintain, the lot of their children. But the resources and opportunities available often act to limit access to what is promoted as proper or desirable parenting practices and knowledge. This runs counter to the "American Dream" in which any individual can achieve a degree of success through hard work. It is largely because of the allure of this dream that so much responsibility and or blame placed on individuals is related to their "sucesss" or "failure" to achieve an acceptable middle class life.

I have also pointed in this chapter to the insufficiency of race, class, and gender as exclusive analytic categories for understanding parenting in the North American context. Perhaps because of the fear of replicating the culture of poverty argument, anthropologists studying North American often shy away from discussing culture in their analysis. Invocations of cultural differences are often misused by personnel in social services or health care to describe undesirable (from a public health or social services

perspective) traits or behaviors and are taken out of their historical and social contexts (Mullings 2002). There is reticence to focus on cultural issues because it allows a discussion of cultural tendencies instead of structural issues that are problems that can be addressed in the political arena. Arguing against an extended discussion on Black family life, African American economist Glenn Loury has argued that cultural issues are a less effective place to try to institute change, and that it lets the government and White Americans off the hook (Tough 2008). Politically, this may be true, but analytically it is very difficult to understand parenting and different approaches to child rearing without considering culture. Parenting especially is an area where cultural differences are apparent, not just in relation to ethnic or national backgrounds, but also regional differences. So while race, class, and gender are clearly vital categories to understand structural inequalities, it is important, too, to recognize culture as an important factor guiding people's parenting knowledge and practices.

Chapter 3:

Risky Parents and Parenting Classes

Parents at Risk

The media was captured in summer of 2008 by the story of 440 children taken away from a Texas ranch that was home to a polygamous Mormon sect. The children were removed based on a phone call to authorities by a 16 year-old girl who claimed to have been sexually abused as a member of the group. She also told authorities that girls as young as 14 and 15 were forced to marry much older men. The teenager who allegedly called was never found, nor were accusations of abuse verified, and after several months the children were returned home on the condition that the parents attend parenting classes ¹⁹(Adams 2008).

The curriculum of the parenting classes was reported to be much like those the Texas Department of Family and Protective services would use with other clients. They would consist of two four-hour sessions. So in spite of the authorities having no evidence of wrongdoing, the parents will be schooled in what is deemed appropriate and normal parenting (Adams 2008). We can only assume that this has mostly to do with difference. Polygamy goes against what we in the United States deem to be natural and acceptable. Much was made of the clothing and hairstyles of the women and children of the sect, which also cause them to stand apart. While this might be an extreme example, it points

¹⁹ They were also ordered by the judge to stay in Texas until Child Protective Services completes its investigation, to stay in contact with and cooperate with caseworkers, and to allow children to undergo psychological or physical examinations if requested (Adams 2008).

to a more commonplace occurrence of increased suspicion and surveillance of families in the U.S. that deviates from the White, heterosexual, monogamous middle-class norm.

British scholars Parton, Thorpe, and Wattam's, in their book *Child Protection: Risk and the Moral Order* assert:

What is considered child abuse for the purposes of child protection policy and practice is much better characterized as a product of social negotiation between different values and beliefs, different social norms and professional knowledges and perspectives about children, child development and parenting. Far from being a medico-scientific reality, it is a phenomenon where moral reasoning and moral judgments are central (Parton, et al. 1997, 67).

This sentiment, that child abuse is socially constructed, is readily applied to the example of the Mormons cited above, as it is to the wide range of alleged cases of child abuse and neglect that social workers are confronted with in their daily work. It is also applicable to cases of child custody wherein courts are faced with assessing the parenting abilities of divorcing or separating families. Parenting education is an attempt to bring the values and beliefs of those parents seen as inadequate with those of the dominant social group, which in the United States is the White, heterosexual, middle class. Historically, poor women and children in the U.S. have been the subjects of surveillance and intervention in the name of protecting and producing specific visions of family life and citizenship. Poor families and families of color continue to be under heightened scrutiny and surveillance, partly because of their more frequent contact with governmental agencies. Mandated parenting classes fit into this model of producing visions of citizenship and families.

This chapter examines how parents mandated to parenting classes are seen as deviating from the accepted norm, and the approach the state assumes in intervening on

behalf of children and families. I describe child welfare and divorce custody cases, focusing on how certain groups may be determined a greater “risk”. Further, I discuss how parenting classes are assigned in both instances, and, finally, I describe the parenting classes that I participated in for my dissertation research on court-mandated parenting classes. In giving an ethnographic description of three different parenting classes, I show the ad hoc nature of the array of parenting classes available and discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from the lack of oversight of these classes.

Families at Risk

The maintenance of the family as an institution is an important and consuming concern in our society, which relies on the family to care for its individuals and to transfer its values. Nikolas Rose observed that, “In the name of public citizenship and private welfare, the family has been configured as a matrix for organizing domestic, conjugal and child rearing arrangements and instrumentalizing wage labor and consumption” (Rose 1993, 286). By devising mechanisms that would support the family in its ‘normal’ functioning society could enable families to fill their social duties of producing “healthy, responsible, adjusted social citizens” (Rose 1999, 128).

Foucault suggested that the role of the family had shifted by the mid-nineteenth century from one based on alliances, transmission of wealth, privilege, and status, to one based on sexuality, and the reproduction and care for proper, healthy, and normal offspring (Foucault 1978). Throughout the 19th century, the United States was undergoing a profound change in its conceptualization of children. The child came to be seen as more precious and fragile. As historian, Michael Katz explains, children no longer held the economically useful position they once had following the shift from

house-hold based production to industrial production outside the home, which led to a period of exploitation of children's labor in factories. Child labor laws removed children from the workforce and an influx of cheap immigrant labor made their labor less desirable. Child psychology, bolstering the importance of childhood, was gaining credence and finding a receptive audience among increasingly domestically focused middle-class women. A falling birth-rate among educated, native-born Whites was compared with alarm to the massive immigration of southern and eastern Europeans, fueling anxiety about the future of the country. All of these factors combined paved the way for a powerful "child-saving" movement, which managed to secure unprecedented powers in regulating and intervening in relations between parents and their children in the form of public health campaigns, a new system of juvenile justice, as well as compulsory education (Katz 1986.)

Though orphanages already took in needy children, it was not until the 1870's that the first Society Prevention of Cruelty to Children was developed to concern itself with families that had neglected or abused their children. Early societies targeted poor White families. Separate institutions served Chinese, Native American, and Japanese children, and Black children were excluded from any institutions until the 1930s, when these separate institutions began to be integrated (Billingsley and Giovannoni 1972). About the nineteenth century political and social climate, historian Molly Ladd-Taylor notes,

The idea of scientific charity that dominated welfare policy in the late nineteenth century opposed all public assistance to the poor in their own homes. Hostile to single mother households and to child rearing practices that differed from middle-class norms, child-saving and charity organization societies generally removed children from economically

unstable household and from families thought to be lacking in discipline and morality. (Ladd-Taylor 1995, 137)

Apart from being monitored for the abuse and neglect of children, poor and immigrant families were targeted for a whole range of programs intended to bring home and family more in line with middle-class standards. Around the turn of the century women activists took an active role in trying to care for children affected by unsanitary and crowded urban settings, as well as those in institutions either because their parents were deemed unfit or simply could not provide for them. Programs were initiated to teach proper hygiene and nutrition as well other classes that included proper, “American” parenting approaches. Interventions were targeted almost exclusively at mothers, though some education was directed at children who might bring home new and improved ideas and standards to their mothers (Gordon 1994), (Ladd-Taylor 1995). These women activists, sometimes referred to as the “Maternalists,” eventually managed to get two important pieces of legislation passed: Mother’s Pensions and the Sheppard Towner Act²⁰. The Mother’s Pensions, first set up on a state level in 1911 provided payments to poor mothers whose husbands could not provide for them – mostly widows -- so that their children would not have to be placed in institutions. Single mothers, however, were looked down upon as morally depraved and were not considered “deserving” of the support. These pensions often had strict behavior requirements that came attached, providing a means of supervising families and child rearing (Ladd-Taylor 1995),(Gordon 1994).

²⁰ Passed in 1921, the Sheppard Towner Act became the first piece of federal legislation addressing health and maternity.

Though standards and approaches have been modified, the suspicion and surveillance of poor families, immigrant families, and families of color has changed little. Families that are not ‘normal’ -- single mothers or parents separating or divorcing, for example -- represent a threat to the ability to rely on families to fulfill their role. Parents who are not able to provide for their children adequately, or who are thought to be mistreating their children may be pulled into a child welfare case, especially if that family is poor or of color (Roberts 2002). Parents who have the resources to stay clear of public institutions (welfare offices, public schools and hospitals) are less likely to come to the attention of child protective services. Likewise, parents who are separating and can afford to consult private lawyers to settle their custody disputes may not end up in front of a court of law. Those who cannot afford lawyers may find themselves arguing their case with publicly assigned mediators or in front of a judge.

In both of these cases – those involved with child welfare, or those in a court - involved custody battle – the families come under state scrutiny. It is my argument that it is largely because these families deviate from a heterosexual and married middle-class norm that they are considered “families at risk” and the parents are sent to parenting classes. As described in Chapter 2, by relying on statistical analysis certain groups who vary significantly from the norm (children of divorce, of single mothers, of drug-using parents, in poor neighborhoods) are determined “at risk” and in need of preventive intervention (Petersen 1996). Providing these groups with expert knowledge (in this case about proper parenting) makes the risk more controllable. So, parenting classes offer an opportunity to reach a large group of parents deemed at risk, to instill certain ideas about proper parenting and to reinforce concepts of citizenship and responsibility. I should note

that I recognize the complexity of cases of child welfare and child custody and the gravity of deciding how best to protect a child and ensure his or her safety. My intention is rather to point out the mechanisms by which certain groups are targeted for intervention over other groups and how the concept of risk is used as a means of control.

Parents and Child Protective Services

Nationwide there are over 500,000 children in foster care and close to one million who are considered victims of maltreatment and are involved with the child welfare system, (NCANDS 2000). One in five of all children in child welfare nationwide is in California, partially due to the fact that California is the most populous state in the nation. California has the largest child welfare services system in the country, with over 100,000 children in foster care (close to half with relatives) (Foster 2001). That the system nationwide is overwhelmed and perceived to be ineffective, is reflected in recent debates about the direction child welfare should take ((Waldfoegel 1998), (English, et al. 1999), (Canedy 2002), (Foster 2001), (Drake and Pandley 1996)). Child Protective Services (CPS) has been criticized for needlessly taking children away from families, for not taking children away from families readily enough, for having overburdened caseworkers, for emphasizing a punitive approach, and for not giving families the services they need (English, et al. 1999).

Many of the policies governing CPS have come about not through careful planning, but in reaction to highly publicized cases about children dying at the hands of their parents or foster parents ((Waldfoegel 1998), (Roberts 2002)). These cases contribute to the public perception that parents involved with CPS are all terrible parents,

if not terrible people. While it is certainly true that some parents are dangerous, it is also true that many children are separated from their families because of inadequate housing, lack of childcare, and other manifestations of poverty.

In fact, 63% of the children judged to be victims of maltreatment are cases of neglect, while 19% were victims of physical abuse, and 10% of sexual abuse (NCANDS 2000). Neglect is a category of maltreatment that has been shown repeatedly to be confounded with and often times defined by poverty ((Swift 1995; Vondra 1990), (Roberts 2002)). One study showed that inadequate income, more than any other factor, predicted out-of-home placement (Lindsey 1994). Studies also show that physical abuse is correlated with poverty ((Lee and Goerge 1999), (Drake and Pandley 1996), (McLeod 1993)). Inadequate resources may cause or worsen feelings of frustration, depression and contribute to social isolation, inadequate social support and a sense of hopelessness that can contribute to abuse or neglect (Dore and Lee 1999).

Race is another factor influencing who becomes involved with child welfare. Studies have repeatedly shown that even after taking poverty into account, Black parents are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to be charged with maltreatment, to have their children taken away, and to lose their parental rights ((Billingsley and Giovannoni 1972), (Courtney, et al. 1996), (Roberts 2002), (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997), (Watch 1998)). Furthermore Black families are less likely to be referred to appropriate services. For example, Roberts (2002) points out that a study by the National Black Child Development Institute in 1989 found that inadequate housing was a factor in nearly one in three placements of Black children in foster care (Institute 1989). Further, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study found

that Black children in the system are more likely than White children to come from families with housing problems. Nevertheless, among families with housing problems, the study found White families are offered housing services almost twice as often as Black families. Overall, only one fourth of families with housing problems were offered and received any housing help (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997).

These systematic flaws call into question the approach and assumptions of CPS. The focus of CPS has vacillated over the years from trying to keep families together to trying to get children adopted as quickly as possible. For many years CPS focused on returning children to their biological parents. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 encouraged states to replace, to the extent possible, costly out-of-home placement plans with preventive services and reunification plans ((Roberts 1999a)). By the mid- 1990's, political sympathies no longer lay with helping poor families and "family preservation" was construed as anti-children's rights ((Roberts 1999b), (Waldfoegel 1998).

In 1997 President Clinton signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), which aims to move children through foster care and into permanent homes as quickly as possible. Because caseworkers are pushed to move children into permanent placements as quickly as possible, many parents do not have the time to comply with the many requirements set before them to get children back. These requirements might include housing with a room for each child, completion of drug rehabilitation, parenting classes, anger management classes, among others. Many argue that having children in a permanent placement is more important than whether they are returned to their parents. In California, the 1997 legislation led to additional laws requiring certain practices to move

children more quickly into permanent placements. One such measure is concurrent planning, which requires caseworkers to simultaneously pursue reunifying children with their parents and finding an alternative arrangement if reunification should not work out (Berrick 2003). While it may seem preferable for children to be adopted rather than to spend years in foster care, in practice this legislation separates children from parents for whom family preservation is not a hopeless endeavor (Moynihan, et al. 2001).

Nationwide, the way federal funding is allocated encourages child removal over family preservation and preventive services (Curtis 1999). More funding is available for foster care placement and one of the major channels of funding does not allow for preventive services. This legislation plays on an image of biological parents of foster children as dangerous and unfit. Media images of the crack mother and the welfare queen created a public image of poor women of color as irresponsible and undesirable ((Gomez 1997), (Williams 1995)), leading to the assumption that their children would be best off away from them and with “proper” families. In reality, the situation is much more complex.

Another significant change has come about in the wake of the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. In the 1990’s the concept of child protection expanded to include the likelihood of future occurrence of harm or abuse. This requires that the adequacy of parenting and the living environment must be assessed to determine not only past harm, but the probability of future harm. This is referred to as risk assessment or risk management (Anglin 2002). This focus on risk has not, however, translated into funding for prevention. Instead there is a tendency to remove children from families that are seen as presenting a risk.

With the shift away from family preservation and toward adoption, resources for preventive services have been severely diminished (Roberts 1999a). Caseworkers assemble a list of requirements for mothers who are threatened with losing their children, or who are trying to be reunited with their children. Parenting education is one of the top three services provided to parents involved with CPS. According to a 1996 survey, out of 577,000 families with open cases for service in a child welfare agency, 18% of parents received parenting education, 19% received in-house treatment and 24% received out-patient mental health treatment.

Not all parents sent to parenting classes have had their children removed from the home. In California, social workers investigate over half a million reports of child abuse and neglect each year, and about a quarter of these are substantiated. The others are screened and closed after an in-person visit by a CFS worker. In many cases that are substantiated, social workers provide services to the family while the child stays at home. In addition to parenting classes, these services include counseling and respite care (providing alternative care to children for a short time to give the parents a break). In about 20% of substantiated cases, the children are placed in foster care or kinship care, and then services are provided to attempt to unify the family (similar to the services listed above) and efforts are made to find a permanent placement should the reunification not succeed (Foster 2001). The way the federal funds are allocated, however, creates an incentive to place and keep children in foster care instead of providing services for the children and their families (such as housing vouchers, drug treatment or other services or supports). Funding for maintaining children in foster care is open-ended, while funding for services is limited (Foster 2001).

On the other hand, greater emphasis is being placed on prevention of child abuse and early intervention as the most effective way of keeping children safe. In practice this means connecting with other community supports (and funding streams), and resources that will be set in place after formal services with child protective services end. Services and support might include health, mental health, and employment (Foster 2001). Education for parents is among the least expensive of these services to provide. Little political support is provided for services such as those mentioned above and social workers report that it is difficult to find adequate services for families (Foster 2001). While there is little support for financial assistance or health and mental health programs, there seems to be adequate support for edifying programs such as parent education, which supposedly encourages parents to improve themselves. This emphasis on prevention and early intervention, based on the theory of risk discussed at the beginning of this chapter. One such support service is parenting education, used to impart expert knowledge as a means of shaping the practices and knowledge about a group considered at risk.

Parents and Child Custody

With nearly 50% of marriages in the United States ending in divorce and approximately 65% of those involving children, child custody cases are no small issue for the U.S. court system. The majority of child custody cases are resolved easily, with both parents agreeing to an arrangement without any court intervention. In a 2003 survey, however, mediators ranked 39% of their cases as being difficult. At least half of these difficult cases require more than one mediation session (Vickrey 2003). Divorced parents need to agree on what the courts term a “parenting plan” including children’s visiting and

holiday schedules, and school choice, as well as consistency on school involvement, eating habits, discipline, and bedtimes, among other issues. Those who repeatedly cannot agree on their parenting plan are often asked to attend a parenting class, with the goal of protecting children from the lasting effects of familial strife and divorce.

Children whose parents are divorcing and whose cases reach the courts come under the surveillance of the court. In their influential book discussing the notion of a child's "best interest," Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (1979) state, "So long as the child is part of a viable family, his own interests are merged with those of the other members. Only *after* the family fails in its function should the child's interests become a matter for state intervention (emphasis in original) (Goldstein 1979, i)." ²¹ A family undergoing a divorce has failed in its role as a viable family and easily meets this stated criterion for becoming a matter of state intervention. Legal scholar Carol S. Bruch (1986) has noted that custody rules and decisions concerning child custody reflect social judgments about acceptable behavior.

Sharing custody, and the many complications that come with it—negotiating parenting plans, fighting over which schools the children go to, whom they visit and when, among a multitude of other issues—was not common until recent times. Until the mid-nineteenth century in the United States, fathers had control of their children in the event of a divorce or separation. Between 1880 and 1925, the language of judicial decisions shifted from supporting paternal custody to favoring maternal custody of children of 'tender years' (Comerford).

The trend of joint custody stems from a push to reform divorce and custody courts. Historically in the United States, divorce and custody cases were handled with the

²¹ This interpretation has been acknowledged in judicial decisions for many years (Anglin 2002).

same adversarial procedure that other civil cases employed: direct and cross-examination to determine the historical facts upon which the case was based. As the name implies, this sets up any divorce or custody situation as adversarial. High rates of divorce and the accompanying research into the effects of divorce on children caused this system to be questioned in the 1970s.

Not surprisingly, adversarial conditions surrounding divorce have been found to be counter-productive at the least, and harmful at the worst. Research shows that children of divorced parents have higher rates of mental health problems, higher levels of drug use, and lower levels of academic achievement. On the other hand, better outcomes for children of divorce are associated with the reduction of parental conflict, a well-functioning custodial parent, and contact with a non-custodial parent (Schepard 2004).

The New Face of Child Custody Court

These findings have helped to prompt changes in the philosophy of the child custody court, which over the last quarter century has come to look more like child protection courts—charged with protecting children. The mission has changed from one of deciding which parent should receive custody after divorce to seeing how to keep both parents involved in their children's lives (Schepard 2004). This reflects the shifting expectations of fathers, though as previously discussed, it is still women who are doing much of the childcare. Fathers who receive joint custody may find themselves in the position of doing much more childcare than they had been accustomed to, which can also be a challenging shift for the children.

Before this change came about, it was common for parents to share legal custody, but for one parent to have primary physical custody. For example, the mother might have

custody of the children during the week, and they would visit their fathers on weekends. Now the goal of the court in many states, including California, is that both parents have equal physical custody. Children may spend half of the week with one parent and half with the other, or six months with one and six months with the other. Equality is the preferred goal in these cases, regardless of who was the primary caretaker in the relationship. Obviously, each case is examined separately to determine the best interest of the child, but equality is considered the ideal (Comerford). The joint custody trend emerged in the late 1970s; by the early 1980s, the courts began awarding it, in some cases even against the wishes of one of the parents. In the United States, the number of state custody statutes that mention joint custody was only three in 1978 (Comerford 2006). A 2002 survey showed that 42 states now allow courts to authorize joint custody in some form (Elrod and Spector 2002).²²

The shift toward equality in physical time spent with children is part of a new movement in the legal system called “therapeutic justice”, which applies mental health criteria to legal decisions. Therapeutic justice asks if legal interventions are likely to benefit or harm the mental health of the litigants in cases involving persistent social problems, such as child abuse, domestic violence, drug addiction and, more recently, parental conflict following divorce (Schepard 2004). The implications of this movement are that the courts are seeking to find alternate ways of addressing these types of cases, for example, mandating drug abusers to rehabilitation programs, rather than sending them to jail. In the case of child custody, this means avoiding the slandering and fighting that is

²² The United States does not have a uniform national divorce and custody law, unlike England, Canada, and Australia. The organization of the courts and the process for resolving divorce and custody issues differs from state to state and sometimes county to county (Schepard 2004).

encouraged in a courtroom in favor of gentler methods of resolving disputes. Custody disputes are often referred to as battles because of the bitter fighting that can take place over children. Accusations and attempts at discrediting the other parent are often brutal and sometimes unfounded. One Canadian study found that in cases involving a custody or access dispute 12% are considered to be intentionally fabricated, compared with 4% of all cases of reported child maltreatment (Trocmé 2005). Further, a report from the Judicial Council of California found that by 1993, one in three custody cases had been investigated by Child Protective services (Services 1997). There is some perception that a significant portion of these are allegations designed to influence the court's decision. And in fact, three of the nine people I interviewed about divorce situations were involved in custody cases complicated by allegations of abuse.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

With the popularity of therapeutic justice and co-custody came a growing interest in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). This term refers to informal means of resolving conflict in order to better serve the involved parties and achieve a more satisfactory outcome. Given that the aim of the court in modern custody law is to protect the child's wellbeing, the impulse to find alternative, more conciliatory forums for managing custody conflicts seems complementary. The emergence of ADR included a push to use mediators as a primary form of resolving the disputes, as is the case in Alameda County; court-affiliated parent education was also championed by this movement. California was the first state to authorize courts to require parents to go to court mediators in child custody disputes. The use of mediators has become the primary process for child custody

dispute resolution. Courts in California can also mandate parents to parenting classes, and will usually follow a mediator's recommendation that they do so (Schepard 2004).

In Alameda County, parents who are not in agreement over the custody or visitation arrangements with their children must attempt to mediate a parenting plan before having a court hearing. The parenting plan should include when each child is with each parent, including holidays and special days, and how the exchange will occur. It should also address any potential problem areas such as visits with extended family members. In cases where the parents have difficulty communicating amicably, or where domestic violence is involved, the court encourages a very detailed and specific plan.

The mediation is a two step process, beginning with an orientation session, which outlines the purposes and process of mediation and gives parents information about how to help their children through the divorce process. The second step is a mediation session that the parents generally attend together, except in cases of domestic violence. If these steps are taken and the parents are not able to come to an agreement, parents are often asked to attend a class on parent education.

Divorce and Parent Education

The use of education in divorce cases has become very popular in the past 15 years. A survey of U.S. counties conducted once in 1991 and again in 1994 showed that the number of counties that had education programs available increased by 180%. (Blaisure and Geasler 1996). As of 2001, legislation or court rules in 35 states regulate and establish parent education programs; judges are permitted to order parents to attend them. (Erickson and Steegh 2001). In California, by 2001, 40% of the family law courts in the state offered parent education.

In his book on divorce and child custody, law professor and Director of the Hofstra University's Center for Children, Families and the Law, Andrew Schepard, advocates for court-mandated or court-affiliated parent education as a way of making child custody cases less difficult for children. In addition to his belief that education can help children of divorce, Schepard feels that "educational programs send an appropriate social message to divorcing parents—the community has resources to help you cope with the transitions that divorce requires, but in the end you are responsible for parenting your children." (Schepard 2004). He states that the two primary goals of court-affiliated educational programs are "(1) to reduce the risks to children created by divorce-related parental conflict, and (2) to improve the quality of parenting children receive during family reorganization." (Schepard 2004, 68-69).

Evaluations of parent education programs have returned varying results. Parents who have been mandated to take these programs overwhelmingly report that they learn important new information, skills, and attitudes that will help their children in their adjustment to divorce and separation (Deutch 2003). Less clear, however, is the degree to which parent education programs affect the ability of divorcing parents' to communicate with each other. A study evaluating a court-affiliated parenting program in San Diego found that while parents found the class to be helpful and would recommend that other parents take the class, mediators did not see much difference in the parents who took the class and parents who didn't. The mediators reported that there were no differences between the two groups in terms of the effectiveness of the parents' communication regarding the children; the cooperation between parents regarding the

children; the intensity and duration of conflict between parents; or the productivity of the mediation²³ (Services 1999).

Regardless of the inconclusive outcomes, parenting education continues to be looked to as an important resource both for divorcing parents and for parents involved with child welfare. If we can consider both custody cases and child welfare cases in the light of an increased focus on risk assessment and risk management, then this perspective makes sense. However, while parents are frequently referred to parenting classes, in Alameda County there is very little oversight as to the content and teaching style of the classes, resulting in broadly ranging experiences.

Ethnographic Research in Parenting Classes

During fieldwork I had the opportunity to attend three parenting classes run by three different organizations in Alameda County. The first is an adult school that serves mostly Whites and Latinos, the second is a multi-service organization that serves mostly African Americans, and the third is a parenting organization that offers a hotline and counseling as well as classes. In this section I will describe these three organizations and the classes they run in order to provide specific examples of the way in which risk management is being approached through parenting classes. The general idea of mandated parenting classes is that certain parents need to be trained in appropriate parenting practices. Nevertheless, the private and non-profit organizations responsible

²³ The study evaluated a brief, two-session program designed specifically to prepare parents for mediation; this program was attached to the courts. (By contrast, the classes I studied were 12 weeks long, not formally attached to the courts, and not specific to divorcing parents.) It is possible that two weeks is not enough to have an effect on communication practices, and that a longer program would give parents more chance to practice, thereby producing better results.

for giving the classes all have their own criteria regarding class content and teaching style and the county and state do not regulate the class content. A market driven style – the assumption that product meets demand – is applied here to parenting classes.

Easton Adult Education

The first class is a part of a parent education program funded by the California Adult Education Program. It was a twelve week course held on a community college campus on Tuesday evenings.

The umbrella organization is run by two women, Diane and Ruth, who started out almost 20 years ago as parents attending classes. I had a chance to meet with both women together in their small office in a small school building, but primarily Diane answered my questions. Diane had been in business and then stopped working when she had her daughter. When her daughter was about six months old, she explained, “I was feeling very isolated, and I said if I don’t get out of here I am going to go crazy.” She found out about the parenting classes and discovered she could bring her daughter. She said she was skeptical about adult education at first, because she felt she didn’t even have time to read a book. But she found a strong community through the classes, and she has been involved in the program ever since. Ruth similarly got involved as a young mother and went on to become an educator and later an administrator.

The parenting program in Easton, a suburb of Oakland in Alameda County, employs sixteen teachers and all but one of them are part time. The classes in Easton are funded by the California Adult Department of Education, which is a part of the state Department of Education and funds such adult schools with such programs as Adult Literacy, English as a Second Language and Citizenship classes, Parenting, Family and

Consumer Awareness, and Career Technical Awareness. The parenting program collects four dollars per adult enrolled per hour. The program charges a minimal fee to the parents for the class: for the twelve week class, they charge forty dollars. The program also has a state early childhood education grant that is intended to fund parent-child classes in Spanish, to train teachers and to buy materials. This grant was rolled into a second year, because they had trouble getting it off the ground, but it is not intended to be an ongoing source of funding.

Most of the classes offered through this program are attended mainly by stay-at-home mothers or mothers who work part time or in the evenings, because the classes are given during the day. Diane said that one class was offered in the evening, but it had been cancelled this year because the teacher took time off after having a baby. After Diane finished describing the classes I asked her if there were any classes for people who were court mandated.

Once I had reminded her, she described a class offered on Tuesday nights into which they try to funnel “court mandated people.” It is open to parents of children over two, but if people call looking for a class to fulfill a court requirement either through family court or child protective services, this is the one they are sent to. I was struck that this was not a class Diane or Ruth had mentioned before. The class is obviously not one they consider to be part of their core curriculum. I asked if it had a different demographic from their other classes, and Diane assured me that it does.

The parent changes for sure. The parents who come in the day time are choosing something proactive. Ninety-nine % are here for their child and are already thinking proactively about their child. If you are at a time that things are so bad you've lost control, you are not proactive. It could be that you are addictive,

abusive or involved in other criminal activities. (They are often) not even committed enough to their kids to stay for the twelve weeks.²⁴

This negative attitude toward the court mandated clientele was evident among the staff at other programs as well.

This class differs somewhat from the other classes offered by the program in both length and content. It is a twelve week course that covers what Diane called “the nuts and bolts of parenting,” including child development, discipline, encouragement, and communication, among other issues. The classes cover the same topics as other classes offered in the program, but it is more extensive and intensive. The other classes are of shorter duration, perhaps four weeks, and some are just workshops.

What is most remarkable, however, is that there is no standard set by the court. As Diane explains, “There’s a lack of communication. If they would say this is what we would like to see -- instead we say this is what we have.” The mediator or the judge will tell the parent that they need to take a certain number of hours of instruction, and this varies from county to county and client to client. The parents come from various court jurisdictions. “They could have moved from LA -- they say the mediator or judge said I have to take four hours of parenting classes. We think four hours of parenting classes won't do much good. You need more time to really understand.” Parents are given a blank certificate at the beginning of the class, and the teacher initials each session they

²⁴ This is not the feeling the students had about their own participation. Many students actually felt that their being there showed their commitment to their children. This view could be biased, however, because the parents who volunteered to speak with me would likely be more committed to the class than those who did not wish to speak with me about their experience in the class.

have attended²⁵.

Neither the program nor the teacher offers the court any assessment of the parents who have taken the class. “We will not make assessments of parents to say that they have changed in any classes. We will never make any claims. They can take extensive notes and really participate, but who knows what will happen, what will set them off.”

In 2001, the Children and Family Bureau of the Easton Family Court (one of the Alameda courts) approached the Easton Parenting Program and asked them to teach a class at the court house for parents involved in custody mediation. Initially this class was going to be a requirement, but the court found that it was not legal to make it obligatory. Parents, however, are required to attend a one hour orientation session about the mediation process. It is then strongly suggested that they stay and take the parenting segment of the orientation which lasts for an additional two and a half hours.

The teacher of this class, Rona, developed the curriculum herself, focusing on making the transition from spouse to co-parent and how the parents can work together to help their children make this adjustment. She took it into the court and presented it. “The judge was pleased,” she said. “The only thing they added was the child’s bill of rights that they got from another state.” They have since begun to offer this class at three of the six county family courts. Rona teaches the class at the Easton court once a week and another teacher gives it weekly in Spanish.

Because of this connection with the courts, many of the students in Rona’s evening class are there because of child custody cases, although some parents are referred

²⁵ When I began observing the class, the teacher would initial certificates during the break in the middle of class, but she decided to initial at the end so that people would not leave part way through.

through CFS, and some have sought it out on their own.

The Tuesday night class, oriented toward parents sent from the court, typically had about thirty students, fairly evenly divided between men and women. The students tended to be Hispanic and White. The course loosely follows a curriculum called Redirecting Children's Behavior. Rona, introduced this particular curriculum when she took over the class. She asked the man who had been teaching it before if there were a set curricula and he told her she could teach what she wanted. She has now been teaching this program for over ten years. Rona has four children and five grandchildren and she took the class Redirecting Behaviors when she was looking for ways to deal with the difficulties she was encountering as a parent. "It felt correct, felt like I was doing the right thing. They get children to cooperate without reward or punishments. Rather it can be their idea – the peaceful way." Rona's views on child care were gained from over twenty years of running a daycare, in addition to being a mother.

The textbook and accompanying workbook that Rona used in her class were premised on the theories of Rudolf Dreikurs²⁶, an influential Adlerian psychologist. They give very specific examples and exercises to guide parents in implementing these new strategies. The author, Kathryn Kvolz, who bases her book on the teachings of Dreikurs, describes the goal of the book as helping "parents raise self-motivated and responsible

²⁶ The basic premises that Dreikurs took from Adler were that 1) man is a social being and his primary motivation is to belong; 2) all behavior has a purpose; 3) man is a decision-making organism; 4) man does not see reality as it is, but as he perceives it. (Dreikurs, 1972, pp. 8-9) Using these premises, Dreikurs wrote several books aimed at guiding teachers and parents in creating respectful, cooperative relationships with students and children, respectively. By encouraging children in their good behaviors, we teach them the value of their participation. Because children want to please and to belong, he reasoned, they will thrive when they are taught how best to achieve these goals in a positive way.

children, who are able to win another's cooperation, create and maintain close relationships, and work successfully on teams" (Kvols 1998, 7). The topics that Rona used in the book are as follows: Take Care of Yourself; Communication in Families; Encourage Your Child; Which Way to Responsibility; Three Parenting Styles; Why do Children Misbehave?; and Discipline that Teaches Self-Control. In addition to these topics, Rona teaches a session each on learning patterns, stages of development and helping children deal with loss. She is also trying to put together a section on fathering, because she has found that the fathers in her class want help and she has not known what to tell them²⁷.

She has found people to be very receptive to the class, in spite of the fact that many are not there on their own volition. "I get a lot of real positive feedback – people are just amazed. A few simple changes – listening to what your children are saying." This sentiment was echoed by several of her students. One woman volunteered in the middle of class, "This class has really helped me. I have more patience for [my daughter] now. I used to have no patience." Those parents I interviewed who did not like the class all emphasized that it was because they had learned these techniques elsewhere and not because they did not find the class to be effective.

Oakland Family and Youth

The second class I describe was run by the Oakland Family and Youth Organization (OFY). The program is located in West Oakland, a predominately African American neighborhood in Oakland that was once a thriving cultural and economic center. In the 1950's a freeway was built that split West Oakland off from the rest of the

²⁷ The teacher of the third class I describe also was trying to develop a course on fathering because she had been struck by the number of fathers seeking help.

city, and economic decline turned this area, filled with elegant old single family homes into a depressed neighborhood. Located in a beautiful old Victorian building in the middle of a park with tennis courts, a playground and picnic tables, entering the OFY building feels like entering an oasis. In order to reach the offices, you climb a narrow dark staircase that lets you out into a bright office where a receptionist greets you. This gives it a much more service oriented feel than the class-room in a community college where that the Easton class is taught.

Founded in 1968, the organization was operated by the California Youth Authority and the original program functioned as a community parole service for youth offenders. In 1974, the Center changed the program from serving the most serious youth offenders to serve “status offender youth,” or minors under 18 who are considered beyond their parents control and at risk of entering the criminal justice system. The goals of the organization changed to offer the means to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, and to provide youth and their families counseling and community development services. At the time of this study, the organization provided services to over 1,200 youth and their families.

With this model of prevention, the OFY started its parenting program. In 2000, Val was hired to run and expand the program. Val is an incredibly dynamic and fast-moving mother of two. An African-American woman in her 30’s from Oakland, she is deeply committed to the plights of families, and especially young women in Oakland. When she arrived she said she had a vision for a program that could be a viable center of activity for parents, to help them with advocacy, and to support them in navigating the difficulties of being a parent.

The main parenting program is the “The Parenting Skills Development Program (PSDP)”, which specializes in working with parents involved with Child Protective Services who are attempting to reunite with their children, as well as parents who are simply interested in improving their parenting skills. They hold classes at the center twice a week and have formed a variety of partnerships to provide additional classes off site. One such partnership is with a recovery program across the street from OFY, which sends a number of clients to the classes held at the center. Other partnerships are with local high schools and middle schools, where the organizations provide classes to teenage mothers and other classes to encourage young girls to stay in school and not become teenage mothers.

Another program run through the parenting department is specifically aimed at child abuse prevention. It provides services for families who have a history of domestic violence and or a CPS case history. Through this program, families can receive individual or family therapy, attend the parenting classes, case management, group therapy and in some cases, home visits.

All of these programs were developed and implemented by Val, which is a testament to her energy and enthusiasm. Many of the services overlap, but she has managed to attract a variety of funding sources as well as create alliances with other organizations by tailoring programs to various interested parties. The organization has a very limited budget and staff, however, and sometimes struggles to keep these programs going.

After meeting with Val and learning more about the program, I began volunteering at the organization once a week to help with administrative duties and

attending a weekly class held at the center. Typically between five and ten students, mostly women, White, Black and Hispanic, attended the class. Some were students who were living across the street at a drug rehabilitation center, some were referred through their case worker in child protective services, and others had simply found the class in the phone book or through a list of parenting classes in the area.

When she arrived at OFY, Val explained, she had set about developing a parenting curricula that would not invalidate how the program's targeted parents were raising their children, but would integrate it with new information. She built the curricula from the Internet, parenting magazines, personal experience, books and information from other organizations. The resulting curriculum was contained in an overflowing binder full of articles and information, as well as in a small library of books and videos. The binder had wide ranging information on a variety of topics, including stages of development, challenging behaviors, alternative discipline methods, stress management, diet and nutrition, as well as information on available community resources.

Val had also integrated a "Parenting Affirmation"²⁸ into the program. It was read at the beginning (and sometimes the end) of every class.

²⁸ I have found other examples of parenting affirmations, generally in conjunction with a spiritual, usually Christian, parenting approach.

PARENTING AFFIRMATION



- **I AKNOWLEDGE THAT THE JOB OF PARENTING IS A LIFE-LONG LEARNING PROCESS.**
- **I HAVE THE STRENGTH TO BE PATIENT WITH MYSELF AND WITH MY CHILDREN.**
- **I AM OPEN TO DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT MYSELF FOR THE BENEFIT OF MY CHILDREN.**
- **I HAVE THE POWER TO RECOGNIZE WHEN I NEED HELP AND THE ABILITY TO ASK FOR IT.**
- **I UNDERSTAND THAT PARENTS NEED TIME-OUTS, TOO.**
- **I AM WILLING TO DEVOTE THE TIME THAT IS NECESSARY TO BE ACTIVE IN MY CHILD'S LIFE.**
- **I UNDERSTAND THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL TO LAUGH AND HAVE FUN WITH MY CHILDREN.**

The affirmation brings to mind similar recitations in twelve-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous. This could be a purposeful connection, as many of the clients are recovering addicts. It also seems to reflect a spirituality that would likely resonate with the largely Africa-American clientele of the OYF. West Oakland has an active religious community and many of the people I spoke to through the OYF referred to their faith.

The information that Val gathered included a lot of topics similar to those presented by Rona in her class, such as information on stress management, being a role model for your children, and promoting a child's self-esteem. In spite of these similarities, however, the delivery of the class was very different.

During the five month period that I volunteered and attended classes at OYF they had three different class facilitators²⁹. The organization had little funding, as previously discussed, and there was a lot of pressure for facilitators to help the department keep up its many partnerships and commitments. Additionally, Val (who did not facilitate the parenting classes herself) was a very hands on and exacting leader with high expectations for her employees. This combination resulted in a somewhat difficult working environment for a low paying position.

The first facilitator who was there when I arrived had been teaching at OYF for about a year. She did some administrative work at the program, but was leaving because the program wanted a full time facilitator/administrator and she wanted to have more flexibility. She was a single mother and a burlesque dancer. She also taught workshops in other organizations, including one for doctors on how to perform breast exams. This facilitator was quite dynamic and used her experience to create an unstructured environment of intimacy and sharing with the students. The class' small size also contributed to this atmosphere akin to group therapy, where participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences. Several of the parents had finished their required number of classes, yet continued to attend the class because they liked the support it gave them. I was only able to attend two classes that she facilitated before she left.

²⁹ OFY used the term facilitator rather than teacher. Indeed, the classes were much smaller and generally involved more discussion and "sharing" than the Easton class.

After she left, the organization advertised on Craigslist and found a young college graduate, Brianna, originally from West Africa. She was very professional and enthusiastic, but lacked any personal experience as a parent and as a teacher. Her classes were quite structured and organized, allowing less time for sharing and addressing students' particular concerns. She developed an agenda for each class based on information in the parenting binder, combined with her own Internet research.

Each class would begin with the Parenting Affirmations, followed by journal writing, a discussion of the selected topic for the day, a related activity and ending again with the Parenting Affirmations. While the topics and related activities were most often very relevant and interesting, Brianna's lack of experience meant that the discussions were quite general and she was not able to give specific feedback when parents had specific questions or concerns about child rearing. As with any teacher or facilitator, her teaching style and her reactions likely reflected her upbringing and education.

After a couple of months, Val informed me that she was going to fire this facilitator because people had complained that she was judgmental. I believe that this perception had largely to do with a difference in educational and class status as well as cultural differences. The next facilitator, Marina, who started just a few weeks before I stopped attending classes was a mother of four, who also lacked experience leading groups, but brought practical experience as a mother. The atmosphere in the class again shifted dramatically.

One woman I interviewed, Mary, summed it up neatly:

[Brianna] -- I like the way she structured the class. *But sometimes* she would say stuff and I would keep myself from laughing because she doesn't have kids. She was professional and I liked that she always had materials to

share... The second teacher - she is more like a part of the group than the teacher. She is more -OK, I am not a teacher. More real in terms of that. My struggles are your struggles. Her class is not as focused as the first teacher.

The different styles of these facilitators was not an intentional change in the approach to the classes, but a result of the backgrounds of the facilitators themselves.

Helping Parents

This last class I describe is given by the best known of all of the organizations. It is also the one I got to know the least. The organization was initially not receptive to my observing classes because they felt it would be a violation of the participants' privacy and that it might disrupt their experience. The representative of the organization with whom I met, Jamie, did say that there was a possibility that I could distribute a survey in class. Because I had not been able to recruit as many parents to interview as I had hoped through the first two classes, I returned to Helping Parents to ask if I might be able to present my project in one of the classes, and ask if anyone would be interested in doing an interview with me. I was given permission and attended one class to give my presentation. In addition, I interviewed Jamie and Florence, the teachers of the class I attended, to get more information about the class and the organization.

My experience with this class was also different, because this was the only class I attended while I was pregnant. I am sure I was now listening to the class differently, and I was received differently, as well. I felt less like a mere observer and researcher.

The organization offers a hotline, counseling and child care respite to parents and foster parents who are having difficulties, in addition to parenting classes. They are funded mainly through the county with a community probation contract to fund parents of teens. They had some state early childhood education money for one term, but it was

subsequently cut. They also had a grant from the California First Five initiative for children's mental health. I will describe this program in detail in Chapter 4. They receive some money through Foster Care to provide support to foster parents. Additionally they have a contract with Children and Family Services. Many CFS clients are referred to Helping Parents and the parents do not have to pay. The organization had over one hundred parents referred from CFS last year. Other parents in the classes pay between one and three dollars per class. There is a mix of clients in the class, in spite of this contract, of some parents who are self referred or referred from family court, as well as some referred by CFS.

Because many clients come from CFS, many in the classes are mandated to attend. Jamie described the clients from CFS, "They come with a whole lot of attitudes about parenting, they think that they do it right and if children are acting out they need to be slapped or hit. They don't have good parenting skills and they haven't been parented well themselves. They have a variety of issues that contribute including low income, stress. Many are addicted to one substance or another and many have been involved in domestic violence and some have health problems."

Since Helping Parents has a contract with CFS, the organization actually designed its curricula in conjunction with CFS. CFS wanted a twelve week course covering communication, understanding children's behavior, stress and anger management and positive discipline. The curriculum is contained in a binder, but the teachers add to it as they go. And as Jamie emphasizes, "The curriculum is written up, but if there is a problem in the room you have to handle it. It is more important to work through what is going on in the room than to cover all the things written up. You have to take care of the

client.”

The class I attended reflected this sentiment. It was a large class, at least thirty clients, held in a church basement in Oakland. The class was mostly African American with an even mix of men and women. Child care was provided for those who needed it.³⁰ A lot of the people in the class were angry about having to be there and freely expressed their frustration. Florence, a tall White woman with a kind yet imposing presence, managed the classroom skillfully. She has been involved with parenting education of one kind or another for over twenty years and has two children of her own, whom she raised on her own after her divorce when her children were young.

The topic of the class was stress management, and she steered people back to the topic after listening to their concerns and frustrations. This style is difficult in a large classroom, because there are a lot of people giving input. She managed to focus the class with worksheets and exercises. People were asked to complete a sheet about stress in their lives to show them how much pressure they are actually under. She then discussed different ways of handling stress. When Jamie told me about stress management, she noted that it was important to teach people ways of handling stress. “Some will say, I bought myself a truck. That is not what we mean – that might bring more stress. Take a bath, take a walk, breathe, read a book. Anything.”

In order to evaluate their program, Helping Parents asks the students to do self reports, and they do some pre and post testing. The pre and post tests include one called

³⁰ This was a point that a number of people I interviewed had concerns with. This was the only class of those I attended that had child care. There were frequently children in the OFY class with their parents.

“Parental Acceptance and Rejection” as well as a vulnerability and stress questionnaire³¹.

Conclusion

In this era of risk assessment and personal accountability, parenting classes are being increasingly used as tools with parents who fall under the supervision of the courts and whose children are considered at risk. The classes offer (or require) the opportunity for these parents to acquire child-rearing practices and knowledge that fall in line with the “norm,” as represented by the White middle class. Once the court has mandated these classes, however, the responsibility is shifted on to the parents themselves and the private organizations that offer the classes. The classes vary greatly in quality, content, and pedagogical style, and the court has no means for evaluating what the parents have experienced or gained from the classes they attend.

This situation is not uncommon at a time when social services are under-valued and under-funded, and when the private sector is engaged to provide public services. Following incidents of child abuse the media is outraged at the government’s failure to protect children. Parenting classes are an example of a recourse the government can take to demonstrate that it is attempting to address the problem. In general, however, public funding for social services has been eroded in California, as elsewhere in the United States. Although the public demands accountability, funding is not available for oversight, program development and evaluation.

The ad hoc nature of parenting classes in Alameda County is evident from the preceding descriptions of the classes I observed. Rona developed the curriculum both for her Tuesday evening class and the class given in the court house. In both cases, though

³¹ I did not have access to the results of their evaluations.

the classes were intended for people referred by the courts, there was little guidance given regarding what should be covered in the class. At OFY, Val developed the entire curriculum on her own, based on her own experience, internet research, and books she had read. The style of the class shifted dramatically based on who was facilitating it. Helping Parents had developed their curriculum in conjunction with CFS, however, the teachers were free to make changes as they saw fit. These examples do not necessarily mean that the classes are inadequate. In fact, many teachers would argue that with less oversight they are free to teach in more creative and dynamic ways. However, this requires that the teachers be experienced and able to successfully design classes and curriculum that will resonate with and reach parents. In the case of OFY, the dynamics of the classes changed not because of intentional pedagogical decisions, but because of the experiences and backgrounds of the facilitators.

If the government were to articulate an ideal model of parenting, it would need to regulate the curriculum of the parenting classes it requires. Instead, the information is subject to the trends and hegemonic models that govern contemporary parenting knowledge and practices.

Chapter 4:

California's Campaign for Good Parenting

Introduction

“Your choices shape their chances,” is the striking slogan flashed on television commercials and billboards throughout California, encouraging parents and guardians to talk and read to their young children, feed them nutritiously and encourage them to exercise. New parents are sent home with kits that include videos, brochures and books “that translate emerging science about the importance of the early years into practical information parents can incorporate into their daily lives.”³² Counties offer an array of services for children under the age of five ranging from health care and parenting classes to child care programs.

This ambitious campaign is a part of a program called First 5, which channels money drawn from a tax on tobacco to fund programs on any and all aspects of child development in the First 5 years of life, with an overarching focus on preparing children to succeed in school. The focus on scientific research is in keeping with our society's trust in the authority of science and medicine; and a desire to spread this scientifically based information is central to this California state program. The material from this program found its way into the classes that I attended on an indirect level – exposure to the well publicized campaigns – but also directly, in the form of videos shown in the classroom.

³² Quoted from a description for service providers in Sacramento County of the Kit for New Parents.

This chapter describes First 5 as an example of parenting education being carried out statewide. At first glance, this program offers a means of examining the state's ideal vision of parenting. However, after taking into account the winding path that led to this program's installment, the picture gets more complicated. I use this program first as an example of the kind of parenting being promoted, and the ways in which the authority derived from scientific and medical discourse is used to promote specific values and social priorities. Additionally, I use it as an example of a product of governmentality, in which the state is one key structure of power, but so too are many other institutions, social groups, and relationships locally³³.

In Part 1 of this chapter I portray the underpinnings of the First 5 program: an influential report generated by the Carnegie Corporation about the developmental importance of the first years of life, and the scientific research the report was premised on. I go into detail about the science, because it has been used to justify much hand-wringing over children's "optimal development." In Part 2, I describe the First 5 program itself, focusing on the parent education campaign. Finally, in Part 3, I describe the process by which First 5 came together to promote specific hegemonic ideas. I place this discussion in the context of California's dwindling social services, rapidly changing demographic, and rampant direct democracy.

Part 1: Evolution of the First 5 Program

In 1997, California voters were presented with Proposition 10, which would place a fifty cent tax on each pack of cigarettes sold in the state. Eighty percent of the estimated

³³ I should note that there is a growing trend to taking children's "agency" into account in designing and evaluating programs, though not specifically in the case of First 5. See for example (Mason and Fattore 2005) or (Panter-Brick 2002).

\$700 million dollars earned would be divided amongst the 58 counties according to the percentage of the state's births that each county reported. Each county would have an independent commission that would determine how their allotted funds would be spent. The remaining 20% would go to administration and various state programs, eventually including Kits for New Parents and both anti-smoking and parenting ad campaigns. Voters narrowly approved the measure, and First 5 began the following year.

Proposition 10 was heavily backed by Hollywood producer and actor Rob Reiner, who took a strong interest in communicating to parents the importance of the early years to their children's development. Reiner was part of a rapidly growing group of people in the mid-1990's interested in what neurobiology could contribute to our understanding of child development. In 1994 the Carnegie Corporation released a report entitled, Starting Points, which sparked intense and sustained media coverage, unusual for a foundation-supported policy report (Bruer 1999). Reiner used his considerable contacts and influence to garner support on national and state levels for this cause and was largely responsible for the passage of Proposition 10.

The interest and support that was funneled into implementing policies based on brain research is notable for a couple of reasons. The brain research that is most frequently referred to is not new; in fact much of it was decades old. Also, the driving purpose behind First 5 is to help California's children learn the skills necessary to succeed in school. While there is interesting scientific material available about how the brain develops, it cannot yet tell us how to optimize the brain's potential for learning³⁴. What it can tell us with more certainty is that the brain's development can suffer under

³⁴ Associational research does show connections between, for example, exposing children to reading early on and later success in school (Risley)

conditions of extreme neglect and deprivation (Bruer 1999) (Halfon, et al. 2001). One of the reasons Starting Points may have generated so much interest was because it tapped into a prevailing sentiment about the importance of parents to be knowledgeable about, invested in, and responsible for their children's development and well being. As public funding and support for services and programs such as welfare or child care have declined, the responsibility has shifted onto the individual and the family unit. Interestingly, while the First 5 literature does contain language promoting an individualistic approach to parenting, as the "Your choices shape their chances" slogan indicates, it also contains elements of a progressive background agenda. Most notably, the state commission has adopted promotion of universally available health care as one of its approaches to change the state systems that should be supporting children. Nevertheless, almost ten years after passing Prop. 10, universal health care has not been accomplished, but programs targeting individual parents prevail.

Preschoolers and Their Brains

The Carnegie Corporation report, Starting Points, was released in 1994 to a very receptive public. Because of the influence it had over the development and implementation of First 5, the report and its foundational assumptions thus deserve examination, especially because the focus on brain research and child development had been appearing in parenting magazines and educational literature for sometime. According to John Bruer, author of the Myth of the First Three Years, and president of the James S. McDonnell Foundation, which funds research in brain science and

education, this report and the resulting media coverage has brought the issue to national prominence (Bruer 1999).

The report was part of a growing trend over the last fifteen years to point out the importance of brain development in children under the age of three. Products encouraged by, and spurring on, this trend provide pregnant women with “education curricula” for their babies in utero, and videos, books and toys designed to maximize babies’ learning potential. The founder of Baby Einstein, perhaps the best known of companies capitalizing on this trend, was recognized in President George W. Bush’s 2007 State of the Union address as a representative of “the great enterprising spirit of America.” The \$200 million dollar business develops and markets primarily videos, books, and flashcards for babies and toddlers to introduce them to art, music and language. The state of Georgia in 1999 even began to distribute Mozart cds to parents taking babies home from the hospital.

Baby Einstein and other companies providing educational tools for babies and toddlers tap into a market of parents who are very anxious about maximizing their children’s potential. Children of middle-class families, especially (Lareau 2003), are often engaged in an ongoing series of structured activities from the time they are very young in order to ensure that they have every opportunity to excel, based on recommendations drawn largely from brain research.

In his discussion about the societal and political shifts provoked by gene research and molecular biology, Nikolas Rose suggests that the possibilities opened up by biological research on the molecular level can give an opportunity to hope for a chance to eliminate adverse genetic health conditions or other debilitating birth defects. While he is

referring primarily to the potential for genetic research to eliminate crippling or deadly diseases, he extends this idea to the possibility for more general benefits (Rose 2007). This has to do not only with “optimizing” our children at birth, but also “optimizing” ourselves – our athletic performance, our intelligence and concentration, our looks. Medical or genetic interventions can be used to make people healthier, more attractive, or more sexually active, to name a few. One could apply his theory more generally to the hope that parents place on biology, in this case brain research, to give them answers about how to maximize children’s potential. The word potential is found repeatedly in both the Carnegie report and the First 5 literature, as I will discuss below.

The report stresses social conditions that affect children, such as inadequate prenatal care, isolated parents, substandard child care, poverty, and insufficient attention given to children by their parents and caregivers. However, it draws on brain research to justify its concentration on children under the age of three, and to provide authority to its message. This pattern of invoking brain research to give credence to discussions about social concerns is one that is echoed in media coverage following the report. First 5 also forefronts science in its mission statement, using it to validate interest in the state’s youngest children.³⁵

In spite of claims that it is based on brain research, the Carnegie Report dedicates only three pages out of 132 to discussing findings in brain research that have important

³⁵ The description of First 5 California on its website (<http://www.ccfc.ca.gov/default.asp>) reads: “Research shows that a child’s brain develops most dramatically during the early years of life. We’ve worked hard to educate parents and caregivers about the important role they play in their children’s first years. First 5 California’s programs are designed to meet its goal of ensuring more children are born healthy, raised in nurturing homes and ready to succeed in school.”

implications for the first three years of life. It identifies “five key findings that should inform policymakers’ deliberations on early childhood policy” (Children 1994, 7). The first finding mentioned is that very rapid and extensive brain development occurs during the prenatal period and first year of life. Secondly, brain development is more vulnerable to environmental influence than previously suspected. The influence of early environment on brain development is long lasting and, fourth, the environment not only affects the number of brain cells and connections among them, but also the nature of these connections. Finally, new scientific evidence is cited for the negative impact of early stress on brain function. I will come back to these points in more detail.

Having touched on the scientific rationale, the report goes on to make a series of policy suggestions to encourage healthy early childhood development in the United States. It recommends promoting responsible parenthood; guaranteeing quality child care choices; ensuring good health and protection; and mobilizing the community to support young children and their families. These recommendations operate on a number of levels, ranging from individual to community, state to federal. Within these four areas are recommendations that follow the individualistic model, especially parent education, which is mentioned under several different headings. However, it also promotes a number of progressive policy reforms, including expanding maternity leave,³⁶ providing health care to infants and toddlers, making affordable child care available, and providing

³⁶ The United States does not provide maternity leave, but there is a Family and Medical Leave Act that was passed in 1993 that is meant to guarantee that women who take 12 weeks unpaid to care for a family member, whether it be a new baby or someone who is ill, do not lose their job. This report proposes extending the time allowed to 4-6 months and providing partial wage replacement.

universal preschool.³⁷ Some of these ideas made it into the First 5 programming. For example, San Mateo County in California instituted universal preschool. Unfortunately, the media coverage of the Carnegie Report focused more intensively on misinterpretations of the scientific data, such as the idea that if you do not teach your child everything possible during the first three years you will never be able to recuperate that opportunity (Halfon, et al. 2001). As we will see, the neurobiological research provides limited information that can actually be used by parents or educators.

Productive Citizens

The underlying focus in the Carnegie report is on getting children prepared to perform on par with their peers as soon as they enter kindergarten. The risks and concerns outlined make it more likely that children are “unprepared to learn” when they start school. The literature on First 5 is also full of language about children realizing their potential, and being “ready to learn.”³⁸ This interest in children being able to get as much as they can out of their education is explicitly linked to their ability to be productive members of society. The following excerpt from Starting Points exemplifies this productivity discourse.

There are, of course, other than economic reasons for protecting young children and their families. Children need to be treasured for their own sake, not merely for what they do in the labor market when they are grown. But the issues of “human capital” – the combined skills, knowledge and ideas of a nation’s people – are real. For most of this century, increased productivity rates have been mainly attributable to improvements in human capital. In the electronic age, this is more true than ever... America’s business

³⁷ It should not be surprising, perhaps, that the task force gave such recommendations given that it was made up of many academics and researchers.

³⁸ I will address expectations for parents and children in terms of schooling and education more thoroughly in a later chapter.

and political leaders are understandably worried about the nation's children and its educational system.

The Carnegie Corporation was created by Andrew Carnegie, a steel industry mogul at the turn of the century. Given its origin, it is not surprising that the Corporation task force might be interested in the country's workforce. However, this concern coincides with similarly motivated emphases on public education in the United States in general, and California in particular. The question is what are the characteristics of the productive citizen envisioned here? Certainly there is a need for a workforce able to contend with and advance rapidly changing technology. But there continues to be a need for workers in the service economy, and many of these jobs do not require high levels of education (Katz 2004). Education is relied on as the great American equalizer, hailed as holding the key to providing equal opportunities for children from all backgrounds, regardless of their economic and social position (Katz 1986). These goals of preparing children for a successful educational career are buried in this campaign under scientific discourse.

The Science

In this section I examine the research underlying First 5 and the Carnegie Report. For the most part, I base my account on a report written by scholars at UCLA who were contracted to provide a series of reports "designed to support the implementation of Proposition 10: The California Children and Families Act. Each installment is written by a team of experts and provides comprehensive and authoritative information on critical

issues concerning young children and families in California.”³⁹ The particular report I refer to is, “Brain Development in Early Childhood” (Halfon, et al. 2001).⁴⁰ I will summarize this research in order to show the way in which findings are construed in order to support specific viewpoints and values. Halfon et al. identify four key findings in neurobiology that apply to early childhood development. I draw primarily on his report, supplementing his information with some other sources. The areas to be addressed are (1) brain development in early years, (2) effects of experience on brain development, (3) the timing of brain development, and (4) the influence of relationships on social and emotional functioning.

Brain Development in Early Years

Scientists have understood since the 1960’s that children are born with about the same number of neurons as contained in an adult brain.⁴¹ However, babies’ brains have only about 25% of the volume of adult brains (Blinkov and Glezer 1968). The volume increases with the addition of connections between neurons called synapses and insulating cells called myelin. In the first three years of life, the number of synaptic connections in the brain doubles, and then, by about age three, synapses will begin to be eliminated selectively. By the time the individual is 15, they will have decreased the

³⁹ This is the description included on the cover of the report.

⁴⁰ The paper reviews research about early childhood brain development and is careful about cautioning against extrapolating from the research described to make predictions about optimal conditions for development. Despite their cautions, however, the conclusions go on to advocate talking, reading, and singing to children daily, among other suggestions.

⁴¹ However, there has been recent research indicating that parts of the monkey cortex in charge of memory formation and consolidation (the hippocampus) may grow new brain cells daily (Halfon, et al. 2001).

number of synaptic connections they had developed by age three by about half, and the number will remain stable from that point on (Huttenlocher 1984).

This decrease in synaptic density creates order in the brain. People with too many synaptic connections often have behavioral or cognitive disorders (Woo, et al. 1997). There has been some popular extrapolation from this suggesting that because there is such intense synaptic connectivity occurring in the first few years, which later drops off, most learning must happen at this time. More synaptic connections do not correlate with higher intelligence or better understanding. In fact, we learn more and learn to think more abstractly as we hit adolescence, the period in which the most synaptic connections are being lost (Halfon, et al. 2001).

Effects of Experience on Brain Development

The second major point Halfon and his colleagues emphasize is that a child's brain is not completely preprogrammed, but can be influenced by the child's experience. Some neural connections governing such basic bodily functions as breathing and heart rate are genetically programmed; however, others involving such functions as memory and learning are "sculpted and modified" by experience (Halfon, et al. 2001, 4).

A certain amount of synaptic firing, leading to the formation of connections is spontaneous. For example, neurons that are triggered at the same time will connect to one another (Penn and Shatz 1999). Other connections are made because they are triggered by external stimuli. This type of neural activity is referred to as sensory-driven. "Because neurons that are activated by a particular stimulus most likely have a role to play in receiving, processing and responding to it, and because cells that are activated at

the same time become connected, sensory-driven neural activity drives the circuitry in a young child's brain toward increasing organization" (Halfon, et al. 2001, 4-5).

Much of this information comes from studies of animals. One study of rats indicates that rats raised in an enriched environment had 30% greater synaptic density in their cerebral cortexes than those in unenriched environments (Black, et al. 1990), (Diamond 1990). In this case, an enriched environment refers to mazes and visual stimuli. Another study with kittens indicates that experiences also shape which connections will be eliminated. Kittens deprived of visual stimuli in one eye for a short time early in life permanently lost the ability to see out of that eye, indicating that the region of the brain responsible for visual perception was never encouraged to grow and maintain connections (Hubel and Wiesel 1971). Based on this last study, researchers found that children under 18 months of age who have cataracts that are left untreated can have a dramatic and permanent loss of visual acuity in the eye (Boothe, et al. 1985).

One study that has been cited repeatedly to indicate the importance of early stimulation and enrichment involves institutionalized Romanian children who had been deprived of appropriate interaction early in life and showed signs of serious developmental impairments prior to adoption. The extent of the deprivation was indeed extreme. This quote gives some idea of the conditions:

The environment was characterised by a room of 20–30 silent children (McMullan 1992) who spent 20 out of 24 hours in their cribs, often rocking back and forth on their hands and knees, or shifting from foot to foot while standing holding on to their crib railings (Ames and Carter 1992). The walls were not decorated and the children did not have toys of their own (Ames 1990). The caretaker-to-child ratio for infants and toddlers ranged from 1:10 to 1:20 and the routine was rigid and set to the caretakers' schedule (McMullan 1992). Little interaction took place between caretaker and children at any time. For example, children up to 2 years of

age received all their food from a propped or self-held bottle (Ames and Carter 1992). (Fisher, et al. 1997, 68)

The children were used as examples of children having experienced extreme deprivation in the first months of life (Rutter 1998); (O'Connor, et al. 2000). The children adopted before six months of age caught up with their peers almost completely. Those adopted after six months made considerable progress, but did continue to have lower cognitive scores and general developmental impairment compared with the children adopted earlier.

These studies all suggest that severe deprivation early in life can have lasting effects on the brain. And while the rat study indicates that living in an enriched environment does have an effect on the brain, it does not show that unusual or excess stimulations will cause the brain to develop more quickly or have greater intellectual capacity. Many have drawn on this study to promote exposing children to as much stimulation as possible under the false assumption that more is better. The Baby Einstein phenomenon discussed earlier draws on this very assumption. Building on this patchwork of studies, experts promote the idea that children must have constant educational stimulation to optimize a child's development. However, this is debatable. Psychology professor Jerome Bruner responded to this perception in a review of John Bruer's book, "most kids have plenty of stimulation, and there is no credible evidence that higher-pressure, more 'enriched' early environments produce 'good' effects in the sense that drastically deprived ones produce bad effects" (Bruner 2000, 30).

The Timing of Experiences

The development of specific areas of the brain, each dedicated to a particular set of abilities or behaviors, become connected to other brain regions at different times. The

most basic functions such as breath and heart function are wired and stabilized right away, and other functions such as vision, hearing, and language, follow. It appears that there are “critical periods” and “sensitive periods” of development for the different areas. Critical periods, which are characterized by an abrupt onset of development of a specific area, followed by an abrupt ending of development, is relatively uncommon. Most brain functions have sensitive periods, indicating that there is an abrupt beginning to the development, which can then last for years, followed by a gradual decline in that area’s ability to develop. Many of these sensitive periods appear to last well into adulthood (Halfon, et al. 2001).

The kitten study described above is an example of a critical period for development. Another study showed that newborn rats exposed to stress as babies, such as being handled by humans, learned early on to have more effective neural control over the response to stress as adults when compared to rats not handled early in life (Cynader and Frost 1999). From this study is derived the possibility that responses to stress are learned at an early age, though the connections to human behavior can only be inferred (Halfon, et al. 2001).

Studies involving the development of language also testify to the importance of specific periods for development. For example, one month-old Japanese and American infants were both able to distinguish between the English sounds of L and R. Five months later, the Japanese infants were no longer able to hear this distinction, indicating that the ability to distinguish phonemes that are not in a child’s native language gradually decreases as the child ages (Kuhl 1997). That said, Japanese children and adults can

learn to hear this difference, effectively reprogramming their neural connections through focused study (McClelland 1999).

It does not appear that these critical periods require any extraordinary action in order to assure proper development. As Halfon et al. explain, “The brain plasticity that occurs during critical periods – enabling the development of abilities such as vision, hearing and the capacity for language – has been called ‘experience expectant,’ because it is responsive to stimuli that are so common in human life that they are practically guaranteed to be available” (Halfon, et al. 2001, 7). What this research does indicate is that if a young child has a health problem such as cataracts or chronic ear infections, the problems is best attended to earlier.

Other abilities such as learning a new language and improving native language vocabulary, or learning an instrument are a type of brain plasticity called “experience dependent.” These abilities rely on more focused attention and stimulation: experiences that are not necessarily available to everyone. Literacy, for example, relies on a complex set of skills that can be encouraged by being read to daily or being enrolled in early childhood education. Halfon and his colleagues note, “Thus, from a policy standpoint, the goal is to ensure not only that all children develop functional sensory and motor skills, but that they are exposed to the experiences and social interactions that are thought to encourage the underlying experience-dependent neural foundation upon which literacy and other abilities can be built” (Halfon, et al. 2001, 8). It is interesting that the investigators draw this point out here in talking about sensitive and critical periods, because, as they explain, these functions are developed during sensitive periods that are open for a much longer period of time, if not for a person’s whole life. In other words,

there is no basis in the brain research to indicate that it is better to learn to read at age four as opposed to age seven or eight. The researchers in fact acknowledge, “What constitutes optimal experiences for the development of cognitive, emotional or musical abilities has not yet been determined and is the subject of intense research” (Halfon, et al. 2001, 8).

Relationships’ Influence on Social and Emotional Functioning

At this point the authors switch from discussing neurobiology to psychology, despite statements that there is no known connection between neurobiology and psychology. They then describe the importance of relationships on children’s social and emotional functioning. While there is nothing inherently wrong in drawing on psychological research to discuss child development, in fact most child development research is based on psychology, the report is titled “Brain Research in Early Childhood,” and the discussion about attachment is included under a section called, “What do we know about brain research?” This slippage indicates the ways in which the language of neurobiology, which seems to trump psychology in terms of credibility, is folded into discussions of child development to provide authority to specific view points.

This section of the report is primarily focused on the protective nature of a “safe and secure” relationship, stating that one of the greatest predictors of social and emotional outcomes is a young child’s relationship with his or her primary caretaker (Sroufe 1988). This attachment relationship develops when a baby is between 6 and 18 months of age. Children learn to regulate their responses to stimuli based on their perception of their caregiver’s response (Fox 1998). If the child feels secure, he or she relies on the caregiver to model responses. If the relationship is not secure, because the

caregiver exhibits inappropriate, inconsistent or ineffective behavior, the child may not learn to regulate stress effectively (Schoore 1996).

Children of mothers who experience severe depression are said to be at risk for insecure attachment and prolonged exposure to stress because the mothers can be either more controlling or less attentive and engaged. Brain wave recordings (electroencephalographic) of children of depressed mothers show more activity in the frontal brain region when expressing negative emotions than children of non-depressed mothers, indicating that the children are attempting to regulate their negative reaction. These children tend to be more irritable and display sadness and anger more frequently. Infants of depressed mothers have also been found to have higher and more persistently elevated levels of cortisol, a hormone related to stress, than infants of non-depressed mothers (Dawson, et al. 1994). One interpretation of the elevated levels of cortisol is that the infants perceive a lack of control over their environment, which in turn impairs their ability to cope with stress. Another interpretation is that persistently elevated levels of cortisol are linked to an atrophy of the hippocampus, the region of the brain involved with memory and learning (Sapolsky 1996).

While these studies all concentrated on the negative effect of an insecure relationship, others show that a secure relationship can have a protective effect. In one study, rhesus monkeys intentionally bred to be highly reactive were raised by unusually nurturing foster mothers for six months. These monkeys were more likely to explore their environment and had less exaggerated responses to minor changes in their environment than those raised by their biological mothers. The fostered monkeys showed even more tendency to explore and less stress during weaning than monkeys with

a normal range of reactivity (Suomi 1987). Once the monkeys were removed from their foster mothers, they were especially adept at developing relationships with other monkeys and maintained top positions in their group's hierarchies (Suomi 1991).

Implications

There is no universal agreement about the importance of capitalizing on these first few years to teach a child as much as possible. John Bruer believes that the expectations placed on parents resulting from the emphasis on early childhood brain development are unrealistic and unscientific. "It's not as if early childhood isn't important. It is. But it's really unfortunate that thinking about how we should spend resources for young children can go on, and really ignore or misrepresent early childhood development. For very commendable reasons, people think we should do more for children, but to do it, they've created a scientific fiction," he told the Los Angeles Times. (Adato 2002) "Brain science has nothing to say about what happens to babies' brains when parents read to them. There's nothing wrong with reading, but in other cultures they're not as concerned with it as we are. We have to be careful in our attempts to use biology to justify our values. Human children thrive under a great variety of social and cultural conditions. Yes, kids should be ready to read when they start school. But starting at age 7 is not a biological constraint"(Adato 2002)⁴².

It is true, he contends, that children can experience negative effects if they live in an inadequately secure and nurturing environment, for example if they are abused or

⁴² Schieffelin and Ochs have done interesting work in language socialization across cultures and the ways in which cultural values are taught through the complex process of language acquisition and learning verbal interactions (Schieffelin 1986).

severely neglected. But the question becomes, what are the values that are being justified by biology?

In her speech opening a 1997 White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning: What New Research Tells Us About Our Youngest Children, Hillary Clinton emphasized the importance of parent's actions in these early years, stating brain science confirms "that a song a father sings to his child in the morning, or a story that a mother reads to her child before bed, helps lay the foundation for a child's life, in turn, for our nations' future" (Quoted in (Bruer 1999, 4)). This is an example of how brain research is misinterpreted to promote specific culturally valued practices in the name of science. While it may be true that reading and singing help a child to develop the language skills that have been prioritized in the United States as critical to "school readiness," there is no neurobiology showing that a child's brain develops better if that child is read and sung to in the first three years.

Moving a step further, Clinton added the questionable statement that children's earliest experiences "can determine whether children will grow up to be peaceful or violent citizens, focused or undisciplined workers, attentive or detached parents themselves" (quoted in (Bruer, 1999, 5)). Likewise, Reiner spoke at this conference and emphasized the importance of these years to our society. "If we want to have a real significant impact, not only on children's success in school and later on in life, healthy relationships, but also an impact of reduction in crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, welfare, homelessness, and a variety of other social ills, we are going to have to address the first three years of life." The connection between early child development and violence or homelessness has certainly never been established. Scientific authority is

being used in these examples to promote specific parenting ideals by making questionable links between social ills and early brain development.

Building on the work of Jerome Kagan (1998) Bruer traces this type of thinking back to arguments about infant determinism. As the role of bourgeois women in 18th century Europe changed to allow more free time to dedicate to raising children, they assumed the role of ensuring the success of their infants. They came to believe that a mother's love and care could produce a successful infant, which would reflect well on the family and assure the family's future economic success. Since that time, Bruer claims, different versions of infant determinism have persisted, taking on a more scientific or medical face. Child psychiatry and attachment theory have built on the idea that how mothers care for their infants will in large part determine that child's future. Brain research on infants is the latest development in this trend, he believes (Bruer 1999).

A series of articles in the media in the mid-1990s, following the release of Starting Points stress the importance of brain development to parents, stirring social and parental anxieties. An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* explained the synaptic connections that are formed in the first few years, "In the first year, the communications network within the brain develops at a breathtaking pace. But if the neural synapses, the bridges of that communications network, aren't exercised, they wither. That withering impoverishes the mind, and ultimately, nourishes the cycle of poverty" (quoted critically in (Bruer 1999, 15)). Another article in the *Boston Globe* feeds the anxiety about getting children into appropriate colleges with the caution. "If they, or their baby sitter, or day care provider isn't speaking articulately to baby, SAT scores may be at stake" (quoted in (Bruer 1999, 17)).

These articles offer exaggerated and almost comical interpretations of the importance of early development, and give faulty interpretations of the science, but there may be some truth in it all. Though brain science may not tell us exactly how reading to a two year old affects their brain, there is much evidence showing that reading and interacting with children early on can make a difference to their success in school.

Psychologists Hart and Risely (1995) followed parents and children once a month over a three year period and recorded all their interactions, and found astonishing class differences in language development. They found that professional parents directed an average of 487 utterances to their children per hour, while in homes where the parents were receiving welfare (used as a marker of class) the parents delivered an average of 178 utterances per hour to their children. By age three, the children of professionals had vocabularies of about 1,100 words and the children of families on welfare had vocabularies of about 525 words. They found a significant difference in IQ, as well, correlating with language exposure. Hart and Risely's (1995) findings indicate the dramatic differences that parenting styles can have on children.

Neurocognitive research confirms these findings. Farah et al. (2005). administered a series of neurocognitive tests on children and conducted in home visits and interviews with the child and his or her mother in order to assess the environment they live in and the relationship that they have with their mothers. Their findings indicate that social and emotional nurturance affects the development of memory, while cognitive stimulation influences the development of language. Though, as Bruer points out, there is nothing inherently or biologically better about having a bigger vocabulary at age three, or a stronger memory, these things can have an effect socially and culturally.

In her book comparing child rearing practices of middle-class, working-class, and poor parents, Annette Lareau discusses the implications of class differences in parenting styles for children's success at school (Lareau 2003). Middle-class parents use a style she calls "concerted cultivation" that tends to teach children social and academic skills that enable them to feel comfortable advocating for themselves in school and ultimately entitled to success in school and the workplace. In other words, they were taught the rules of the game for operating within White, middle-class America (Lareau 2003). The children of poor and working-class parents are taught, on the other hand, not to challenge authority, leaving them feeling more constrained in institutional settings.

Because of the correlation between educational attainment and wages earned, it makes sense to strive for children of all economic backgrounds to do well in school. And part of children doing well in school is having the skills they need once they get there. This preparedness is California's First 5 is primary concern. My extensive discussion of scientific findings, shows how science has been used as a means of establishing authority and promoting ideas that are not necessarily related. Scientific authority is also drawn on to give legitimacy to the First 5 program.

Part 2: First 5 California

This section will show how expert advice is promoted to further social aims, such as developing an effective workforce, and socializing the next generation to be productive members of society. When federal laws mandating school attendance were passed in 1918, school promoters promised a reduction of crime and poverty, improvement of upward mobility, and the generation of wealth (Katz 1986). Though these predictions have not necessarily come to pass, the high expectations placed on

education have not changed. The focus on preparing younger children to be ready for the classroom, based on brain research, which surfaces in the First 5 California campaign, should be examined in the economic and social contexts that gave rise to this program in California. I go into these contexts in Part 3, and in Part 2 I describe the nature of First 5 itself.

Although First 5 was slow to get off of its feet in its first two years, the program has expanded in terms of the number of people served and areas addressed. As promised in Proposition 10, the mission of the program is to provide a comprehensive integrated system of early childhood development services:

Through the integration of health care, quality child care, parent education and effective intervention programs for families at risk, children and their parents and caregivers will be provided with the tools necessary to foster secure, healthy and loving attachments. These attachments will lay the emotional, physical and intellectual foundation for every child to enter school ready to learn and develop the potential to become productive, well-adjusted members of society.⁴³

The program's understanding of the many factors contributing to child development and to success in school is reflected in this statement. The 2005-2006 annual report notes the diverse program areas adopted by First 5, including health outreach, migrant worker programs, anti-smoking campaigns, parent education, child care training, identification of special needs, and public education campaigns, among others. The program also has a dedicated portion to address school readiness, which targets the communities around the lowest performing schools in each county. These communities are provided with early education programs, kindergarten transition programs, parent education, health insurance enrollment and on-going health care, oral

⁴³ Mission statement from the California Children and Families Commission.

health screening and treatment, family literacy programs and nutrition assessments and education. Seventy-seven percent of the families targeted in the school readiness project statewide are Latino, 58% are English learners, and 67% are low-income (Services 2005-2006).⁴⁴

First 5 is overseen by the California Children and Family Commission, which combines statewide with county-by-county efforts. The CCFC sets out its goals, but each county is free to determine its own needs and funding priorities. Each county has its own commission to make these decisions. Alameda County, for example, gives priority to providing prevention, early intervention, treatment and support for families identified as at risk, in response to the high volume of domestic violence and child abuse calls; over 21,000 children are reported to the Child Abuse Hotline every year. Because the county has a high concentration of low performing elementary schools with students who speak 32 different languages, and a high number of children enrolled in special education, it has also prioritized preparing children and families for school (in keeping with the statewide focus on this issue). Improving the quality of child care is another primary activity, along with changing systems and enhancing community capacity by providing education for professionals and identifying children in need.

Evaluations

Evaluations are conducted on both state and county efforts to examine effectiveness in four key areas: improved child development, improved child health,

⁴⁴ The focus on Latinos and English Learners is not surprising given that Latinos now comprise about 35% of California's population, and in 2005 more than 26% of the state's population were foreign born, the highest percentage in modern history (Schrag 2006). Also, the school readiness program could easily be classified as an acculturation program, encouraging parents to adapt a new way of approaching literacy in their homes.

improved family functioning and improved systems of care. It will become clear as we discuss the assumptions upon which First 5 is built, that evaluations, almost necessarily, follow the logic of the initial assumptions. Furthermore, evaluations are often based on a pre and post test model, in which participants enrolled in a program are asked questions about their knowledge and behavior before and after the intervention. The participant outcome area of First 5 statewide evaluation is based on asking participants a set of questions when they enroll and then asking them the same questions six months later to assess what has changed. The questions involve the areas the program is specifically targeting, so the hope is that more people will be doing what the program wants them to be doing.

For example, in order to measure improved child development, the evaluators assess how many children are participating in early childhood education programs, and how many children have received early screening or intervention for disabilities or other special needs. These measures are based on the idea that early childhood education programs will improve a child's development by aiding with school readiness. Early screening and intervention for disabilities is premised on the idea that children with unidentified disabilities will have more trouble developing the foundations for school success. Based on these criteria, First 5 is assumed to be achieving its goal of improved child development, because more children are receiving these services.

Child health is measured by examining the number of children who are born healthy, are receiving preventive and on-going health care,⁴⁵ are healthy and well-nourished, have good oral health, and are free from tobacco related illnesses. To

⁴⁵ This indicator includes the number of well-baby visits to the doctor, having a regular medical "home" and having health insurance.

determine family functioning, evaluators assess whether children are living in home environments supporting of optimal cognitive development, families are self-sufficient and few teens have babies and teen-mothers delay subsequent pregnancies. The first indicator is determined by looking at the number of parents who read, sing or tell stories to their children regularly. The second indicator looks at the number of families in poverty, parents who complete high school or pass the GED, and the number of times a family has moved, because of the instability and stress on the family associated with moves. The last goal about systems change is not measured through participant outcome. The system's change goal is primarily addressed by funding existing programs and helping to make services and benefits more accessible to those who most need them. The most widely funded programs are home visiting programs, case management, family resource centers, provider training support, consultation to providers, mobile health screening, dental and library services, large efforts to create universal access to care (Services 2005-2006).

Parent Education

Among the statewide goals for areas of intervention is Parent and Community Education Initiatives and Projects. The goal is addressed with three targeted programs: the Kit for New Parents, reducing children's exposure to violence, and public education campaigns on early childhood development, preschool and health. After a brief description of the public education campaigns, I focus specifically on the Kit for New Parents as it represents the most direct parenting intervention being carried out by the state.

The public education campaigns primarily feature billboards, television and print ads, and are a widespread source of information about parenting practices. One series of ads gives parents specific instructions for how to incorporate reading, talking and playing into a family's daily routine. One ad in particular showed a father doing laundry with his son. He was teaching his son about colors as they placed each item of clothing into the washer: a blue shirt, red pants, etc., and they both looked to be having fun. The voice-over said that even everyday chores can be an opportunity for teaching your child. This ad is a creative attempt to encourage a culture of increased communication and discussion between parents and children. As discussed, this type of communication can have a significant impact on developing literacy skills. Other campaigns address health issues such as obesity and diabetes, and smoking cessation. Each ad ends with the slogan, "Your choices shape their chances," making the case for parents to assume full responsibility for their role in children developing diabetes or learning to read.

The centerpiece of the Kit for New Parents is a series of five videos on different aspects of parenting produced by Reiner's I Am Your Child Foundation. Each of the videos has a celebrity host guiding the parent through the topic at hand. In keeping with the mission of First 5, the videos all emphasize scientific research showing how critical the First 5 years are for a child's brain development. The topics include health and nutrition, child safety, finding quality child care, early literacy and discipline.

The video entitled Ready to Learn, for example, is narrated by actors Lavar Burton and Jaime Lee Curtis. They emphasize in the beginning of the video that although the viewers are likely new parents, it is never too early to start thinking about literacy. "Science has shown a child's brain grows most rapidly in its first few years of

life and important learning occurs in the first weeks and months. An important part of this learning is about language,” they emphasize. The video is divided into three sections about infancy, toddler-hood, and preschool years, and ways to help develop children’s language skills, familiarity with words and letters, and interest in books in each of these stages. For example, they want parents to share books with infants so that they associate books with comfort and love. And by talking to your child throughout your daily routine, such as mealtimes, and while changing the baby, you can help them to learn patterns of communications and words. “The earlier you start talking to your baby, the more your baby will learn.” An effort is made not to overwhelm the parent. At one point they say that they are not suggesting you push each child to be a genius, and at another point that parents should not feel they need to speak and read to their child every minute of every day. This last point is an effort to recognize the demands on parents and the difficulty of carrying out this kind of intensive parenting.

Also included in the Kit is The Parents Guide, a booklet developed at UC Berkeley with tips and resources for many aspects of parenting, ranging from breast feeding (which is emphasized throughout the videos, as well), to general health and education information for families. A series of 8 brochures accompany the videos and guide, and cover early brain development, reading, quality child care, child safety, healthy pregnancy, feeding your baby, health and development, and discipline. Finally the kit includes a small board book on counting and animals for parents to read to their children.

Twenty three million dollars was put into the implementation of the Kit in both English and Spanish (they are developing Kits in Chinese, Tagalog and Vietnamese as

well). The state funded the production of the kits and the federal government contributed an additional 7.5 million dollars annually of Medicaid funds to help distribute the kit. The counties are responsible for funding local distribution.

In 2001, First 5 partnered with the Center for Community Wellness at U.C. Berkeley⁴⁶ to pilot the Kit for New Parents, with the eventual goal of distributing these kits to the parents of all of the parents of the 500,000 children born in California each year. The initial results were impressive and the Principal Investigator released the glowing statement that, "In 15 years of evaluating parenting materials, I have never seen anything as effective...."

The Center for Community Wellness distributed over 450 kits to parents in 6 counties and three settings: prenatal clinics, delivery hospitals, and post partum/infant home visits. Parents were interviewed before they received the kit and then six weeks later. They asked parents about their use of and satisfaction with the kit, changes they made as a result of the kit, knowledge about where to go for help if needed and finally knowledge about child care and child development.

This last point is evaluated by essentially testing parents on certain points that were emphasized in the kit, such as whether breast feeding was the best way to feed a one year old, when to start feeding a child solid foods (First 5 says around 4-6 months), if a child should be placed on her back or stomach to sleep, if the first year is the best time to start reading to your child, and if it is appropriate to spank a one year old if they are misbehaving. This method of evaluation takes for granted that the information presented

⁴⁶ The Center for Community Wellness, now called Health Research for Action specializes in translating health research into products, policies and programs to reduce health disparities and improve overall health.

to the parents is the only correct answer, and does not measure outcomes based on the use of these suggestions.

The evaluators found that the kit was a great success and the state began a large scale distribution. In the 2004-2005 fiscal year 482,000 parents received the kit. It is distributed through hospitals, clinics, home visit programs, HMOs and a variety of community based programs. Nearly 75% of the counties in California were customizing their kits by adding information about resources, information on child development, child safety devices or toys.

The Center for Community Wellness has continued with a long-term evaluation of the Kit and continues to get good results. Through interviews, surveys, and focus groups, the group found that 87% of mothers who received the Kit were using it during the first 6-9 weeks. The kit was found to be especially well received among the Spanish speaking population who were more apt to pass it along to friends or family, and showed a greater accumulation of knowledge. The interest in new more “American” approaches may indicate a generational shift wherein the second generation or younger first generation immigrants are interested in pursuing the “new” ways of parenting. The finding about Spanish speakers showing a greater accumulation of knowledge is especially interesting, because it speaks to the issue of acculturation and acceptance of the values of “mainstream” society. Spanish speaking immigrants, who make up a sizable percentage of the California population, are showing an interest in preparing their children for life in this country. The fact that Spanish speaking mothers who received the kit showed a greater accumulation of knowledge mostly reflects, however, the design of the evaluation and the fact that the White middle-class parenting knowledge and practices

being promoted by the Kit are different culturally from those typical to the Spanish-speaking immigrant population. Having had less exposure to the approach being promoted, they have more to learn about this parenting approach.

California at a Crossroads

California has become, since the turn of the 21st century, a state with a majority of “minorities.” Less than half of the population in the state is non-Hispanic White. Nonetheless, non-Hispanic Whites make up 70% of the voters in the state. Increasingly, this new majority is finding a state unwilling to invest in infrastructure and public services. Where California was once a model for public universities, freeways, water systems and parks, many of these achievements are suffering from lack of upkeep and proper funding (Schrag 2006). Two principal factors that contribute to this divestment are the unwillingness to raise taxes and the state’s unique use of direct democracy. Since the 1980’s, the public and elected officials have resisted relying on tax hikes to pay for the costs of public service. California Governor and Hollywood actor Arnold Schwarzenegger came into office in 2000 following the recall of Democratic Governor Gray Davis. He promised to govern for the “people” and to restore California to its previous grandeur without raising taxes. In fact, when he came into office facing multi-billion dollar state deficits, he cut another \$4 billion dollars in taxes (Schrag 2006). California in 2008 is once again facing a budget crisis with looming threats of hiring freezes and pay-cuts for state workers, and closings of parks and other state-run services.

Over the past thirty years as the number of non-European immigrants in the state has shot up, the use of direct democracy has significantly increased as well. In California, any citizen or group that collects sufficient signatures can place an initiative

on the ballot. Voters are regularly asked to vote on very complicated budget items, bond proposals and social policy measures, meaning that much of the state's policy is created based on the tide of public opinion and the depth of the pockets of parties backing specific propositions.

The initiative, referendum and recall processes were written into California's constitution in 1911. They were progressive era reforms, passed in reaction to concerns about corporate influence on state politics. To place an initiative or referendum⁴⁷ on the ballot, requires collecting signatures of registered voters equal to 5% of the total votes cast in the last regular governor's elections. A proposed constitutional amendment needs 8% of the votes and a recall requires 12%. Once the initiative, referendum or recall is on the ballot, it requires a simple majority to pass.

Over the past 30 years, Californians have increasingly relied on these measures. During that time the use of direct democracy has tripled. This process ties the hands of state legislators who regularly see their efforts overturned by initiatives taken directly to the ballots. Peter Schrag, longtime Sacramento journalist and author of a recent book on California politics, describes the fickle nature of voters in the state:

[G]iven the impulsive nature of the electorate and the ad hoc structure of the process, the same voters who pass a measure seeking to end bilingual education one year and banning gay marriage in the next will also approve initiatives to permit the medical use of marijuana, raise the minimum wage, mandate treatment rather than prison for small-time drug offenders, and pass massive bond issues to fund stem cell research. (Schrag 2006, 7-8)

Prior to each election I find myself in a friend's living room, filled with frustrated fellow-voters trying to understand the nuances and implications of passing a 30 million

⁴⁷ A referendum challenges a law recently approved by the legislature.

dollar bond initiative to invest in California's highways and public transportation, or amend the state constitution to mandate incentives for developing alternate sources of energy. Adding to the complication are California's seven thousand overlapping jurisdictions, including cities, counties, school districts, community college districts, water districts, fire districts, park districts, and irrigation districts, to name a few (Schrage 2006). These districts are all differently affected by funding decisions in unfathomable ways. We spend hours debating the different propositions and most often come away feeling ill equipped to make the decisions being demanded of us. In the end, it is a gut decision rather than a well-informed analysis that directs my votes, and I seriously doubt that the majority of the electorate invest even these hours to deciding their vote.

My voting friends are apparently in the minority in their distrust of the initiative process, however; according to a statewide survey, 71% of Californians like the initiative system, and 59% feel the voters make better public policies than elected officials (Surveys 2006). Still, the majority would also like a review process to clarify the language used in the ballot proposal as well as more transparency regarding the financial backers of the proposals (PPIC 2002).

In spite of my skepticism, studies have shown that citizen groups typically use their resources to propose changes in policy, while economic interests focus their spending on defeating the proposed changes (PPIC 2002). In the case of Prop. 10, Rob Reiner proposed the initiative and tobacco companies fiercely opposed it, though the initiative ultimately passed. Regardless of who initiates the propositions, the backer needs significant financial resources to familiarize voters with the initiative, convince them of its value and resist attacks against it.

The result of this combination of factors – unwillingness to raise taxes, and overactive use of direct democracy -- has been an increasing tendency to place the burden of costs of public services – universities, parks, highways, bridges, etc. – on those who use them through fees and tolls, instead of citizens sharing the costs (Schrag 2006).

Public universities and colleges in California, for example, are facing devastating budget cuts in 2009, meaning higher fees and larger and fewer classes. A new student tracking system showed that a quarter of the state's high school students drop out before graduating, and African Americans and Latinos are leaving schools at much higher rates (Asimov 2008). Forty-three percent of California's enrollment starts out speaking some other language, presenting a great challenge to educators (Schrag 2006). In spite of these issues, the schools regularly face budget cuts. So the immigrant population is faced with a voting public and complying government cutting the funding out of education that could help to ensure the future of the state. Schrag points out that a variety of studies have shown that the greater a society's ethnic diversity, the lower its investment in schooling and other public goods. This tendency goes against the logic of needing to develop a productive citizenry to remain competitive in the future, especially since California will have to rely on the productivity of its immigrants and their children. But there is no question that to remain competitive and to support its dependent populations – the retired, the young – California will have to rely on the productivity of its immigrants and their children (Schrag 2006). There is concern for the deskilling of the population. In this context, First 5 was developed and implemented.

From Proposition 10 to First 5

First 5 has been born in a particularly Californian way: as indicated above, it was created almost entirely because Hollywood director and producer Rob Reiner took an interest in it. This is unique to California, not only because the state seems to lean toward political leaders who come from Hollywood (Ronald Regan and Arnold Schwarzenegger being the most obvious examples), but because of the state's unique form of direct democracy. Rob Reiner introduced the initiative, Proposition 10, which would eventually enable this \$700 million dollar statewide program, in 1997. By 2005, families had accessed First 5 funded programs 3.5 million times through the course of one year.

When Hollywood Met Sacramento

Rob Reiner first gained notoriety in the 1970's for his role as Meathead on the series Archie Bunker, the ranting liberal counterpart to his bigoted father-in-law. A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* drew a link to this early role as a manifestation of his longtime interest in politics. He told the reporter that he and Meathead shared many of the same political views. "Both, for instance, believed that government should move aggressively to correct social ills" (Adato 2002). It wasn't until 1997 that Reiner began acting on his political views.

Reiner became interested in the importance of early childhood after undergoing psychoanalysis twenty years ago. The father of three committed himself to this interest after reading a report released by the Carnegie Corporation (discussed earlier) emphasizing findings that an inadequate environment between birth and age three can compromise a child's brain development and can create considerable costs to society. "Every single person in jail for a violent crime had a nightmare childhood," Reiner told

the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “To me [early childhood education] is a way of changing social outcomes in a much more cost-effective manner (Russell 1998).”

Reiner decided to use his connections and influence as a celebrity to draw attention to the cause. He told the *Los Angeles Times*, “It occurred to me: all this great information and nobody knows about it. OK, there’s my role: I’m a communicator” (Adato 2002). He and his wife created a foundation called I Am Your Child dedicated to letting people know about the importance of maximizing brain development in the first few years of life. They developed a television special and lobbied the White House to hold a conference on the subject.

Then, in 1997, a former state assemblyman Mike Roos approached him with the idea for Prop. 10: to provide for the physical, mental, emotional and developmental needs of the 500,000 children born each year in California. Together they introduced the initiative and Reiner⁴⁸ put down two million dollars of his own money and brought in his Hollywood buddies to help him finance publicity supporting the measure. Dustin Hoffman, Nicole Kidman, Tom Cruise, Steven Spielberg, Robin Williams and Michael Douglas are a few of the names credited with signing on to help with funding.

Prop. 10: Sin taxes and selling services to the public

Proposition 10 suggested a fifty cent tax on each pack of cigarettes sold in the state. The money from the taxes would be channeled into a fund that would be distributed throughout the state. Eighty percent of the estimated \$700 million dollars

⁴⁸ Although Reiner had claimed no interest in sitting on the state commission to oversee the program, he was appointed to the commission by then-governor Gray Davis. He only recently stepped down in 2006. He had introduced another proposition to guarantee universal preschool for children in California, which was voted down after charges that he had used his position on the state council to campaign for the universal preschool proposition.

earned would be divided amongst the counties according to the percentage of the state's births that each county reported. Each county would have an independent commission that would determine how their allotted funds would be spent. The remaining 20% would go to administration and various state programs, which would eventually include Kits for New Parents and both anti-smoking and parenting ad campaigns.

The fact that the measure used money from cigarettes made it both appealing and viable. It meant, in effect, that the state would not have to pay for the programs supporting young children and their parents. Some critics opposed this pairing, claiming that it would unduly tax the poor, who disproportionately are the ones buying cigarettes. Others felt the pairing made it too easy to pass the initiative without looking closely at what was being proposed. Jacob Sullivan, author of For your own good: The anti-smoking crusade and tyranny of public health told the *L.A. Times* that, "It relieves the burden of having to make the case to the public. If they had to pick up the tab, people would have been more skeptical. In this case people could feel, we're not paying for this, who cares what it costs"(Adato 2002).

It does seem likely that given California voters' poor record of funding public services in recent years, especially education, this reliance on a cigarette tax rather than taxation allowed the proposition to pass. The tobacco industry financed an aggressive campaign against the proposition and in the end it passed by less than a half a percentage point. It was challenged by another proposition put on the ballot by a cigarette retail chain, four months later. This time 72% of voters voted in favor of the measure. It also survived a state Supreme Court challenge claiming that it was unlawfully funded with taxes from an unrelated product. The proposal itself also appealed to a wide range of

supporters. Business leaders were interested because it was a way of addressing a declining workforce. Liberals were interested because it meant increased maternal and child health programs and services for underserved populations.

Governmentality and Parent Education

The confluence of events and interest that supported First 5's inception is an example not only of the whims and fancies of the California voters, but also of the diffuse nature of power and governmentality. Discourses such as the focus on early childhood education as a means for improving school achievement come to the fore in spite of often conflicting interests. The electorate who is not willing to fund many public programs was able to get behind this because of its focus on parental responsibility, which fits neatly with neo-liberal values. As sociologist Glenda Wall notes in an article reviewing a similar program in the province of Ontario, "The focus on educating parents fits well with a model of individual responsibility and privatized parenting. It does not require governments to re-invest in the welfare state and design policy to alleviate poverty, provide affordable housing and child care services, and improve employment practices" (Wall 2005). Because it is funded with a "sin tax", it does not require additional public funding or taxes, making it especially attractive.

Foucault's concept of governmentality sees power relations as diffuse. "The state now appears simply as one element [of political power] – whose functionality is historically specific and contextually variable – in multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages" (Rose 1999, 5). In the case of First 5, immigrant communities and service providers recognized the opportunity to bring funding and information to groups not often included.

Businessmen wanted an improved work force and were willing to support the proposition because it promised to improved education, which in turn provides young people with the skills necessary.

The system of direct democracy in California allows a public debate over measures and initiatives that might ordinarily take place behind closed doors between legislators and lobbyists. First 5 is not unique in its vision or its methods. In fact, the ideas it is based on are ubiquitous, and similar programs exist in many places, such as the program described by Wall (2005) in Ontario. The tenets of the program fit within an entrenched neo-liberal logic that manifests itself in many areas, including education, public health, and social services. But the method of governance that enabled First 5 to come into being makes it easier to see the many influences and interests that came together to create this program.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to use California's First 5 program to illustrate several points. I discuss the use of scientific authority to justify cultural values embedded in child rearing messages, such as First 5's focus on school readiness. Parental practices contributing to school readiness such as reading and frequent conversation have been shown to have social benefits. However, using the "new brain research" to justify it is misleading, as the science itself does not necessarily back up all of the claims being made on its behalf. We can see this in the use of expert authority to inform and justify the production of discourse around parenting, which in turn helps to support structures of power. Because the type of parenting promoted is more accessible to and practiced by middle-class parents, it helps to reinforce structural inequalities.

Also in this chapter, I draw out the nature of the First 5 program to illustrate its aims and assumptions and then place this program in the context of California's current political and economic environment. In a state with dwindling resources and a large and changing population, the trend is toward withdrawing support from publicly funded institutions that would help lower classes and in turn future workforce of the state. In discussing how the First 5 was implemented I attempt to exemplify the diffuse nature of power and to emphasize that it cannot be assumed that state programs represent solely the will of those holding political power, but operate in more complicated ways.

Section 2:

Parenting Classes and Parents

Chapter 5:

Discipline

Society and Discipline

Rona contrasts democratic parenting with the autocratic style – “my way or the highway” – and the permissive style – “do what ever you want.” The democratic way is to discuss things, give children choices within the boundaries of what they can handle, which teaches them to reason, think, and learn to make decisions. It is less about the child and parent hierarchy, she says. Rona asks, what do kids learn if they blindly obey? The class answers, dependency. Rona responds, Do we want them to grow up and not be able to make decisions on their own? The class answers with “no’s” all around. One man notes, It’s a lot easier [if they obey]. Rona answers, Has anyone noticed that life is easy once you had kids?
 –Excerpt from field notes about the Tuesday night class in Easton.

As discussed in Chapter 1 and emphasized throughout this dissertation, child-rearing practices stem from and react to the social and economic context of a given society. In this chapter I discuss the way our disciplinary techniques reflect specific values and economic structures in our own society. Discipline is a broad topic that could encompass almost every aspect of parenting that is not related to a provision of basic needs (and perhaps some of those as well). As is often pointed out in contemporary parenting guides, there is an important difference between discipline and punishment. Foucault noted a significant shift not just in child rearing, but in governance, from needing to exact desired behaviors not from fear of punishment, but because a person is taught to want to do the right thing (Foucault 1991). Punishment is used to stop a behavior in the moment and to teach children to fear further punishment, while discipline teaches children self-control. Parents are meant to both teach discipline and teach with

discipline. In other words, in order to instill self-control in a child, parents need to be disciplined in their parenting – consistent, intentional and loving.

In this chapter I discuss the emergence of this distinction: the rejection of punishment, specifically physical punishment in White middle-class America, and the embracing of a systematic, disciplined approach. I address the different strategies for discipline that were encouraged in the parenting classes I studied: instilling self-esteem, teaching effective communication, providing children with decision making skills by offering choices, and teaching self reliance by allowing children to make mistakes. These strategies are not uniformly embraced by people in the parenting classes, and I discuss the ways in which differences in race, class, culture, gender, and generation bear on this debate in the U.S., especially where spanking is concerned.

Discipline and Punishment: Historical Overview

Discipline was not always valued over punishment in parenting. For many years punishment was one of the central aspects of parenting. In this section I indicate some of the major changes in childrearing that led to the current mainstream antipathy toward physical punishment and embracing of gentler approaches.

Whipping was the normal method of discipline in Middle Ages. Misbehaving children were said to have been viewed at that time as evil and frightening, and strict physical punishment was commonplace. There was no conception of our contemporary understanding of childhood as an important developmental phase. As discussed earlier, it was not until the 17th and 18th centuries that children were accorded more social importance. In his classic study, Aries gives evidence of the new affection for children appearing around that time – toys, books, and clothing, special schools, family portraits

and special coffins for children, signaling a recognition of childhood as a significant stage in human development (Aries 1962). Feminist scholars (Simonds and Katz Rothman 1992) indicate that Aries' arguments are from a male perspective, and that children were very present in the lives of women before this time. From this perspective, the male "discovery" of childhood denies the experience of women in relation to their children (Simonds and Rothman 1992).

Many male philosophers around the time Aries wrote about changed their thinking on child rearing as well. John Locke expressed his conviction that parents had an important role in the development of children's characters in his 1693 *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, where he indicates that young children should be educated in reason by means of strict discipline and then through friendship as the child grew older (Hays 1996). Sociologist Sharon Hays proposes, however, that Rousseau was the real forefather of the current ideology of child rearing. Rousseau thought of and described children as sacred, noble and innocent beings. In his 1762 study of education, *Emile*, he condemned the use of wet nurses and the lack of interest upper-class women displayed toward their children. He also felt that demanding obedience without understanding stages of development was wrongheaded. "Rousseau argued that child-rearing practices should follow from the development of the child's inner nature rather than from adult interests and that children should be cherished, treated with love and affection, and protected from the corruption of the larger society" (Hays 1996). In spite of these early writings, changes in the treatment of children were slow in coming.

Historian Daniel Rodgers offers this description of American childrearing prior to the nineteenth century:

Not that earlier generations of Americans had been indifferent to the rearing of children to a clear sense of adult duties. But even in New England, where Puritan legacies of diligent upbringing in a calling retained a good deal of force, caring fell considerably short of sustained, systematic training. If wills were often broken at a very tender age in early nineteenth-century America, they were also indulged in what seemed to later writers an irregular and all too impulsive pattern. (Rodgers 1980, 356)

Historians point to several interrelated changes that emerged between the late-1700s and the mid-1800s that had a serious impact on child rearing in America: the emerging role of women in the young republic as “republican mothers”; the shaping of a “domestic code” for White middle-class mothers; and the decline in birthrates among urban women. All of these factors contributed to the focusing of attention on child-rearing techniques and their role in producing certain valued characteristics in a child.

In the highly politically charged U.S. environment at the time of the Revolutionary War, women wrestled with defining their own role in the new republic. What emerged was the concept of the “republican mother,” whose life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue. She would be charged with educating her sons for, and keeping her husband committed to, the cause of the republic. If the stability of the nation rested on the persistence of virtue among its citizens, then well informed wives and mothers were vital (Kerber 1976).

This sensibility set the stage for the defining certain virtues for women that would enable them to keep the home a haven for men and children. Evangelical preachers, who gained influence in the early Victorian period, positioned women and children as moral counterparts to the corrupt outside world. The “cult of domesticity,” or “domestic code,” arose in which women within the safe domestic sphere would provide moral guidance

and emotional support for husbands and children by maintaining piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness (Cott 1977).

This corresponded with demographic changes as the United States shifted to an urban, industrial and service-based economy. At the turn of the 20th century, White women surviving to menopause had an average of 3.56 children, a drop from 7.04 in 1800 (Apple 2006b). With fewer children and a charge to lead the domestic sphere, women began concentrating more on the ways in which they would educate and discipline their children. The most common disciplines at that time – corporal punishment, fear, and guilt – were reevaluated. Fear and guilt became early targets as people began to question whether the delicate psyche of the child could withstand the shame and terror used to manipulate children into obeying their parents (Stearns 2003). “The majority of the most widely circulating mid-nineteenth century child-management guides tried to inspire parents with an ideal of far more orderly family governments, constructed out of kindly but consistently enforced punishments and carefully graded, habit forming lessons in industry, duty, and restraint” (Rodgers 1980, 357).

As Rodgers implies, the circulation of expert advice on childrearing was another important change. Historian Rima Apple argues that until the end of the 19th century, child rearing was considered a commonsense affair, and mothers were assumed to know instinctively how to care for their children. Further, advice was assumed to be passed down through generations of women when extended families collaborated on child care. Around the turn of the 20th century, however, that began to change. Families became smaller and the responsibility for child care shifted to the nuclear family. Medical and scientific advice replaced instinct and tradition in childrearing, and good mothers

required the knowledge of experts to properly raise their children (Apple 2006b). It is not clear how much of their advice was absorbed, but upper and middle-class White women were especially keen on keeping up to date on the latest child rearing advice.

The emergence of behaviorism, a development in psychology most often associated with Pavlov and his dogs, appeared early in the 20th century to offer new approaches to exacting proper behavior from children. John Watson, one of the founding fathers of behaviorism offered parents advice on child rearing. He strongly opposed coddling children and hugging them, but he did feel that rewarding positive behavior would elicit better results than punishing bad behavior. Spankings were usually given well after the bad behavior, so the link between the behavior and the consequence was not made. Instead, he felt parents should enforce positive learning and habits with rewards, and help children avoid situations in which bad habits might be learned (Stearns 2003).

Historian Peter Stearns asserts that this idea of positive discipline met a receptive audience because the idea of positive rewards instead of negative reactions rang true “in an increasingly consumerist society in which providing treats gained increasing cultural sanction” (Stearns 2003). One could also argue that positive discipline fit the project of raising children to have more self-discipline, in order to be better suited for the work force, and to be more valuable citizens. Rodgers argues that even by the mid-1800s there was a desire for a new kind of worker. While before, “Work and obedience, service and mastership, remained intricately tangled together in early nineteenth-century America, and the socialization of children followed suit in its preoccupation not with system but with submission and authority” (Rodgers 1980, 356). By the 1830s, there was “a

strikingly different conception of work, marked not by obedience but by self-control, and induced not through fear as much as through systematic inculcation of habit” (Rodgers 1980, 356). So to have experts promoting “scientific” ways of instilling this kind of character must have been appealing to mothers trying to find a new way.

Behaviorism as it related to childrearing fell out of favor partially because of its inflexibility and extremism, and a new generation of experts came along to offer advice. The idea of positive discipline, however, carried over. By the 1950s, praise was considered essential to encouraging children to act in appropriate ways. And along with praise came the new ingredient of reasoning. In this school of thought, termed permissiveness⁴⁹, it was considered important to let children know why what they did was wrong and to enlist their help in avoiding similar situations in the future. “Here then was the fundamental late-20th- century formula. Avoid spanking and scolding and all the trappings of traditional discipline, including mindless request that parental authority be obeyed” (Stearns 2003).

The term permissiveness does not really encompass the regulation and supervision involved in this type of parenting. Children were to adhere to scheduled mealtimes and bedtimes, to avoid expressing intense emotion, and to avoid danger. And they were to do these things willingly. So the task of the parent was not to command children, but to convince them to want to do what their parents wanted them to do (Stearns 2003). Stearns quotes one child-rearing “expert,” Sidonie Gruenberg, as explaining that the idea was to make children into “self-directing, responsible, useful persons” (Stearns 2003).

⁴⁹ “Permissiveness” came to have a pejorative meaning in the popular consciousness as not exerting enough control and guidance in child rearing.

Permissive parenting gave way to a new form, democratic parenting, often associated with Rudolf Dreikurs.

Children are particularly sensitive to a social climate. They have been quick to catch on to the idea that they share in the equal rights of everyone. They sense their equality with adults and no longer tolerate an autocratic dominant-submissive relationship. Parents, too, vaguely realize that their children have become their equals and have lessened the pressures of the you-do-as-I-say form of child raising. (Dreikurs and Soltz 1964, p.8-9)

Dreikurs' view makes explicit the connection between child-rearing principles and political and economic ideals. Much of the advice distributed in the parenting classes I observed was based on his ideas. Dreikurs sought to give parents more tools to use in guiding children to make the right decisions. In addition to encouragement and praise, he advocated allowing children to experience the consequences of their decisions. The idea of children choosing the right path became very important, along with the idea that children's opinions and decisions should be respected, but that they should also feel the effects of bad decisions. This school of parenting advice, with minor adjustments, remains popular today, as it dovetails with the predominant cultural values emphasizing individual responsibility and freedom of choice. In discussing the historical changes in principles of discipline and punishment, I have attempted to illustrate how these concepts and practices are linked to historically specific values and principles.

What Discipline Looks Like

At the start of class at Oakland Youth and Families a video was often playing as people walked into the room. The First 5 video on discipline was one of the videos in circulation, and it was also played in its entirety during one class session. I will describe it here, because it gives a good overview of the strategies promoted for dealing with

children and misbehavior. This video is specifically designed for parents of children under the age of five, and especially targets new parents. It was a part of the free Kit for New Parents distributed at hospitals and organizations serving new parents, promoting strategies for dealing with young children.

The video was presented to the students in the OFY class as a part of a segment on discipline. “Discipline: Setting Limits with Love,” is hosted by parenting guru Barry Brazelton, whose work builds somewhat on Dreikurs’. It combines a series of vignettes showing effective discipline techniques with discussion groups with parents talking about where they feel that they, or their own parents erred in their disciplining techniques.

The video emphasizes the importance of setting limits. Early on, infants are looking for limits in the form of routines such as bedtimes and regular feeding times. At first, Brazelton says, the child looks to you for regulation and control. Later on, he or she will be able to regulate themselves like being able to fall asleep or calm herself down. Routines will give your child a sense of security.

The video covers the ways in which children learn, through imitation and modeling, encouraging parents to help them through these processes. He also emphasizes that you cannot spoil an infant if you respond too quickly to its cries. Science shows, he says, that it is better to respond quickly to an infant’s cries so that they understand that their needs will be met.

The discussion groups largely serve as means for Brazelton to explore the negative impact of spanking and physical punishment. He asks the parents to recall, for example, how they felt when they were spanked as children. They all said that it made

them feel angry, misunderstood or resentful toward their parents. Brazelton strongly states in the video, “Never ever spank, hit or shake your child.”

Brazelton and the parents in his video model a series of what he advocates as more effective techniques, such as distraction and redirection, or time outs. Babies learn through exploring and will start testing limits, so parents should be calm and firm, and understand that children are not being malicious. One woman is shown sitting on the floor with a toddler and a baby. She is reading to the baby and the toddler starts kicking his toys. She asks him to stop kicking his toys and then quickly distracts him by showing him a picture of a little boy in the book that looks like him. Other parents are shown getting down to their child’s level and stating clearly what they had done wrong, emphasizing that it is the behavior that is not desirable, not the child. This modeling of calm, direct communication is repeated throughout the video. Emphasis is also placed on encouraging children by praising them when they are doing something the parent likes rather than dwelling on negative behavior.

In this video we see the critical elements of democratic parenting: encouragement, reasoning, distractions (to keep the child from engaging in undesirable behaviors), and no physical punishment. The distraction technique is one that is thought to be useful with young children under the age of about four. This technique is later replaced with time-outs or the removal of desired objects as ways of establishing limits of acceptable behavior.

The video was well received in the group, though it was played occasionally at the beginning of class while people were filtering in, placing it in the background of activity. A couple of the class participants specifically commented that they found the

video very useful, however. I find myself in my own parenting drawing from suggestions in the video and remembering techniques that were presented.⁵⁰

Intensive Parenting

The injunction to avoid physical punishment is a clear message in the classes, but what is not as clear is the alternative. This is especially relevant in these classes that serve some parents who are involved with CFS because of alleged abuse or neglect. Parents who are mandated are under greater scrutiny, but the message is directed also at others going through a contentious divorce. While it is not illegal to spank your child, parents who are involved with the courts may have conditions placed on retaining custody of their child, such as no physical punishment of any kind. The type of discipline being promoted is very intensive, requires much time and focus, and for this reason is not easily achieved.

The vagueness of the message about correct discipline is evident in this ethnographic excerpt from my observation of the Easton class:

Rona came up with a system of debits and credits for parents, which she listed on the board with the help of her class.

Debits: yelling, spanking, name calling, threatening, not listening.

⁵⁰ This is an excerpt from my field notes describing a class at OFY in which I refer to the video: “The baby (who came to class with his mom) was crawling all over during the class. Everyone loved to play with him. It was kind of interesting to watch people with him and what they allowed or encouraged. He was interested in my pen, but I kept trying the distraction technique (which I learned from the video tape on discipline) and giving him my bracelet. The first woman had a pen attached to her purse. He was reaching for it and she said, he can't get it. After a few minutes of his playing with it, he turned around and she put the purse under the table.

Credits: meals, positive communication, help them with homework, taxi driving,⁵¹ listening, giving choices, hugs.

The debits are all pretty straightforward violations of the no-punishment approach, but the list of credits does not offer much in the way of alternatives to controlling or shaping children's behavior. The credits have more to do with the ways in which you assist children and offer love to them. This is connected to the idea that if you make children feel loved and you build up their self-esteem, they will be more likely to cooperate.

In a session at OYF Brianna handed out a sheet titled, "9 Principles of Smart Love." She read the principles one by one to the class and used them as talking points.

"Number 5. Happy Children Behave. Parenting is not behavior modification. Cultivating your child's inner happiness is what really leads to good behavior. Chances are your child will behave better if you spend less time trying to change his or her behavior...Number 7. Attention Breeds Independence: Lots of loving attention will make your child independent. Let go of those worries that you will spoil your child or make your child needy and dependent by providing too much attention."

She looks up at the class and says, "Spending positive time allows your child to become independent."

"Number 8. Capture the middle ground. No parent should feel stuck between being a pushover and a disciplinarian, between letting everything go and relying on the "quick fix" of discipline. You can find a happy medium."

⁵¹ Rona is referring here to driving children around to activities, school, or other engagements.

Again, Brianna addresses the class, “Being consistent is very difficult. My mother cried when I cried, but she still disciplined me and that made me respect her-- that she stuck by her word. Setting boundaries is very, very important. Children need structure in their lives.”

After she finishes reading the principles, she asks the class, “What do you think about these nine principles? Are they true? Are they bull? What do you think?”

Dwayne, the only man in class that day answered, “The major thing is trying to get healthy self-esteem and develop coping skills, and take responsibility for certain actions.”

This exchange is fairly typical of the lessons given at OYF. For a population of parents, mostly mothers, who were most in need of parenting counsel, the vague platitudes about finding the happy medium and letting go of worries were not necessarily useful in finding ways of dealing with misbehavior. And Dwayne’s response about establishing self-esteem, responsibility and coping skills gets at the crux of this parenting approach. It has more to do with the ideology of the approach than the practicalities of childrearing. It takes a lot of thought, reading, and involvement on the part of the parents to parent in this way. No easy answers and few defined boundaries are provided. I will discuss in a later section the unequal embracing of positive discipline or democratic parenting across different social groups.

The teacher of this particular class is a young woman in her early 20s who does not have children, and did not have any background in parenting education before she was hired. Therefore, she is only able to respond on the level of the theoretical and ideological, not the practical. One pregnant teenage girl in the class expressed frustration

with her sister's two-year-old daughter, whom she lived with. "Her two year old stresses me so much. She goes by the window that is broken and we tell her no, and she keeps doing it. I used to want to hit her. Now I ignore her."

No one in the class had any practical advice to offer her about how to handle the little girl. While there were some handouts given to the class that offers practical advice based on the premises of positive discipline or democratic parenting, and the video also presented ideas about setting limits for young children, these resources were not drawn into discussions or used in response to questions about handling children. I have included the handouts here to show how the general advice being put forward is similar in both the

classes, even if the information is not integrated in the same way.

DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUE	HOW TO USE IT	KEEP IN MIND
1 Redirect your child's behavior.	Distract your toddler with a toy or suggest a new activity instead of always saying "Stop" or "Don't" when he wants to play with something he shouldn't. ("Let's look at this fun book!")	This positive approach works well for children under 2, who have poor impulse control and lack the cognitive ability to understand why you're saying no. Preschoolers react well too.
2 Ignore the behavior.	Pick and choose which behaviors to ignore (whining, for example, but not hitting). This tactic can also work for meltdowns. ("When you stop screaming, we'll talk about what you want.")	Some actions, like fidgeting, are actually more annoying than harmful. If you focus on them too much, you're more likely to get caught in a power struggle or reinforce the negative behavior.
3 Praise alternative actions.	Compliment your child each and every time she opts not to engage in a problem behavior, such as grabbing. ("It was nice of you to ask Zachary if you could play with his trucks.")	Positive reinforcement is effective with kids who tend to be defiant and oppositional. Always link the praise to a specific action. ("I like the way you remembered to pick up your clothes.")
4 Provide a physical outlet.	Make sure your child has enough time and space for physical play on a regular basis. Go outdoors, spend time on a playground, or visit an indoor gym or recreation area together.	This is a good preventive tactic. Young children who aren't yet able to verbalize their feelings will benefit from finding a way to release and vent energy that might otherwise be misdirected.
5 Avoid using "you."	In front of your child, talk to someone else about how you want your child to behave. Stay calm and neutral. ("When Susie has her coat and shoes on, we'll take a ride in the car.")	This less-confrontational approach lets a child save face and allows her to hear what's expected without feeling criticized. It's also a good way to smooth transitions like bedtime.
6 Give options.	Provide simple and practical choices when your child is being obstinate. ("You can wear the corduroy pants or your jeans; it's up to you.") But make sure you can live with what she chooses.	This approach helps a young child feel in control and capable of making a decision. It's especially good during the "terrible twos." One caveat: Avoid offering too many choices.
7 Request words.	Encourage your child to tell you how he feels or what he means. When you see your child hit or push a sibling or playmate, stop him and say, "Use your words to tell me what's wrong."	Some children need to be encouraged to speak rather than lash out physically when they're mad. You can start as young as 2½, but don't expect kids to always get it right until they're 3 or older.
8 Promise one-on-one time.	If you can't respond to your child's need for your attention right away (perhaps you're on the phone), say, "I can't play with you now, but I'll be able to soon. Show me you can wait."	Some kids need a lot of individual attention. With this preventive tactic, you acknowledge the request but control the frequency and time. It's also a good way to nip tantrums in the bud.
9 Encourage an airing of viewpoints.	When siblings or friends are fighting, give each child a chance to tell her side of the story. ("Tell me what happened. How did that make you feel?") Then ask, "What can we do now?"	This strategy is geared to kids with language skills (at least 2½) and is great for older children (6 and up). It allows kids to be heard and to listen. It also teaches problem-solving.
10 Teach cause and effect.	Set a consequence for your child that is age-appropriate and fits the problem behavior. ("You need to put your toys away when you're done playing. We can't leave until the room is clean.")	This works best if you state your expectations and explain the consequences of your child's misbehavior in advance. Then make sure to follow through and be consistent. 

 Perplexed by a discipline problem? Discuss it on our Behavior & Discipline board at www.child.com/community.

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15 Things To Do Instead Of Spanking



- Think
- Ignore bad behavior
- Count to 10 in a loud voice
- Talk to the child
- Listen to the child's feelings
- Give child a "Time Out"
- Take away a favorite toy, and make them earn it back
- Give child a choice: "Would you like to stop (behavior) or (consequence)"?
- Use positive reinforcement
- Take away dessert or a treat
- Take away television
- Use logical consequences
- withdraw from conflict
- choose battles wisely

The techniques advocated here – give choices, use positive reinforcement, use logical consequences, withdraw from conflicts – are all reflected both in the First 5 video and in the Easton class. However, the teacher of the Easton class has a much more integrated, practical approach to teaching. She ran a preschool for many years before getting interested in parenting education. She first started studying specific approaches to parenting in order to help her with her own three children. She had been teaching for almost a decade.

Because of this experience, she was able to respond to people's concerns with specific ideas, derived, of course, from the approach she was teaching. For example, one woman asked about how to get her fifteen month old son to share with his cousin. Rona told her that trying to force children to share is hard. She suggested that her son bring out

only the toys he was willing to share, and to leave the things he did not want to share in his room. That way, she suggested, the child would retain some control.

I don't mean to imply, however, that the parenting approach was only spoken about on an ideological level in Brianna's class. In fact, Rona spent at least half of every class addressing parenting on an ideological level. The quote at the opening of the chapter is an example. In that example, she tells the class that life is not easy with kids, by way of explaining the amount of work that goes into democratic parenting. Democratic parenting is not simple, she seems to be saying, but it is the proper way. She explains to the class that democratic parenting is going to take more time. "You have to do a lot more listening and discussing and give more options."

I was at a parent education meeting at my daughter's cooperative preschool. The presenter had spent two hours discussing with us how we can speak to our children with empathy to make them feel heard. A parent raised her hand and said she wanted to know how to get her children to hear her. She said her three children aged three to eight would run away when she called them and she did not know how to get them to listen. The speaker told her what she was asking about was how to get children to cooperate with you. She said it was a more advanced topic and that it would take another session to address that issue. I thought it was telling that getting kids to obey would be considered an "advanced topic." Also, this is an example of the way that classes tend to portray an ideal for of parenting, without offering practical advice as to how to shift the relationship to mirror the one being promoted.

Sociologist Sharon Hays (1996) refers to the current approach to parenting as intensive parenting, which she describes as child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally

absorbing, labor intensive and financially expensive. It is an approach that is, indeed, very demanding. In lieu of insisting that a child listen to and obey a parent without question, the child is included in the process of setting limits. Children are encouraged to speak their minds and negotiate. In order to help children learn to establish their own socially acceptable boundaries as well as to maximize their potential as adults, parents are in constant communication with their children. Parents are taught to offer encouragement, to use every interaction as a learning tool, to listen to what children are trying to express and help them learn to express themselves effectively. Parents should offer choices to children to give them a sense of power and to teach them about decision making. They are also supposed to help them to understand and experience the consequences of bad choices without expressing anger or frustration toward the child. To accomplish this takes a huge amount of energy, time, and resources.

The intensive demands of this style of parenting make it difficult to achieve, especially for those who do not have the luxury of endless time to funnel into their child's development. I will discuss these implications in greater detail in a later section. Here I focus on the key aspects of discipline or limit setting in intensive parenting.

Communication and Encouragement

As Rona states above, listening, discussing, and encouraging are essential in intensive parenting. Effective communication with the child shows that he or she is considered a respected member of the family whose opinion is important. Furthermore, learning to voice feelings and emotions helps children to develop a sense of themselves. Encouragement helps to bolster children's self-esteem, which is expected, in turn, to enable them to be more successful in their endeavors.

In intensive parenting, it is considered important to listen to, understand, and take into account their point of view. “We want kids to learn to express their feelings – help give them names for their feelings,” Rona told her class. “We don’t want them to stuff their feelings away. Feelings eventually come out. It is better to feel them when they are happening.”

Both Rona’s class and the Helping Parents class coach parents to use “I messages” to communicate with their children. I messages are a way of framing directives or requests that frame the statement or question in to reflect the speakers feelings. Florence, the teacher at Helping Parents told me she loves teaching “I messages, because it is a way to take responsibility for your self and your feelings and it teaches the child to do that.”

Rona tells her class that I messages won’t put children on the defensive because they don’t order them around and insult them. She gives the class some examples “When you play your music loud I feel like I can’t concentrate or think. I would like for the music to be quieter.” Or “When you tell me you are bored I feel like I can’t help you or I feel ineffective and I don’t know how to help you, because you don’t like any of my suggestions. I would like to see you actively engaged in something you like to do. Something you can do that is here and healthy. And if not I have some work I could use some help with.”

A couple of parents whom I spoke to felt that the I statements were particularly useful to them. Betty, an African-American mother of two and grandmother of two found that they helped her in communicating with her granddaughter, who had been placed in foster care. “Usually when you talk to a child its ‘you do this.’ If you say ‘you do this’

and ‘I feel like this,’ it makes it positive: ‘When you do that it makes me upset.’” She found that her granddaughter was more inclined to listen if she understood that it was upsetting her grandmother.

Likewise, Carol, a young Black single mother with a four-year old son, liked the I messages. “They don’t understand when you say you have to do something.” Carol offered her version of what an I message sounded like, “I feel you have to do it or you will get sent to your room. He gets mad, but he says OK.” Carol essentially precedes her directive with “I feel,” which she believes softens the blow for her son. She does not include how the action is affecting her, but rather what the consequence will be if he does not stop. Carol does not like disciplining her son and told me it breaks her heart to put her son on punishment or send him to his room. Her own mother was a strict disciplinarian who “never tolerated anything.” If she did something wrong they got a whooping or punishment (being grounded). “She gave us choices. I give him choices – his room or sit in a corner.” In spite of her execution of the I messages, Carol likes idea of a softer, more expressive form of discipline.

Another form of positive communication that Rona teaches in her class is often referred to as active listening. The idea is to stop what you are doing and pay close attention to what is being said. She has the class do an exercise that she calls genuine encounters. The class breaks into pairs; one person is supposed to act as the child and the other is the parent. The child wants to tell the parent about a beautiful butterfly he or she has just seen. In the first round, the parent is supposed to be busy preparing dinner and is to try to put the child off. In the second round, the parent stops what he or she is doing and really listens to what the child is saying about the butterfly before going back to what

he or she was doing. After this exercise, the class agreed that it took more energy and more time to try to resist what the child wanted to tell you than to take a minute to really listen.

After this class she asks the class to try genuine encounters at home with their children and to report back during the next class. The following week she asks if anyone had tried it. One man reported, “Actually, yes. I get a much better response from my son now. When he talks to me I really stop and pay attention.”

Another woman who attended the Helping Parents class also found active listening to be very helpful. Patsy has a twelve year old daughter and was struggling to adjust to the changes of parenting a teenager. “They reach an age when they have thoughts and feelings.” Active listening, she said, helped her to be able to listen without judging. “I am still working on it. You can check back what you think you are hearing. My daughter started telling me more.”

The value of self-expression that is encouraged through I messages and active listening is taught as a way of naturally expressing the self. In her study of class differences in conceptualizations of individualism, anthropologist Adrie Kusserow (2004) emphasizes how self-expression, and especially expressions of feelings, are treated as a natural expression of self. She cites Deborah Gordon and Margaret Locke (1988) in asserting that emotions and feelings are seen as more natural and less cultural than actions. Feelings are viewed as elemental to a being and not related to learning or culture. This leads to an assumption that communicating feelings is vital. In fact, the expression of feelings is linked to class and culture. Jean Briggs offers one classic example of how patterns of emotional expression are culturally regulated. Among the

Eskimos she found that emotional control and restraint is highly valued and is an essential sign of maturity (Briggs 1970). Furthermore, Kusserow cites Joseph Tobin who argues that the assumption of self-expression is insensitive to class differences in the United States, and that these differences appear especially in school and work settings. “Although less often and openly discussed, social class differences in self-expression within American society are as profound and significant as ethnic and cultural differences” (Tobin 1995, 248).

In her study of middle, upper and working-class families, Annette Lareau found that parents in middle-class families talk to their children much more than parents in working -class families. Middle-class families tend to use conversation very deliberately, drawing out children’s opinions and interests. This results in a variety of advantages for these children once they reach school and subsequently the work force. The children develop greater verbal ability, a larger vocabulary, more comfort with authority figures, and more familiarity with abstract concepts, traits that are often valued and privileged in school and work settings (Lareau 2003).

On the other hand, middle-class children are used to having adults manage their time and provide constant companionship and entertainment. Lareau says that middle-class children “were not conversant in other important skills, however, such as organizing their time for hours on end during weekends and summers, spending long periods of time away from adults, or hanging out with adults in a unobtrusive, subordinate fashion (Lareau 2003, 6).

While communication and the expression of emotions are thought to help the child access their true self, encouragement is used to help build a child’s self-esteem. By

carefully choosing how to talk to a child, a parent can focus on positive behaviors, traits, and outcomes, thereby building the child's confidence.

One Tuesday night, Rona told her class, "Tonight's class is about encouragement. Rudolf Dreikurs says encouragement is the cure--all. It is really beneficial to you to use it when [children have] made mistakes...people need to belong, feel loved, powerful, valuable, have a place, experiment and explore...Encouragement is better than praise. 'You are such a good girl' is very vague. Praise focuses on the doer. It is limited to good results and it fosters self evaluation. Encouragement focuses on deed, and is based on efforts, even tiny efforts, and it fosters self-esteem -- how we all feel about ourselves, which determines how we behave."

Self-esteem is a term that has become a catch-all, meaning anything and everything related to a person's view of themselves and their behavior. I return below to a discussion of self-esteem and how it emerged historically.

Rona gives the example of a child who plays baseball. "One day he hits the ball out of park. You tell him he is the best player on the team. Now the pressure is on -- there is nowhere to go except down. Instead you could say, great hit, how does that make you feel?" By reflecting back to the child, she emphasizes that you should help the child learn to appreciate their own actions rather than depending on you for praise. At the same time, she says, you are helping the child to believe that "no matter what anyone says or does to you are a valuable, capable and loveable person."

Florence also likes to teach encouragement in her Helping Parents class. "I love encouragement. It is such a treasure. We have an exercise where we have the group divided in two circles. You whisper encouraging things in your neighbors ear. Some

people cry because they never have had so much encouragement.” By modeling encouragements among the adult participants in her class, Florence is hoping to help people feel the importance of encouraging children.

Similarly, the First 5 video cautions viewers to label the child’s behavior and not the child, when disciplining a child. In one scene, a toddler knocks over the blocks her sister is building. Her mother tells her “No” and says, “I love you, but I don’t like it when you knock down your sister’s blocks.” Another father puts his son on timeout for using a toy motorcycle on the woodfloor, which he had been warned not to do. After the boy had been sitting on the sofa for a few minutes his father says, “You are a good boy, but what you did is bad. I asked you not to use the motorcycle on the floor because it could scratch it.”

In these examples we see the seeming delicacy of the children’s egos. If they are labeled bad or are not properly encouraged, it is assumed that they may learn to loathe themselves and consequently not be as successful.

Historical Look at Self-Esteem

The idea that a child’s ego is so easily damaged and in need of constant reinforcement is one that has gained increasing credence over the years. Much of the advice discussed here, especially that based on encouragement and praise are linked to the concept of self-esteem, a concept that emerged as early as the turn of the 19th century. Self-esteem became the cornerstone of childrearing theories by the end of the 1960s.

According to Stearns, John Dewey and William James were early proponents of the psychological importance of the self. Dewey in 1886 talked about intuition of self

being key to gaining knowledge in general, and suggested that selfhood was essential to freedom. James was the first to use the term self-esteem in 1892. He felt that one of the important aspects of socialization was to help children develop a sense of self, which would enable adaptation to different social settings with appropriate projections of self. He saw self-esteem as crucial to achievement and success (Stearns 2003).

The growing popularity of psychology in the 1920s and 1930s gave the concept of self-esteem more import. More focus was placed on protecting or building self-esteem, because children were viewed as vulnerable (as discussed above) and self-esteem was crucial to children's proper behavior. This continued to be an area of some concern, but it came to the fore in the 1960s, when Stanley Coopersmith noted in 1967 that there were "indications that in children, domination, rejection, and severe punishment result in lowered self-esteem. Under such conditions they have fewer experiences of love and success and tend to become generally more submissive and withdrawn (though occasionally veering to the opposite extreme of aggression and domination)" (Coopersmith quoted in Stearns 2003, 107). Continued scientific research suggested three main points: self-esteem was very important to a well-adjusted, high-functioning child and, in turn, adult; parents had an important impact on their children's self-esteem; and self-esteem was closely linked to school success (Stearns 2003).

Stearns asserts that self-esteem was embraced as a concept for a couple of reasons. The shift in the U.S. economy toward service-sector work played on the minds of parents post World War II. Parents aspired to help their children find jobs in these new fields, such as sales or management, which represented the possibility of upward mobility. These jobs required interpersonal skills, which experts were linking to self-

esteem. Also, rising divorce rates in the 1950s and the return of women to the workforce made people uneasy about the stability of family life, and parents looked for ways of strengthening their children and their psyches to buffer them. “Measuring and bolstering children’s self-esteem became something of a barometer in an anxious period in American family history” (Stearns 2003).

The focus on self-esteem building increased and became so great that California governor George Deukmejian in 1986 funded a Task Force on Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility with a budget of \$245,000 per year. Assemblyman John Vasconcellos who supported the task force argued that raising self-esteem in a state’s population would help solve many problems including crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, school underachievement and pollution. He even argued that it would help the state’s budget because people with better self-esteem would make more money and pay more taxes. He also felt it would help protect people from being overwhelmed by life’s challenges and reduce failures and misbehaviors. The task force did not find what it was hoping for – there were very low correlations between self-esteem and presumed consequences (Baumeister, et al. 2003).

Writing about this task force, Barbara Cruikshank (1993) notes that the self-esteem movement “promises to deliver a technology of subjectivity that will solve social problems from crime and poverty to gender inequality by waging a social revolution, not against capitalism, racism and inequality, but against the order of the self and the way we govern ourselves” (Cruikshank 1993, 328). This construal of self-esteem, she claims, moves from the personal to the political, making it a political obligation. Donna Goldstein (2001) shows how the discourse of self-esteem in the context of the popular

field of micro enterprise becomes a means of shifting responsibility to the individual.

“These discourses assume that the potential for economic success lies in the individual self rather than in more material and economic conditions affecting the availability of decent jobs with decent wages” (Goldstein 2001, 238). In child rearing this translates to teaching children that if they believe in themselves enough they will be able to accomplish anything, in spite of external conditions and pressures.

The term self-esteem itself is a vague one, meaning different things to different people. In her study of concepts of individualism in three communities in New York, Adrie Kusserow found that the working-class parents she interviewed wanted their children to be tough. “If the boundaries of self were too porous or soft, the negative influences of the street (prostitution, violence, drugs, alcohol, peer pressure, gangs) could penetrate and take over” (Kusserow 2004, 35). In this community, self-esteem might mean having enough confidence and self-awareness to protect oneself from negative influence. On the other hand, the affluent parents she interviewed wanted their children to have self-esteem in order to be able to participate in and engage with the world. It was “less of a toughening against a harsh environment; rather, it was tied to ensuring that the child opened into the world, into a successful career” (Kusserow 2004, 81).

These different conceptualizations corresponded to very different interactions between parents and children.

I discovered that much of the thickening and toughening of the boundaries of the self occurred though using techniques such as humor and teasing, by instilling a ‘get over it,’ ‘move on’ philosophy, by using a relatively loud, strict voice in discipline (which also often included spanking and hitting)...Nor did the parents always respond immediately and seriously to crying, yells, or questions from the child....Furthermore, unlike the [affluent] parents, the [working-class] parents tended to feel there should be limits on praise so the child didn’t

become too dependent on it or become too ‘full of himself’ or ‘puffed up.’ (Kusserow 2004, 36)

In Rona’s class, following a discussion on encouragement, one man responded with regret about the way he had been bringing up his son. “My son took the drivers test. He was beating himself up because he missed seven, even though he passes. I did that for years, that everything he does he is no good for it. I wish I had taken this class before. I made him doubt himself, I wish I could go back.” Though I don’t have detailed information about this father, it sounds as if he had been adhering to the working class toughen-them-up sensibility that Kusserow describes. Now, being confronted with the “expert” driven parenting philosophy that holds self-esteem in the highest regard, he is caused to rethink how he had been interacting with his son.

Choices and Consequences

In order to teach children a sense of responsibility and by extension, independence, these classes urge parents to teach decision making early on. By offering children choices that are appropriate to their age, you can give them a sense of control and inclusion. But making choices also means that children have to learn to take responsibility for their actions, and in order to understand that they need to feel the consequences of their decisions. These principles are important aspects of what Rona refers to as democratic parenting. Having choices and consequences at the center of a parenting approach for Dreikurs was a very self-conscious link to the democratic principles governing the United States, as we can see from the quote at the opening of this chapter. Perhaps not quite as self-conscious is the link between offering children choices and the consumer ethic that also governs the United States.

In her description of democratic parenting in comparison with autocratic and permissive parenting, Rona tells her class that under this model, children “have choice. People hear what you do or listen – you can say what you want. What do you learn from choice? You learn to be independent. Learn to explore different ideas and options. Why is it important to feel listened to? You are an actual person. You feel you are being heard.”

Rona’s choice of words is telling. To be a citizen in the United States at present, to be an actual person, is to have choice. We believe that the right to choose – choose our elected officials, choose to have a child or not, choose the products and homes and schools we want – is what it means to be free. In his discussion of the importance of consumption in advanced liberal societies, Nikolas Rose explains:

[M]odern individuals are not merely ‘free to choose’, but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice. They must interpret their past and dream their future as outcomes of choices made or choices still to make. Their choices are, in their turn, seen as realizations or the attributes of the choosing person – expressions of personality – and reflect back upon the person who has made them. (Italics in original) (Rose 1999, 87)

So choice is vital to our existence as a member of contemporary society but also vital as a means of expressing ourselves, of displaying the kind of person we are or wish to be. However, within that ‘freedom to choose,’ the choices are limited by economic policy, by economic constraints, by hegemonically shaped social preferences and structures. The choices that are being offered to children under democratic parenting are a replica of the constrained choices that are available to us.

The first kind of choice is offered in class discussion as a means of tricking a child into doing what you want them to do by offering her a set of inconsequential

choices. A woman in Rona's class said she was having trouble with her children talking back to her. For example, she would tell her son to go clean up his room and he would say, "I don't want to yet." "He is always coming back with something," the woman said, "What am I doing wrong?" Rona suggested she might offer her son choices. "Do you want to choose to clean your room now, or in twenty minutes?"

Another woman asked, "What about getting my son to pick up the puzzle? He says, no, no, no. I finally say I am not going to give you a hug. I don't like to put conditions on my love." Rona answers, "No, you don't want to withhold hugs. Say, do you want to pick up the puzzle now or in five minutes? And then if he doesn't pick it up, tell him, tomorrow you don't get to use the puzzle. You can also offer to help him pick it up. Say, I am willing to pick up three pieces. Kids like choices, they like to negotiate, they like to do things with you."

In both of these examples, the child is being offered a "choice" of doing what the parent wants immediately or in the immediate future. It is meant to give the child a sense of power and control over his behaviors. But in reality, the parent is setting the outcome. In her paper on power struggles between parents and children, anthropologist Diane Hoffman writes of her work in the US, "There exists a fundamental cultural paradox at the root of the cultural discourse on power: while control of self and others is very necessary, such control must be veiled; its outward appearances must be muted or otherwise deflected, in order to maintain the appearance of parent-child egalitarianism (Hoffman 2007)."

A similar form of giving younger children a sense of power over her actions while controlling her behavior is distraction. Instead of simply telling the child not to do

something, the parent offers an alternative to distract her from the undesirable behavior.

The handout included above from OYF, *The Ultimate Discipline Guide*, offers:

Distract your toddler with a toy or suggest a new activity instead of always saying "Stop" or "Don't" when he wants to play with something he shouldn't. (Let's look at this fun book). This positive approach works well for children under 2, who have poor impulse control and lack the cognitive ability to understand why you're saying no. Preschoolers react well too.

Doug, a 28-year old single father I interviewed found distractions to be one of the most valuable things he had learned in parenting class. "Instead of saying, no, don't climb on the fence, you say, would you like to climb on the slide? He responds to that." Distractions, such as this, help to guide a child's behavior by engaging them in another activity without actually forbidding them from doing the undesirable behavior, and without disciplining them. It gives the child the idea that they are simply choosing to do something else they would like to do.

Another way of using choices gives the child experience with making choices. This, again, can be used to elicit compliance with the parents' wishes. Rona offered her class, "To give them power, give them choices about food, clothes, books, travel. Negotiate with them about bedtime - you shoot early, they shoot late." For example, if a child wants to watch TV, but they also need to take a shower, you could tell them, "If you take a quick shower then you can watch a little TV, if not no TV." *The Ultimate Guide to Discipline* (handout from OYF included above) suggests:

Provide simple and practical choice when your child is being obstinate. ("You can wear the corduroy pants or your jeans. It's up to you.") But make sure you can live with what she chooses. This approach helps a young child feel in control and capable of making a decision. It's especially good during the terrible twos." One caveat: Avoid offering too many choices.

Offering choices about clothing or food might be used to get a child dressed or fed more quickly. But it also gives the child a chance to exercise his or her preferences and self-expression. It is a skill that, as discussed above, will be an important one in presenting themselves to the outside world.

Another aspect of choice that is important is accepting responsibility for the choices and decisions one has made. Allowing children to experience the consequences of their behaviors or choices is a way of teaching them to take responsibility for their actions. One way of doing this is to help them solve their own problems (let me help you put your train back together, or here is a towel to clean up the spilled water). Another way, especially for older children is to avoid intervening on their behalf to protect them, whenever possible. As Rona told her class, “Kids need to be loved and to be able to repair their mistakes. By repairing their mistakes and learning from their own choices, children learn self-control. Self-control is self-discipline. When you are a kid your parent is supposed to help you learn self-discipline. The goal of discipline is to teach a child to be self-responsible and act in ways to get positive results, even when no authority figure is present.” Here Rona has stated the very important principle behind contemporary society, is that the individual take responsibility for his or her actions and their effects on those around them.

Both handouts included above advocate using logical consequences to teach children the outcome of negative behavior. For logical consequences, the parent orchestrates a way of the child repairing the mistake, or in some way feeling the effects of their actions. Rona also advocates using natural consequences, where the child does not intervene at all (if the consequences of the child’s behavior will not physically injure

him.) “If they forget their lunch,” she told her class, “they will be hungry at lunch... Ask yourself what will happen if you don’t intervene.”

Following a discussion in the Easton class of teaching responsibility and self-discipline to children by letting them take responsibility for their actions, Mike brought up an example of some of his nephews who stole a car. The 14 and 16 year old boys went joyriding on Thanksgiving in a car that belonged to some friends of the family. They got caught by the people who owned the car. Mike said they were lucky he was not the one to catch them. Mike asks the class, “How do you punish this?” Some one answers, “Whip their asses!” Mike raises his fist in the air and said, “Thank you! I think it is better me than the police.” The teacher asks, “How can they repair the damage? At 16 they know right from wrong. Apologizing is not enough.” Some one suggests, “They could offer to pay his registration.” Another person adds, “I personally would let them make up their own punishment.” Rona responds, “We are not going to do punishment.” (She wants the class instead to focus on consequences for their actions.) She offers, “They could detail it, do some yard work. [The idea is] they are restoring their integrity. You could tell them, next time I will call the police and you will not get your license until you are 18.”

This discussion brings up a few points that we have touched on. First, Mike is embracing the idea that physical punishment is sometimes necessary in order to protect children from the real world, in this case the police. This is a point I will address again below. Rona is trying to direct the class to find consequences that will help to teach the children that what they did was wrong and that they have to take responsibility for their actions, without applying a “punishment.” The distinction she is trying to make is that a

punishment will not necessarily help children learn to take responsibility for their actions as well as repairing or rectifying their mistake. Another example she gave was of her son playing basketball in the house and breaking her lamp. She did not get angry at him, but he had to pay for a new lamp out of his allowance. Here again, we see the importance placed on children learning and taking responsibility.

Nevertheless, as Mike illustrates, the idea that children should not be punished is not a concept that is uniformly accepted. Consider the following two quotes by parents I interviewed about a very similar situation.

Carol is a 23 year-old Black woman, who is a single mother, and was taking the Helping Parents class because her social worker encouraged her to take it. She describes a difficult moment with her four-year old son that she did not feel she handled well. “We were walking across the street going somewhere and he ran off from me and I popped him upside the head. I was so scared because he ran in the street.” I asked her what she wished she had done differently. “I could of just grabbed him and said no running in the street or that car will hit you.”

Doug is a 28 year-old White father of a two-year old boy. He is fighting for custody of the boy who lives with him in Doug’s mother’s house. He recounted a situation with his son that he felt he handled well, “When the gate to the yard was open he ran right into the street. Instead of running and whooping him back in, I picked him up and just said we don’t go in the street. I thought I handled it well.” Doug told me that he had found the Easton Class helpful with the “hitting thing.” “I used to swat him, but I don’t do that anymore.”

It is clear from these two scenarios that physical punishment is not completely off the radar. In fact, it is something that parents grapple with, in spite of advice to the contrary. As Carol says, in a moment when she was very frightened, hitting her son felt like a more immediate and serious way to get his attention. She later reflects that she would prefer to have a different reaction. And Doug acknowledges that swatting his son is something he is not doing after taking this class, but that it is something he has done before.

Cheryl, a 31 year-old African-American woman who grew up in Oakland is struggling with finding the appropriate way to discipline her children. Her parents were very strict – too strict in her opinion. They lived in a bad neighborhood and were never allowed to go outside. Her grandmother is a minister and taught her “if you chastise your kids, you love them – to help guide them. That is the way you teach them the right way.” Cheryl has three kids and had a conflict with CFS because she gave one of her daughters a “whooping.” The daughter told a teacher at school and CFS ended up placing the girl in foster care. She says of her own trajectory that in the beginning with her children, “you do too many things wrong, you get your butt whooped. Now I don’t whoop my kids. I give them timeout, make my son write lines or take some thing from them. So far it’s been working.” It is clear from these examples, that though the message is being absorbed that spanking is not an appropriate way to discipline, it is a way many people use, perhaps because their own parents used it, and it is not easy to replace.

Physical punishment

In early 2007, a California Assemblywoman proposed a bill that would make spanking children under three a crime. This bill sparked a lively controversy with

emotional reactions from both supporters and detractors. Although advocates for spanking in the world of parenting advice are few and far between, this bill found surprisingly dismal support. Even the San Francisco Bay Area, one of the most liberal regions in the state, a poll of 500 adults, conducted by a local television channel, found that 57% would oppose the bill and only 23% supported it (Zimmerman 2007).

Many opposed the bill because they felt it went too far in controlling parenting choices that families should be able to make with out legislation. Legislation banning child abuse is already in existence, so this would be more about outlawing a swat on the behind than an outright beating, critics said. Would laws about breastfeeding and homework support follow (Zimmerman 2007)? This fear of government involvement in private affairs has a long and complicated history in the United States, evident in debates such as the one around gun control. On the other hand, 17 countries (mostly European) have outlawed corporal punishment of children by family members (Lelchuk 2007). Canada was debating passing federal legislation to this effect this year. Due to lack of support, the legislator eventually revised her bill to tighten existing child abuse laws.

The spanking question has been one of the most visible debates around parenting. Arguments have been made that in certain populations, especially African American, parents feel it necessary to physically punish children to teach them self-control that will save them later on from violence and discrimination. We saw this attitude in Mike's comment about its being better for him to punish his nephew than the police. This attitude has been linked to parents under slavery who wanted to punish their children and control them before the masters could (Wissow 2001), (Whaley 2000). A recent radio show called "Parenthood Matters," broadcast in the San Francisco Bay Area had cultural

differences in discipline as its topic.⁵² A guest on the show La Rhonda Crosby-Johnson⁵³ told the host that in the African American community, there is a fear that their children are not in a safe place, and that there “is not a lot of latitude for our children to act up or act out.” There is an idea that the world will punish children in a much harsher way than the parent, if the parent does not step in and punish early. Renner acknowledged this concern and then said that some cross cultural studies⁵⁴ she had read showed that parents who physically disciplined their children rated their children as more aggressive and more depressed. There have been a lot of studies, she asserted, that if you use “too harsh discipline, you might cause more aggression in your children.”

As discussed, all but one of the classes that I studied strongly rejected spanking or corporal punishment, instead focusing on “positive discipline” or encouragement. The curriculum of the OFY class was designed by the director of the program, a Black woman, to respect the parenting philosophies of her clientele, which was also largely Black. While the class offered alternatives to spanking and discusses other techniques such as timeouts and removing privileges, they also offered the following handout on spanking effectively.

⁵² This weekly show is funded in large part through First 5. I am referring to the show that aired 4/1/07, which is available at www.childhoodmatters.org

⁵³ Crosby-Johnson is an author, health educator, and consultant on issues of violence prevention and health.

⁵⁴ No citations were given for these studies.

HOW TO SPANK EFFECTIVELY

Effective spanking is not a last resort. Spanking is only useful to draw a child's attention to a problematic behavior and your decision about it if it is done early, quickly, and without fuss. If a child has repeatedly disobeyed you because you failed to set limits, the problem is that you failed to set and hold to limits. Spanking will not change that. If a child repeatedly disobeys after being warned once, spanked, and punished, then the behavioral cycle is serious and spanking will no help at this point. Here are some tips for effective spanking.

1. Only spank to provide an immediate halt to an unacceptable behavior
2. Spanking should be followed by a short explanation and a consequence. Time out, losing some privileges for the rest of the day, going to bed early etc... are effective consequences
3. Correction should immediately follow the undesired behavior
4. Effective spankings are not accompanied by yelling and name calling. They are never motivated by rage.

This handout outlines very controlled, very specific use of spanking. It makes a clear distinction between spanking with intention and hitting children in rage. This class was available for parents who had been referred because of their involvement in Children and Family Services. Clients in CFS are strongly advised never to hit their children, so this is an example of a very measured use of physical discipline.

What is especially interesting here, however, is the fact that the director included it because she wanted to be especially sensitive to be accepting of the culture of parenting practices prevalent in the local community. Mike, whom I discussed in Chapter 7 on Schools, and who grew up in the largely African-American community where OFY is

located, confirmed this. He did not like that the teacher of the Easton Class he attended told her students directly that spanking was not acceptable. He told me he did not find this helpful. “I believe in spanking,” he said. “I know they teach you not to spank, but negotiating only goes so far.”⁵⁵

Mary, whom I have also discussed in previous chapters also grew up nearby. She described to me her process of deciding not to spank her children any more. She had been spanked when she was young and she said when she had her kids she started spanking when she was frustrated. “I didn’t know what to do and I would spank.” When she went to college and started studying child development, she decided not to spank anymore, and she made a concerted effort to change her style. Her family was not supportive of this change, which they likely perceived as a cultural rejection. “They said I was turning White.” The transition from spanking to not spanking was a difficult one, and the children were really testing her. Her family saw this as evidence of her new style not working. “We used to see White kids in a supermarket have a tantrum and the mother was just looking. When we went we got a lecture about don’t touch anything, don’t ask for anything because you know what is going to happen if you do.”

Class and Discipline

The fact that studies have not conclusively shown there to be a higher rate of spanking in minority families (Wissow 2001) has done little to change the perception that

⁵⁵ On the other hand, when I asked him about a parenting moment he felt he handled well, he told me about a situation with his step-son. The boy got into a fist fight with his best friend and when Mike tried to talk to him he walked out of the house and down the road. “Instead of doing what I would normally done, I went and talked to him, and it never happened again. I would have normally spanked him or put him on punishment. But I talked to him about it and it worked out.”

this is largely a “cultural” or “racial” issue. In fact, there is some indication that differences in styles around discipline have more to do with class than race. In the examples of Mary and Mike above, both are African American, but Mary was raised by a professional mother and Mary herself graduated from college. Mike, on the other hand, while in a highly paid profession, did not attend college. These factors suggest that perhaps their differences have to do with class sensibilities.

Following her college education, Mary changed her approach to parenting and her family felt she was betraying her cultural background. But this change could be attributed to a change in class or class aspirations. Mike, on the other hand, still believed in physical punishment in spite of his high pay bracket. I should note that in the following chapter I discuss Mike’s attitude toward education as an example of a middle-class approach. The fact that he could be placed into either working class or middle class depending on how class is determined (upbringing, education, or career) and his seemingly contradictory approaches to education and discipline are indicative. They speak to the porous nature of class categories and the trouble trying to assign class to individuals.

In her book examining the parenting of Black and White families across class lines, Lareau found that it was class and not race that made a difference in terms of their approach to child rearing.

In terms of the areas this book has focused on – how children spend their time, the way parents use language and discipline in the home, the nature of the families’ social connections, and the strategies used for intervening in institutions – white and Black parents engaged in very similar, often identical, practices with their children. (Lareau 2003, 241)

So while parenting differences, and especially in terms of the use of physical punishment, are often painted as cultural, it seems that in reality these differences might have more to do with class.

Generational and Cultural Differences

Betty, the grandmother who is caring for her two grandchildren part time commented on this change. “Now, discipline is so different. You used to pop them on their butts and go on with your business. Now you have to reason it out with them.” Her sentiments were echoed in a multi-generational interview I conducted with the mother and grandmother of Doug (mentioned above). He and his two year old son lived with his mother and his grandparents, and the family ran a daycare at home. The mother, Peni, and grandmother, Betty, felt that children today lack discipline and respect. They felt that parents might tell their children to stop a certain behavior, but that the children never felt any consequences. “Kids have got their parents buffaloed today,” Betty told me. Peni agreed, “I don’t believe in beating children, but sometimes children need a spanking.” Betty chimed in, “A swat on the behind. It don’t even need to hurt them.” Peni added that a tap on the behind wouldn’t hurt them, but it would hurt their feelings, which would be enough to discipline them. This concern about lack of discipline may partially be the ubiquitous feeling that the new generation is falling apart, but it is also due to the traceable change in disciplinary techniques. Since taking the class, Doug is working on not spanking his son and trying other techniques such as distraction or timeouts.

Generational differences in approaches to discipline may also have to do with immigration and cultural assimilation. Luis grew up with his strict and Catholic parents

who had both emigrated to the United States from Mexico when he was young. He was 26 years old and had met a Canadian woman on-line who had one son. They had married and had a new baby together, though she was living in Canada with her parents and he was living in the Bay Area. They planned to be living together soon. He felt vindicated in this class because he could see what his parents had done “wrong” and how he could do it better. “My parents were completely my way or the highway. They believed to teach us anything they had to have us under control emotionally, through fear, punishment, and spanking. They didn’t know much about parenting. They thought they knew so they stuck to it. They didn’t go to school. They didn’t even speak English. They tried to apply life in Mexico [to their life in the United States]. ...I’m raising [my son] completely differently. I’m more of a democratic parent. I would encourage kids more than they encouraged us. They’ll be free expression of love with my kids. Things our parents didn’t do for us that are essential for successful, no limit people.” What Luis does not mention is that he is living under very different economic circumstances than his parents. His father had built a successful business in the United States, but they had immigrated with few resources. It is likely they were not able to provide for their children in the same way he would like. And there were different cultural values associated with their style of child rearing, including respect for authority and responsibility to the family.

Luis spoke several times about wanting his children to be “no limit kid.” When I asked him what that meant, he said, “They won’t be held back by any debilitating emotional feelings. He can feel what he wants – no one can force you. It is most important to teach them how to be self-propelled, self-motivated people, [who can be] as

successful as they wanted. And I guess ultimately raise kids who are happy. Happy all the time.”

As Valdes (1996) points out, many working-class Mexican families have worldviews of success and proper socialization that differ dramatically from those of White, middle-class, mainstream families. “For most ordinary Mexican families, individual success and accomplishment are generally held in lesser esteem than are people’s abilities to maintain ties across generations and to make an honest living” (Valdes 1996, 170). In her ethnography, Jennifer Hirsch (1999) addresses how generational and geographic shifts for Mexican immigrant women can open opportunities for building marriages based less on the Mexican tradition of respect and more on the ideal of trust. While women on both sides of the border wanted to have companionate marriages, based on less gendered division of labor in social reproduction, and more cooperative decision making, those who had migrated to the United States found they had more leverage for pursuing such relationships.

Villenas (2001) shows how immigrants construe their own child rearing as superior to U.S. models because they teach “Buena educacion” – respect, and a commitment to el hogar (the home), and being able to take care of themselves. They present this in contradiction to how they are portrayed as uneducated and in need of parenting skills. The mistrust of foreign or antiquated ideas of child rearing (and the corresponding resistance from those being accused) is not a new phenomenon. There is resistance to change from one generation to the next whether the family has immigrated or not. But this perception of a generation of undisciplined children does correspond to the powerful notion that physical punishment should be a thing of the past.

Gendered discipline

Carol, the 23 year old single mother mentioned early had an interesting take on her own predicament. She has a chipper and positive character and clearly adores her son. Yet she feels somewhat stuck. She tells me, “I am trying to be mother and father at the same time—the discipliner and lover and the one that plays with him too. She tells a story about shopping at Walmart and her son was “acting fool, screaming about what he want.” She told him, “If you don’t stop we will put everything back and go home and I will call Daddy. That made him quiet.” She tells this story as an example of a parenting moment she felt she handled well. She felt that using a male disciplinary figure as a back up to her authority was helpful. After her son turned one, she told me the boy’s father was not a part of their lives, so I am not sure if he is invoked for the purpose of discipline or if she is referring to someone else. But the point is having a male figure as “the discipliner.” What is interesting is that in her own life Carol’s mother was the disciplinary figure. Her father “never whooped us at all. If we did something he tell our mother. My mother never tolerated anything.”

Tiffany is a 28 year old White woman with two sons, aged five and two at the time of our interview. When she was pregnant she envisioned having a family like “Leave it to Beaver,” with a white picket fence, a dad who goes to work and is “hard” and a mom who is the “soft one”, loving and warm. She wanted to be “the house where all the kids go because the mom is cool. A loving home.” Her own home growing up was a far cry from this. Her mom and dad were both serious drug users. Her dad overdosed and her mom got cleaned up when Tiffany was seven or eight.

In spite of this perception that mothers should be the soft, nurturing ones and father’s the disciplinarians, this was not so clear cut in my interview when people talked

about their own parents. More often than not people mentioned their mother as the strict disciplinarian. A couple of men mentioned that their fathers were really hard on them, but overall the pictures people painted of their own families did not fall neatly along these gendered lines. This nostalgia is for an imagined division of gender roles and nuclear family life that was never so cut and dried (Coontz 1992). Few working-class women stayed home, because it was not financially feasible. Where a strict division of labor existed, women were responsible for child care, and that includes discipline. The “discipliner” and the “lover,” as Carol describes the roles, are most often one and the same.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show in this chapter that disciplinary techniques taught in parenting classes reflect the self-control required of members of contemporary society. Physical punishment is still prevalent, but is being replaced by other strategies, sometimes referred collectively to as intensive parenting (Hays 1996). This approach requires parents to constantly negotiate and interact with their children and to control their own reactions to their children’s behavior.

The techniques most often taught in the parenting classes I observed were communication, encouragement, and offering choices. Encouragement is a catchword built on the idea that children have very fragile egos and will act better if they feel better about themselves. Both expression of feelings and insistence on protecting self-esteem are linked to class and culture (Kusserow 2004). Because schools and workplaces value controlled self-expression and confident communication, these traits can benefit the middle-class children who have been raised according to these principles. Cruikshank

(1993) writes, “Self-esteem is a technology of citizenship and self-governance for evaluating and acting upon our selves so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to” (Cruikshank 1993, 330). By constantly seeking to improve ourselves and our self-esteem, we are acting to improve ourselves as people and citizens. What we view as good and “esteemed” in ourselves is most often what is valued by the society as a whole.

Offering choices is another technique that is taught for guiding children to desired behavior. Choice is a key word in the market-driven neo-liberal era we live in. It is linked to choices about life-style and consumer goods. The concept of choice also points to individual responsibility. The idea that we choose how we live our lives serves the neo-liberal position that each individual is responsible for his or her own achievements and failures. By extension, parents are responsible for making proper choices in child rearing in order to instill a similar sense of responsibility in their children.

I have also discussed the ways in which disciplinary styles are influenced by the three key North American analytic categories, race, class, and gender, but also by generation and culture. The cultural values prioritized by different generations as well as different ethnic or national backgrounds are very important in influencing the knowledge and practices to which parents are drawn.

Chapter 6:

Relaxation and Responsibility

Introduction

“Be Good to Yourself! 19 Easy Ways to Stay Well and Feel Great,” announces the cover of a recent issue of *Parenting* magazine⁵⁶. Articles such as this one, in which “Moms share their favorite stay-well tactics for body and mind,” are regularly featured in magazines and other popular outlets for parenting advice. I admit to eagerly reading similar articles that promise to give me ideas about how to feel less hurried and anxious, more patient and controlled. The idea that you have to take care of yourself in order to better take care of your child/children is a truism in this era of the constant quest for healthy bodies and minds. What is left unstated in this advice is the assumption that being selfish about taking care of yourself enhances parents’ ability to selflessly care for children and fulfill their responsibility as productive citizens. This focus on self-care in many cases represents further shifting the burden of care onto parents in an era where the state already provides minimal support for helping citizens with children.

Stress is considered a side effect of modern life. So to manage stress is a constant pursuit for those living in the modern age. Having a healthy body and mind is considered the first step to keeping stress at bay, and as we will see in this chapter, teachers in these parenting classes talk about the many ways in which we can “take care of ourselves.”

Sociologist Deborah Lupton eloquently states,

In this secular age, focusing upon one’s diet and other lifestyle choices has become an alternative to prayer and

⁵⁶ *Parenting*, September 2005, pg. 118

righteous living in providing a means of making sense of life and death. 'Healthiness' has replaced Godliness as a yardstick of accomplishment and proper living. (Lupton 1995, 4)

Following this argument, if we view stress as antithetical to health, to live a life in which stress is properly "managed" is to live a proper life. What is assumed here is that we all have the same resources available to take care of ourselves: time, money, support, access to nutritious food. Those who fall short of making adequate attempts to take care of themselves may be judged for not trying hard enough, and perhaps worse, may judge themselves for failing to meet these expectations.

This chapter will draw on advice given in parenting classes about striving to maintain a healthy body and mind. I briefly discuss the history of the concept of stress alongside the emergence in the mainstream of practices drawn from eastern religion to manage stress. Managing stress is also construed as key to staying in control, and a controlled parent is crucial for creating what is seen as the optimal atmosphere for child rearing: stable, secure, predictable, and scheduled. Again, it should be noted that the ability to provide this kind of atmosphere depends largely on material circumstances, such as the quality and quantity of living space, and the time to create and follow a disciplined schedule, among others. However, regardless of the availability of resources, parents are to strive for this sort of disciplined environment, which allows for the reproduction of morally correct and productive citizens.

Taking Care of Yourself

Each of the classes I attended dedicated a full session to stress reduction and

managing stress,⁵⁷ which included some combination of role playing exercises, reading, and handouts. The techniques advocated ranged from exercising, eating well, and sleeping enough, to meditating, deep breathing and cultivating inner happiness. The following scenarios are examples of class discussions centered on stress reduction.

Easton Night Class

Rona, the teacher of the Tuesday night class in Easton, gives a handout to the class entitled Meeting Your Own Emotional Needs. Referring to the handout she says, “We all have physical needs: food, water, sleep, shelter. There are emotional needs, too.” Here she reads the list: time management, positive action toward others, self-honesty, and growth on an intellectual or physical level. “Are there any others?”

One man in the class calls out, “being loved.” A woman adds, “communication.” Another asks, “Do you ever reach a point when you are in balance?” Several people answer, “No!”

After a brief side discussion, she brings them back to the subject at hand. “You need to take care of yourself. How do you do it?” People call out answers: hygiene, eat right and get a balanced diet, exercise, rest.

“How do we make ourselves feel better?” Again people call out: “Talk to someone else.” “Take a run.” “Walk.” “Kick the dog,” someone adds sarcastically. The teacher interrupts, “That would be negative.”

Opening the next session, Rona asks, Last week were you taking care of yourselves? What did you do nice for yourself?

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3 for a more complete description of the classes and the topics discussed.

One man answers, “I went fishing a few times. Rode my bike. I’m trying to take care of myself (his wife sitting beside him is silent). Another man says, “I treated myself to a Sunday off. I sat at my desk and snoozed and hung my boots up. I needed it – I’ve gotten five- six hours of sleep the last twelve weeks.”

Oakland Youth and Family Class

After closing up the weekly exercise of journal writing, Brianna, class facilitator at Oakland Youth and Family, turns the discussion to what we can do to take care of ourselves. She brings up exercise, and a couple of people call out: running, walking. Her next point was talking out problems and how important it is to share your feelings with someone. She goes on to tell the class about a friend of hers who committed suicide, and how she is always thinking that if he had talked to someone maybe that wouldn't have happened.

Her next point is meditation. “Why is that important? It takes your mind off your worries. Gives you time to rest.” Callie, a mother in the class who is in the Navy Guard says, “I hate meditation. I am a runner, I have to move. It is good, because with the baby you have to do this (she is holding her year-old son, bouncing and swinging him around).” I interject that sometimes running is like meditation, but she answers, no - she has to listen to music.

Brianna brings up proper nutrition next. “If you eat well, your body will act well.”

She closes the discussion with getting a full body massage. “I believe everyone should have two full body massages per year.”

During another session, Brianna brought out a work sheet about the Nine Principles of smart love. One of the principles is “Cultivate Inner Happiness: The greatest gift you can give your child is a sturdy fortress of inner happiness. Outward happiness always will be fleeting and uncertain without this inward foundation.” The only father in class that day commented that it made him think of an oxygen mask on the airplane, and how you have to put it on yourself first and then on your child. You have to take care of yourself first, before you are able to take care of someone else.

This last comment about the oxygen mask is one that comes up repeatedly in discussions of parenting and stress. This vivid metaphor of taking in oxygen so that you do not lose your orientation and your ability to care for you child is an indicative one and one that is often used. For example, it appears in the opening chapter of the book Redirecting Children’s Behavior, which is used in the Easton night class:

Just before the airplane takes off, the stewardess instructs parents to place the oxygen mask on themselves first in an emergency and then place a mask on their child. Notice the request: Put yours on first, then you will be able to help your child. All to often we satisfy the needs of our children and others before our own. As a result our energy is depleted and we have nothing left to give, or we give with resentment and frustration. (Kvols 1998)

This idea compares the need to manage stress and take care of ourselves to the very act of breathing. These quotes give us an idea of the many ways that the concept of “taking care of yourself” is included in parenting classes, and the myriad ways that people take care.

In the first example, Rona clearly joins physical and emotional needs and this is echoed in the other examples. There is a conflation of healthy mind and healthy body,

which is indicative of the way stress is popularly understood: as having both physical and mental origins and effects. Stress management, in turn, involves caring for both body and mind. Brianna's suggestion to her class of mostly poor, single mothers that everyone have two full body massages per year highlights the ways in which stress management discourse is insensitive to class differences. The ease of eating well and exercising, let alone getting full body massages, is based largely on access to money, time, and healthy food choices. To those who do not have these resources readily available (and even sometimes to those that do), suggestions about reducing stress in your life can act as an additional demand.⁵⁸

In the first example at the Eaton class there are a number of men talking about how they are pursuing free time. In one example in particular, the man's wife is noticeably quiet while he talks about trying to take care of themselves. Mattingly and Bianchi (2003) find in their study of gender differences in free time that men have more free time and that this difference is exacerbated by marriage and children. Women bear much of the responsibility for coordinating and preparing family time activities (meals, decoration, and other preparation, for eg) so that they may have less time to enjoy this "free time" within the family setting (Mattingly 2003). In this way it may be more difficult for women to take care of themselves by pursuing leisure activities.

The first of the following handouts gives a visual barrage of such suggestions. This handout was given out during a class at OYF, and directs the reader to any of the 101 actions proposed to relieve stress. OYF had a binder full of information on different

⁵⁸ However, as I will discuss below, for the most part class participants welcomed suggestions about stress management or stress relief, relishing the luxury of focusing on themselves instead of their children.

topics, which had been pulled from a variety of sources, including magazines, books and the internet. The handout brings in anything and everything that could help someone to relax, from daydreaming to “eating an orange segment by segment.” The parenting program director had developed the curriculum and added information she felt would be helpful for her clients. The second handout is also from OYF and gives a very physical and medical description of stress and its effects. This contrasts with the third sheet from an organization that is older, more established, and has a uniform curriculum that teachers draw on. This handout relies on meditation or mindfulness techniques that have become very popular means of stress management. I will return to the use of techniques drawn from Eastern religions later in the chapter.

Stress Management For Parents



Stress is something that is a part of all of our lives. It is impossible to totally avoid stress. In fact, mild to moderate amounts of stress can be good for you. Too much stress, however, can result in various problems. Specific reactions to stress vary from person to person. Excessive stress can have a negative effect on people's health, making them more susceptible to illness. Too much stress can also have a negative effect on relationships with family and friends. Regardless of how stress affects an individual, all people experiencing excessive stress need to identify what stressors are impacting them, and how to prevent and manage stress.

Signs That You May Be Experiencing Too Much Stress

There are many clues that your body gives that indicate you are under too much stress. Such clues may include a tight throat, sweaty palms, headache, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, uneasiness, indigestion, depression, restlessness, frustration, and changes in sleeping or eating patterns. People who learn how to recognize these stress signs have taken the first step to combating stress. If high levels of stress continue, it can lead to numerous problems including increased risk of illness, increased risk of accidents, decreased satisfaction with life, and increased risk of alcohol and/or drug abuse.

Increased risk of illness:

There are a number of illnesses that are directly related to too much stress in one's life. Such illnesses include high blood pressure, coronary disease, and ulcers. Too much stress can also affect a person's immune system, making it more difficult to combat illnesses when they occur. Such people may get ill more easily and take longer to recover.

Brief Relaxation Techniques

The Relaxing Sigh

During the day you probably catch yourself sighing or yawning. This is generally a sign that you are not getting enough oxygen. Sighing and yawning are your body's way of remedying the situation. A sigh is often accompanied by a feeling of tension and a sense that things are not quite as they should be. A sigh releases a bit of tension and can be practiced at will as a means of relaxing.

1. Sit or stand up straight.
2. Sigh deeply, letting out a sound of deep relief as the air rushes out of your lungs.
3. Don't think about inhaling, just let the air come out naturally.
4. Repeat this procedure 8-12 times whenever you feel the need for it, and experience the feeling of relaxation.
5. At the end of each exhale shake your hands away from your body as a symbol that you're throwing your tensions away.

Color Imagery

- Close your eyes and scan your body for tension. Imagine the color red associated with this tension or discomfort.
- Take a deep breath and change the color from red to blue and let all the tension go. Experience the relaxation associated with the color blue.
- Now imagine the color blue becoming darker and darker and relax further with each shade of blue you experience.
- Practice changing from red to blue with each daily hassle you confront. Imagine the color blue as your cue to relax.

Instant Relaxation Drill

Sit comfortably, or if needed, stand.

Draw in a deep breath and hold it for five seconds (count to five slowly), exhale slowly, and tell all your muscles to relax. Repeat this two or three times to become more completely relaxed.

If circumstances permit, imagine a pleasant thought ("I am learning how to relax"), or a pleasant scene (a calm lake, a mountain stream).

Develop cueing systems to remind yourself to use this drill (for example, whenever you become impatient over having to wait). The Instant Relaxation Drill takes from 30-60 seconds.

Stress and Well-Being

The health and well-being promoted in these classes is a very ambiguous state. As we can see from the opening examples, the way people take care of themselves range widely from fishing, to running, to creating a positive state of mind. The generalized notion of everyday life causing physical and mental fatigue and tension (stress), which can cause any number of problems with your mood, outlook, and physical being, contributes to this vague understanding of health. I will diverge briefly here to examine the concept of stress and how stress management came to be seen as an integral part of health and well-being.

The word stress, used in a physiological sense to mean a general anxiety produced from the cares of life, was employed by physiologist Walter B. Cannon as early as 1914, perhaps earlier (Abbott 1990). Sociologist Andrew Abbott contends that the concept of stress – that individuals suffer the difficult demands of life, resulting in psychological or biological disease date back to the Romantic critique of modernity, referred to variously as nerves, hysteria, tension and anxiety, over time. By the progressive era, the idea that chronic and acute stress could cause nervous and mental disease was well established (Abbott 1990).

It took hold as a term in popular literature in the early 1950s, stemming from Hans Selye's scientific work, who according to Venir, a medical historian, originated the idea of the collective troubles of life as perilous, but identifiable and controllable. Selye, an endocrinologist, first used the term to refer to "non-specific physiological defense reaction" after observing that rats he injected with various agents responded consistently with ulceration of the intestines, atrophy of the thymus and lymphatic system, and ulceration of the adrenal cortex. He determined that these three responses were signs of

damage to a mammalian body in response to environmental agents. By the 1940s he had established the now accepted scientific definition for stress: “the sum of all non-specifically induced changes in a biologic system. – that is to say, the non-specific physiological adaptation that was the basis of life itself”(Viner 1999, 392). He indicated that successful adaptation to the adverse stimuli of life could lead to health and happiness. In other words, he believed that if people could learn to handle stress properly, they could negate the ill effects of the pressures of life.

His findings were quickly taken up by military psychologists at the time because it spoke to the problem of combat neuroses that caused a significant loss of military manpower and suggested new areas of prevention and therapy. Practitioners of alternative medicine were also drawn to his theories because they reinforced their ideas about the negative effect of the built environment on the human body. “Selye actively encouraged alliances between regular and alternative medical practitioners, and spoke regularly to alternative medicine groups who eagerly embraced what they saw as a scientific validation of meditation and relaxation as ways to personal empowerment” (Viner 1999, 402).

In the 1960s several scientists initiated studies to investigate the link between stress responses and practices drawn from Eastern Religions such as meditation. One Harvard researcher was surprised to find that practitioners of meditation could alter their metabolism, breathing rate and brain wave frequency. He had been so leery of associating himself with hippies that he undertook the study with the condition that the practitioners of meditation come after-hours through the backdoor. In spite of his skepticism, he was very impressed with his findings, and subsequently undertook a project to write a

pragmatic book about the practice of meditation, removed from any of its religious underpinnings, which ended up on the *New York Times* best-seller list (Harrington 2008).

Another MIT educated scientist, Jon Kabat-Zinn, who was a devoted teacher of Buddhist meditation and yoga, has been very influential in popularizing the use of mindfulness techniques from Buddhist religions to assuage the effects of stress. Mindfulness, as described by historian Franz Aubrey Metcalf, is a core attentional stance underlying all streams of Buddhist meditative practices (Metcalf 2002, 146). Kabat-Zinn started one of the first stress clinics in the late 1970s in Massachusetts. “The primary intention was to see if it were possible to create a vehicle for the effective training of medical patients in relatively intensive mindfulness meditation (including mindful hatha yoga) and its immediate applications to the stress, pain, and illness people were grappling with in their lives” (Kabat-Zinn 2003, 149). Since that time mindfulness-based programs have been implemented in hospitals, schools, workplaces, prisons, and health centers (Kabat-Zinn 2003). Benson, Kabat-Zinn, and other popular figures such as Dr. Andrew Weil, have brought meditation and mindfulness into the popular culture (Metcalf 2002) in such a way that they are no longer associated with either religion or “alternative” medicine. These techniques are, as is evident from these parenting classes, in the mainstream, alongside other more standard modern day approaches to the pursuit of health, such as proper nutrition and exercise.

Anthropologists have critiqued the concept of stress as a universal reality by showing that stress is mediated by our perceptions of our social world. Allan Young, in his classic article on stress, wrote, “Because the stress discourse is a social discourse – it claims to situate pathogenesis within everyday experience -- its specificity has important

ideological consequences in the sense of legitimizing existing social arrangements” (Young 1980: 144). So inequalities that produce what are perceived as stressors are medicalized and treated as individual pathologies. Following Young’s argument, scholars have explored stress discourse in a variety of settings. Adelson (2008) writes about discourses of stress among Cree women in Northern Quebec. “Although there are shared challenges in terms of the various historical, economic, political, and social determinants of stress in their daily lives, there is a concomitant perpetuation of the idea that “stress” needs to be managed on one’s own” (Adelson 2008: 328). In his dissertation, Gerard Weber (2008) writes about an “epidemic of stress” surfacing in the lives of older, working-class men and women following the transformation of Romania from socialism to capitalism beginning in 1989. He suggests that some people seem to perceive the transformation of their society as having an impact on their physical and mental health. This examination of the stress discourse in parenting education builds on the anthropological inquiry of stress as representation of often detrimental social conditions.

Parents’ Reactions

The topics of stress and stress management are ones that parents relate to and to which they look forward. They see the focus on stress management as an acknowledgement of the strains on their lives. Focusing on themselves feels like an indulgence, a welcome reprieve from so much other parenting advice, which is often, as sociologist Sharon Hays (1996) describes, child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive and financially expensive. There is no stigma attached to being stressed, as there may be with being an inadequate parent. In fact, being stressed is

thought of as a fact of modern life. In an article on early stress research, social scientist Viner states that, “Stress today is a deeply held modern metaphor, an unquestioned explanation of the darker sides of human experience” (Viner 1999, p. 392). Stress is seen as something that affects us all and is beyond our control. What is not beyond our control is how we deal with stress.

One parent, Mary, who attended the classes at OYF under a court order resulting from an acrimonious custody dispute, had few good things to say about the class. She had studied child development in college and did not feel the facilitators had much to offer her, which she had not heard before. She prided herself on her knowledge of parenting techniques and felt she was a very good mother. When I asked Mary if she felt the classes had been helpful, she responded, “The thing I enjoyed the most was the handout the new lady gave on 101 ways to relieve stress.⁵⁹ I was looking for ways to relieve stress. I do some of these things, but there are others I can try.”

Though Mary resented being given information about parenting that she considers basic and uninformative, she was willing, and even grateful, to receive suggestions about relieving stress. She saw no negative implications in accepting this kind of advice. Stress to her is something that affects everyone, not just people who have been singled out as parents in need of instruction.

Betty, a grandmother who was trying to get custody of her grandchildren, said of the Helping Parents class “Everything was helpful. Taking care of yourself is important. Because you won’t be good to nobody else until you take care of yourself. There was this exercise we did where we sat in a circle and someone would come and whisper

⁵⁹ This is the first handout presented above.

something positive about you in your ear. That feels so good.” As mentioned previously, one teacher who had been working with Helping Parents for eleven years told me that this exercise can be very difficult for people. “It is so intimate to hear encouragement in their ear. They talk about how that feels. I hear them say, ‘If I had heard all this before, I would have been able to...’ People have not had the experience of being encouraged!”

Betty’s linking this exercise about encouragement and discussion on taking care of yourself gets at the murky connection in parenting classes between feeling good about yourself and taking care of yourself. Helping Parents models exercises with parents that they would like to see parents use with children, so that if a parent can see what encouragement does for them, they will be more apt to use it with their children. This is not just about building parent’s self-esteem, but about building children’s self-esteem so that they have the wherewithal to cope with the difficulties life delivers. This is linked to the idea discussed in the Chapter 4 that babies who experience a sense of security and stability will have less adverse reactions to stressors. One strain of stress research focuses on how a person’s appraisal of a situation affects the impact it will have on them: if the person feels confident that they can handle it, he or she will experience fewer physical indicators of stress. Therefore, if people are endowed with a strong sense of self-confidence, they are less likely to suffer from the effects of stress (Cox 1978).

Megan, a facilitator at OYF, offered her class some advice on stress from her own experience. She told the class that sometimes they have to just “Let it go.” She gave the example of people who kept calling her about a car payment that she could not make. “I just try to take it without freaking out. Just being calm. I cannot do anything about it.

You can deal with minor irritations like in the *Matrix*⁶⁰—just let it pass. It is kind of fun to imagine it that way, and the person doesn't know what to do with you. Also your children will see your example of how to deal with stress. Help them learn to relax and breathe.”

Megan was not trying to pull the wool over her students’ eyes; she was relaying how she herself deals with the difficulty of being a single mother in a low-paying job. This class was made up mostly of poor, single mothers who would have easily related to the challenge of paying monthly bills. And as Mary expressed, it is helpful for parents to have techniques to keep from becoming overwhelmed by the challenges they are inevitably faced with.

While it seems logical to offer advice on “taking care” to the overwhelmed parents who generally end up in mandated classes, it also creates an added expectation on parents. Parents are faced not only with the daily difficulties of life, but also the demand that they learn to handle these difficulties well. The struggle to find extra time in the day to care for yourself is evident in Callie’s reaction to the facilitator’s comment that parents need time outs, too. Brianna asked the class if they ever had a situation when they needed a time out, and the mother answered, “What time outs?” She said she is a single mom right now; she is getting married, but her fiancée travels a lot. Work is like a time out for her. When she has to spend 24 hours on the military base, she just sleeps the whole time.

Ironically, Callie was mandated to the class because she left her son sleeping one night and ran to the store to get cigarettes. “I thought that was OK,” she told me. On her

⁶⁰ In this movie, characters can contort their bodies in order to dodge bullets or avoid other injuries.

way home she got into an accident and got a DUI. They threatened her with a charge of child neglect and required her to take parenting classes, do community service, and take a driving class. So while she is encouraged to take timeouts, the particular timeouts that are indicated are proscribed, requiring a partner, a babysitter, or an apartment big enough for escape. A timeout cannot include leaving a child at home alone, which is considered grounds for child neglect. On the flip side, having too much time is also looked down upon. In this era of anti-welfare sentiment, it is unacceptable for a person who relies on state assistance to be only taking care of her children. He or she is expected to have time filled up in appropriate and productive ways, such as job training. On the other hand, for those who can afford it, it is considered highly desirable in many circles for the mother or father to stay home to take care of their children. Middle-class stay-at-home mothers or fathers are expected, however to make a job of this task, with many planned and educational activities, and constant engagement with their children. So while taking *time* for yourself as a parent can be viewed as positive way of taking *care* of yourself, this timeout is very restricted.

The fact that Callie was charged with neglect for leaving her child home alone is one that deserves some attention. A generation ago, it would not have been considered child neglect to run out quickly while a child was sleeping. Anglin (2002) suggests that this heightened concern is linked to the dominance of a risk management approach in child protection, growing out of our increasing concern with risk as a society. As discussed in Chapter 3, the definition of child protection, following the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, has expanded to include the possibility of future harm. Anglin (2002) explains that it is not considered adequate

now to consider whether harm has occurred, but officials must determine the likelihood of harm in the future. “In practice this means that the adequacy of the parenting and the living environment need to be assessed” (Anglin 2002, 239). This, combined with the hyper-awareness of potential accidents, combines to make what might have been considered acceptable behaviors in the past completely unacceptable. In the case of Callie, leaving her child at home leads authorities to question her ability as a parent because she did not consider the possible accident that might have befallen her son, and did not act to prevent that accident.

This example is also complicated by the fact that Callie had been drinking before she left. Drinking or using drugs around children is now widely seen as irresponsible and contemptible behavior. Again, I suggest that this has to do with the concern with potential risk. Parents that drink or use drugs around children are seen as having an elevated risk of harming their children. Because they are making undesirable choices in caring for their own bodies, they are seen as less fit for caring for their own children, whether or not that child comes to harm. So Callie’s decision to do something for herself – go get cigarettes while her son was sleeping was judged both irresponsible and evidence of how she might cause harm to her son in the future.

If taking time out as a parent is challenging, other suggestions about taking care of oneself, such as eating well and exercising, can be equally difficult to follow. Many parents I spoke with felt they should be exercising, but were not always able to do so; this failure to exercise weighed on them. Callie found respite in running, but she was in the minority. Patsy, a working mother with a 12-year-old daughter told me about her family’s attempts to start walking on the beach in the evening as a way of getting exercise and

relieving stress. They had done it a few times, but then, “We just got ill, then the weather was bad, then my foot was bad. But everybody is ready to do stuff.” Patsy offers a number of excuses (to herself, I think, as much as me) about why they have not been able to keep up with their exercise regime. Patsy gets home from work after 6:30 p.m. and has to get dinner together—she is trying to cook more and make her family healthier meals—as well as help her daughter with homework and unwind from the day’s work. It is no surprise that it is hard to fit in a walk on the beach every evening.

The other mandate, to put healthy food on the table, is also a challenge. Patsy was grateful that a Trader Joe’s had opened up near by, which offers healthier options to cooking⁶¹. In the neighborhood where Brianna and Megan taught their classes, however, there are very few options for buying healthy food. It is a neighborhood full of corner liquor stores, where supermarkets are few and far between. One organization began having a produce truck park in different locations to address the lack of fresh produce available; a step, certainly, and an indication that community groups recognize this problem and are looking for solutions.

Discourse around stress management, which promotes such individually driven solutions as exercising, eating better, and taking time outs, ignores the extent to which stressors can originate from one’s environment. Violence in a community, neglected public spaces, access to food and other necessities are stressors in and of themselves, which can have a significant impact on people’s health, as documented by Mullings and Wali (2001). In this context, advice about taking care of oneself takes on a moralizing quality, indicating what parents *should* be doing in order to have the energy required to

⁶¹ Trader Joe’s offers many semi-prepared foods, such as chopped vegetables and fruits, at a reasonable price.

be a better parent, in spite of what they *can* be doing.

Nikolas Rose uses the “ethic of active citizenship” to describe the moralizing around health promotion.

This is an ethic in which the maximization of lifestyle, potential, health, and quality of life has become almost obligatory, and where negative judgments are directed toward those who will not, for whatever reason, adopt an active, informed, positive, and prudent relation to the future. (Rose 2007)

This moralizing about health and the demand for a pursuit of healthy bodies serves the neo-liberal attitude toward accepting or demanding government help. Many scholars, such as Kathryn Edin (1997), Katherine Newman (1998), Janet Poppendeik (1998), and Sandra Morgen (2001), to name a few, have documented the shift away from a social safety net and to an isolation of individuals and families in taking care of their own economic, social and health needs.

Control

While much of the discussion in these classes on the topic of stress management is about maintaining a healthy body and mind, there is also importance placed on managing stress in order to maintain control. Petersen and Lufton assert, “The concepts of rationality and self-control are central to an understanding of citizenship, because both concepts underpin contemporary assumptions of what it means to be ‘human’ and what the ideal modern ‘self’ should be” (Petersen and Lupton 1996, 64). Following this argument, there is a certain moral weight given to self-control: to be controlled is to be disciplined. While stress encompasses forces, situations, and environments that you cannot control, stress management is seen as a way of controlling the way you bear or

receive these stresses. Again, I would like to emphasize that the conditions that facilitate the managing of stress as promoted in these classes and in popular media are affected greatly by material circumstances.

The following quote introduces this idea of retaining control by managing your reaction to stressful encounters:

Rona starts a lesson on stimulus and response. “If a child pokes at you, what is the reaction you give?” Parents call out, “irritation,” “I tell them to go ask their mother.” Rona moves on, “what are other things kids do to get attention?” The class again contributes with, “cry,” “temper tantrum,” “fight”, “nag”.

“What do we do in reaction?” Rona asks. “We push the pause button between stimulus and reaction.” She hands out a blue piece of paper with a button drawn on it that just says “Pause.” “Put this on your fridge. Decide what your intention is, then you can act instead of just reacting. We have a choice in here of how we act - count to ten, take a breath.”

After more discussion of breaking the link between negative behavior and an uncontrolled reaction, Rona talked about modeling self-control. “Kids feed off the vibes they get from you. If you are calm they are going to be calm. How can you model self-control?” Answers: Use actions, not words; count to ten; take a deep breath; scream outside; take a walk. Rona adds that playing Baroque music is really supposed to calm everyone down.

Rona handed out the following sheet to reinforce her lesson. The first two suggestions about “What to do when your kids are driving you crazy” are to 1)Take Care of Yourself, and 2) Get Control of Yourself. The first will presumably give you the

energy and strength to react properly and the second requires that you be disciplined in your disciplining; that you press the pause button, as Rona suggests.

What To Do When Your Kids Are Driving You Crazy!

1. Take care of yourself
2. Get control of yourself
3. Use action, not words
4. Speak softly
5. Ask for the behavior you want
6. Get on their eye level
7. Be firm and kind
8. Detach with love

Rona is clear that parents should be striving to act with intention, to model self-control. This fits in neatly with the Foucaultian idea that citizens in the modern era are expected to exert self-discipline rather than an externally-imposed discipline. Instead of relying on a religious or moral discourse in encouraging this behavior, there is a reliance on scientific discourse – expert opinion. Experts tell us that stress causes physical distress on your body and can contribute to any number of chronic and acute illnesses. Experts cite scientific studies to show that controlling your actions, breathing, and thoughts through such practices as meditation and mindfulness will help to decrease adverse

reactions of the body to stress. Mindfulness and meditation have been broken down here into easily achievable mini-techniques, such as counting to ten, taking a deep breath, or pressing the “pause button.” Several participants also mentioned that their spiritual connection and faith helped them to cope with stress and to maintain control. Acting in a controlled manner has been tied here to the mandate to maintain a healthy body.

In keeping with this ethic, parents themselves belittled their own lack of control, and strove to maintain calm when faced with challenging behavior from their children. Steve and Maggie, a White middle-class couple with two daughters, admitted to having lost control. Steve says, “I was *that* dad at the soccer game-the one hollering. This fella came up out of the blue and started giving me the business - it ended up with three dads on each team yelling at each other.”

Maggie helped to alleviate his guilt by saying, “That was a weird day. There was a full moon or something.” She goes on to say “There are times I’ve gotten so mad - yelled and screamed before I got all the details. I blew up and felt really bad.”

In Steve’s example he is not even yelling at his kids, he is just demonstrating a lack of control in dealing with other people *in front* of his kids. He is not modeling self-discipline, as he might. Maggie (who was baking cookies for her daughters’ soccer game as we spoke) admitted to screaming at her kids at times. It is hard to imagine a parent who has not screamed at their children, but here she talks about this as if it is a character weakness that needs addressing.

Abe and Brenda, a Black Muslim couple with four children between the two of them, referred themselves to the Helping Parents class because they wanted to address issues they were having at home with communication, anger management and decreasing

stress. The value placed on control is evident in an example she gave me of a difficult parenting moment she felt she handled well: “My three year old was screaming at the top of her lungs about getting dressed and I had her sit down and calm down and I got her dressed with out assaulting her.” I think most parents of toddlers can relate to the exasperation that can result from dealing with children learning to assert their independence and their *own* manifestations of control.

She is proud that she was able to keep her cool, and she contrasts this with an example of a situation she wished she had handled differently, “My 14 year old was bucking like she wanted to hit me, like oooh she wished she could, and I pushed her. I wish I had followed through with what I started with - breathing, taking a moment -- but she kept talking and talking. I knew I needed to calm down.” She had lost control – lost her intention, as Rona would say – and pushed her daughter, an action she immediately regretted. She told me that she felt the class had been helpful with teaching techniques for calming down and breathing, which had been one of her primary goals for taking the class.

Brenda said she struggles with dealing with anger, something she feels she gets from her father. “My father was a yeller and my mother wasn’t. My siblings – some of us picked up yelling and some picked up not yelling. It’s a perpetuated habit.” In spite of what she perceives to be her flaws as a parent, she is proud of how she is working to instill morals and spirituality in her kids. When asked what aspect of parenting she is best at she answers, “Being a model of a productive spiritual human being and exhibiting that

at home.”⁶² She home schools them because she wants to keep them away from the negative influences in the public schools, she veils in public, and she and her husband are proud Muslims who both accepted Islam as adults.

She sees her spirituality as a source of strength for her in dealing with her role as a mother of four (one of which is a step-daughter) and a wife. She home-schools, not because she enjoys it, but because she feels she has to. She struggles with getting her husband to help her with day to day chores and with coping with her children. Her spirituality, she says, has helped tremendously with those things. It “gives me the strength to carry on, to not leave somebody else to take care of the kids. It gives me the strength to keep on parenting.” Several others referred to their faith as a coping mechanism, specifically noting that it was helpful to read the bible, or “affirm that there is a higher conscious being.” One woman, recounting her terrible struggle surrounding the removal of her son from her care said, “I’m on a first name basis with God. That helps.”

What is interesting about Brenda and Abe is that in spite of the solace that she takes from her religious practice, she and her husband decided voluntarily⁶³ to take a secular parenting class, and in fact she had taken several other parenting classes before. While her spirituality may guide her in making decisions about her role and responsibilities as a wife and a mother, she is looking for advice on how to carry out these tasks. She wants to find ways to control her anger and frustration, to avoid

⁶² The other part of her answer is that she is good at “staying in the know. Not much gets past me. They work hard to keep me out of the loop.” She admits to have gotten into a lot of trouble as a kid, which has served her in her own parenting.

⁶³ This couple are among three participants in my study who were not mandated to take parenting classes, but who elected to take them voluntarily.

following in her father's footsteps of being a "yeller." Ironically, the expert advice she is receiving is in part a secularized rendition of Buddhist practices. But most importantly, it is advice that can be taken as authoritative, partly because it *is* secularized. In order for parenting advice to be seen as correct, it needs to be perceived as scientific. The advice being given is not moral, nor spiritual, it has been scientifically proven. The fact that parenting advice, all based on scientific research, seems to shift frequently does not seem to deter people from believing in it.

Lack of Control

The irony of seeking to be controlled as a parent is that in spite of their best intentions parents often have very little control over their children's actions. The best parents can do is to be thoughtful and disciplined themselves, both to set an example and to use every opportunity to help children to be disciplined themselves. Mary beautifully described her surprise upon becoming a parent, "I thought I was going to be the one in control. Filling up an empty vessel. I saw it as a very controlling type of job. That was my image. I found that not to be true." She went on to tell me that she found the most difficult aspect of parenting to be a lack of control. "You know you have to let kids do what they will do - there is nothing I can do about it. I felt that with kids as teenagers or adults. If I haven't laid the foundation-- given them tools you will be a wreck when they walk out the door every morning. I have given them all the tools I know to give them. I don't know what will happen, I pray they will survive their experiences, not choose paths I don't like. If they make choices I don't like I think they will return to their sense. It is hard to see them do things that could hurt them."

So again, Mary comes back to the need to set an example for her children and

then to relinquish control. In order to set this example and guide her children to make the right choices, she described for me the way that she deals with her youngest daughter when she is having a tantrum (she also has two children in their 20s). She explains that she tries to relax when her daughter is having a tantrum. “You are not in control, people are gawking. You can say I will let you continue until I finish counting to ten, and then I am going to pick you up. I narrate the flip out.” Mary’s technique is to bring structure and calm to her daughter’s melt down. By doing this she can try to help her daughter to regulate herself and her emotions and to model controlled reactions.

Conclusion

Throughout the day I use many of the techniques I have discussed here in trying to remain calm and positive. My point in this chapter is not to say that these things do not work or that they should not be attempted or adopted, but to question why they have become so important to us and what interests they serve. Stress and stressors are a product of the social environment. In the context of parents’ lives, lack of child care and support, financial difficulties, gendered division of labor, and lack of opportunities may cause “stress,” which is then treated as an individualized problem.⁶⁴ In describing Young’s work on stress (1980), Adelson writes “the naturalized conceptualization of stress in scientific and popular discourse not only shrouds its social context but perpetuates inequity through the persistence of unexamined (asymmetrical) social relations” (Adelson 2008: 316). And the current purported answers to dealing with stress

⁶⁴ The structural reality that makes the lives of certain people more stress-laden and difficult due to economic and social conditions is nicely expressed by Paul Farmer’s term “structural violence.” (Farmer 1996)

on the individual level – time, good nutrition, exercise -- are not equally accessible. This inequality is not discussed in terms of material circumstances, but rather in terms of moral failure. The concept of stress and emphasis on stress management in parenting education can thus be addressed through an analysis of stress discourse and how this feeds into power hierarchies. We can also understand the effect of advice about taking care of oneself or stress management by looking at inequalities of access.

In this first line of analysis, the inability to control one's body and mind is seen as a personal weakness. In Western thought, to be in control of one's body and mind is to be human. Deborah Lupton explains,

The civilized body is controlled, rationalized and individualized, subject to conscious restraint of impulses, bodily processes, urges and desires. This mastery, it is believed, is what sets humans apart from animals: the more an individual can display self-control, an unwillingness to 'give in' to the desires of the flesh, the more civilized and refined the individual is considered.

What I have tried to express is that it is not only considered "civilized and refined" to have the control necessary to keep stress from interfering with productivity and proper child rearing, but a responsibility. Contemporary therapies propose that to take care of our children, we need to take care of ourselves properly. Control is seen as especially important in child rearing because of the responsibility to instill similar modes of self-control and self-discipline in our children.

We see here the reproduction of the self-discipline that Foucault points to in discussing the shift from externally imposed discipline to self-imposed discipline (Foucault 1984). In lieu of fearing physical punishment from authorities, we are taught to feel guilt or shame when we do not maintain control over our own bodies and behavior

and those of our children. It is this process we see in the way stress management and taking care of ourselves is promoted to parents.

In terms of inequality of access, it becomes evident that focusing on how we each individually process stress and can learn to better accept stress, perhaps detracts from a discussion on the kinds of social supports that could help to lessen the burden for those who have few social resources, as in the absence of family friendly policies, affordable child care, health coverage, parental leave, or a living wage. Stress discourse can serve to shift the focus from social decisions and social responsibilities to individual choices and individual responsibilities.

Chapter 7

Homework and Schoolwork: The Relationship between Parents and Schools

Introduction

When children turn five and enter into the school system, the responsibility for their upbringing is no longer predominantly the parents' alone⁶⁵. Teachers and schools play a very important role in the social, physical and academic formation of children. Further, schools are largely charged with equipping children with the basic formal technical skills they need to be productive citizens. This shared responsibility for the formation of children has been fraught with tensions as lines are drawn in the sand regarding where the role of the school begins and ends and, conversely, what role parents should play in their children's education. Over a million U.S. parents go so far as to educate their children at home so that they can retain control over their children's education and formation (Princiotta 2006). We can see from the following scenes from the parenting classes I observed the wide range of ways in which parents are encouraged to prepare their children for school, as well as recognize the limitation of schools in instilling proper values.

In a class at the Oakland Youth and Family Program of six students, most of whom were asked to take classes because of their involvement with Children and Family Services (CFS), the facilitator opened a discussion on education. She had visited the Department of Education website and brought in information to share on how to instill in children an appreciation for the importance of education and to create an atmosphere

⁶⁵ This is somewhat overstated, as most children have been in some form of pre-school or day care, or have been cared for by someone other than their parent.

that is conducive to getting homework done. Drawing from information she pulled from the website, she tells the class,

“Be available. [Children] have to have someone to ask questions to. Tell them if they need help they can call you...Help your child to relate everyday routines. Help him or her look up things they are interested in. Be interested and interesting. Be with children as often as you can. Ask him or her to read stories that they wrote. Be involved in school activities. Go to sports events, plays. Be involved in your child's education if education is important to you. Having education isn't everything, but it makes things easier.”

Rona, the teacher of the Easton Parenting Program evening class, drew participants of her class into a discussion on self-esteem, “the core of the child's personality” that “determines the use he/she makes of his/her life.” In order to help children feel good about themselves you need to help them prepare. For example, she asks the class, how do you prepare a child for a good day at school? People call out: a good meal; let them know what to expect; a good rest the night before; get familiar with school; get them comfortable with a new place.”

During another lesson on Respect, Rona tells her class, “If kids are not treated respectfully, they won't treat people respectfully themselves. Can we leave this up to the school? It has to happen at home.”

These quotes all illustrate the complicated relationship between the role of the school and the role of the parents in preparing and socializing children academically, socially and emotionally. Parents are advised to feed their children well, ensure that they are rested, attend school functions, as well as encourage interest and be interesting themselves. This is a tall order, which is being met with a wide range of responses from parents who alternately feel great pressure to meet these expectations or somewhat distanced from the school system.

Recalling the previously discussed emphasis on reading and talking regularly to children from the time they are infants, we can see here a similar emphasis on ensuring optimal cognitive development. The stakes for parental involvement are perceived as

high, and indeed in this current incarnation of educational concern, parental vigilance is at a premium.

In this chapter, I give a brief history of the relationship between parents and schools in the United States, and describe how it has come to shape parental responsibility to the schools that we see in the above quotes, as well as the class-based experiences with the schools reported by the parents I interviewed. The poor and working-class parents I spoke with feel very strongly about, but are less engaged in their children's education, compared with the middle-class parents. The middle-class parents were seemingly more concerned with and felt more equipped to tailor their children's education and encourage their children to be personally concerned with learning in the form of reading or other extracurricular activities.⁶⁶ Further, parents who are involved with CFS, have even less motivation to interact with the school because of the role school and teachers often play in initiating CFS investigations.

I argue that the parents I interviewed are pressured through these classes, as well as through the media to take an active part in their children's schooling. However, parents are in many ways discouraged from becoming too involved or criticizing school procedures and decisions. While most of the parents, from all social backgrounds, felt that education was important and saw it as their duty to be sure that their children stayed in school and did their work, middle-class parents also took on the job of monitoring their children's school careers. By this I mean making sure that their children were receiving the best resources, were succeeding, if not excelling in class, were being placed in the right programs and schools and were receiving adequate exposure to extracurricular

⁶⁶ This part of my works was influenced by Annette Lareau's work with middle class and working-class parents

activities. Because of the more direct and persistent concern of middle-class parents with their children's schooling, they are more apt to ensure that their children are indeed getting the best and most varied education that they can. In the current state of education, however, it is the poor and working-class parents who most need to be monitoring their children's school, because these are the schools that are being neglected under the No Child Left Behind program. In her book addressing poor youth in New York City, Cindi Katz writes,

Employment figures, coupled with enduring disinvestments in public higher education in New York, suggest that many poor and working-class children, particularly those in Black and Latino families, will continue to face futures with diminished possibilities for finding stable and reasonably compensated work. In the face of these displaced futures, young people experienced untimely presents suffused with measurable and non-coincidental decreases in the level of social investments in them and their everyday environments. (Katz 2004, 162)

In spite of these dim prospects, poor parents are faulted for their lack of commitment to their children's education.

I also address the issue of homework directly. I use the word issue deliberately, because homework is just that for many families. It becomes a site for parents to contribute to their children's schooling, but is at the same time a constant point of contention because both parents and schools see it as the parents' responsibility to see that homework is completed. Homework has been the subject of much debate over the years, with alternating interests in augmenting the amount of homework given to produce a smarter citizenry and abolishing homework all together to allow children more time for play and other pursuits. Recently, "homework" starts even before children are in school with the movement to prepare children to enter school by reading to them from birth. Also, in cases of divorce, homework often becomes a point of contention between

parents both because it is a chore to ensure that children get their homework done, and also because it can be used as a means of showing involvement in school. This in turn can be used as a tool for proving oneself to be the better, more caring, parent.

Homework, in other words, is the most direct and easily available site for heightened expectations about a parent's role in ensuring children will succeed.

The Troubled Relationship between Home and School

Up until the early 19th century, schooling beyond the first few grades was reserved for upper class children. The majority of children were trained at home to be productive members of the family, which at that time would include helping the family economically. Middle-class children began entering the school system more regularly in the United States in the 1830's as the shift to industrial production helped to change the nature of family life (Stearns 2003), (Katz 1986). As schooling expanded and children were expected to be in school for longer, the relationship between parents and educators became more complicated. Parents continued to hold primary responsibility for the moral education of their children, and to have much influence over cognitive development, and both parents and teachers were responsible for seeing to children's safety, both moral and physical. The distance between these parties grew, as schools became more standardized and bureaucratized. The increased authority of the schools and the teachers became more threatening, especially for working-class and immigrant families (Cutler 2000). Report cards, for example, became standard practice by the 1920's, and represented a formal system of evaluation, replacing the more informal forms of communication that had previously existed. Rules were introduced about attendance and punctuality. Teachers,

who had been closely linked to the communities and able to respond to the particular circumstances of their students, lost much of their authority to a centralized system (Stearns 2003). This shift occurred within a wider context of industrialization and connected societal changes that deeply affected traditional roles in American families.

The “child-saving” movement of the nineteenth century managed to secure unprecedented powers in regulating and intervening in relations between parents and their children in the form of public health campaigns and a system of juvenile justice, as well as compulsory education (Katz 1986.). Massachusetts passed the first law requiring children to attend school in 1852 and by 1918 education was compulsory in all of the states. This period was fraught with debate over the merits of universal education. Many parents were resistant to the state’s mandating school attendance for their children, especially working-class parents who did not always see the relevance of school to their children’s future. On the other hand, taxpayers were supporting schools and expected children to attend (Katz 1986). School attendance “bore directly on the highest interests of society and the state, because school promoters had defended the expensive expansion of public education by predicting it would reduce crime and poverty, heal social antagonisms, promote upward mobility, improve social morals, and create wealth.” (Katz 1986, 135). Essentially, schools were given the job of training children to be productive and responsible citizens and workers. Even with this level of expectation and investment it was difficult to sell compulsion, because it represented a major intrusion into the relations between parents and children. Nevertheless, by 1918, all states made education compulsory, threatened fines for parents whose children did not attend and set up systems for inspections and prosecution (Katz 1986).

It is important to note that racial segregation created unequal educational opportunities for Black children in the Southern United States. State legislatures allocated resources for schools along racial lines with White students receiving five to twelve times the amount per capita as allocated for Black students. In 1920, over 80% of all Black public school children were enrolled in only the first four grades. While compulsory education may have been applied across the board in principle, in reality truancy laws were unequally enforced (Marable and Mullings 2002).

In addition to race, social class was a huge factor in determining education children received. William Cutler, author of *Parents and Schools: the 150-year struggle for control in American Education*, asserts, “It would be difficult to overstate the importance of social class to the link between home and school” (Cutler 2000, 18). As middle-class women were spending more time at home and more energy on cultivating their children, the urban poor appeared increasingly unable to care for their own children because of work and housing conditions, among many other factors. Child savers saw schools as an opportunity to provide the moral and cognitive guidance to poor children that their own children were receiving. Certainly this was seen as an opportunity for many poor and working-class parents. But as teachers began to receive specialized training and schools adopted systematic procedures and standardized expectations, the working-class and poor parents felt increasingly alienated from their children’s education. “Even in the nineteenth century,” Cutler writes, “middle-class families were much more likely to enroll their children and keep them in school. They brought different social skills and higher educational aspirations to the parent-teacher

relationship” (Cutler 2000, 18). Immigrant families faced the additional threat of competing over linguistic, religious and cultural norms.

Unlike in Japan and Europe, American schools did not automatically separate professionally bound and blue collar bound students before college, historian Peter Stearns points out. This was admirable in many regards, however, middle-class parents worried children weren’t challenged or recognized enough, and children from working-class families wondered about the relevance of schools to their future. Schools faced problems (as they do today) with racial and residential segregation, and in the early 20th century they started testing children to “track” them in schools, or separate them according to perceived academic ability. In spite of these issues, Americans came to view education as a social responsibility. If children had access to education and failed they had only themselves to blame. Europeans were more convinced that social barriers were difficult to transcend, so they did not expect education to be an equalizer (for this same reason, Europeans were more willing to support welfare, because poverty was not viewed as an individual failure).

Because Americans have never been willing to explain the persistence of poverty as an inescapable consequence of the American political economy, they either had to explain it as individual short comings or the result of artificial barriers to the “open and competitive structure of American life.” As historian Michael Katz emphatically explains,

This is why opportunity so often became defined as education and why education has occupied so often a special place in American reform. Education, so it was often argued, could soften the rough edges of capitalism by making Americans equal, not in condition but in opportunity to compete and achieve. Education became a painless panacea, a way, in time, to solve

every social problem without recourse to conflict or redistribution. The good society became, in short, a horse race without handicaps. In the context of economic growth and limitless abundance, even the losers need not suffer. (Katz 1986, 263)

This idea of education as a panacea is applicable in thinking about how education was viewed in the past, but as we will discuss in the next section, it continues to be a salient point in discussing the current state of the educational system.

The attitude of education being a cure-all for America's social problems led Americans to place more expectations on their schools than was customary in other countries. They wanted the schools to solve social problems, teach driving, safety, hygiene and sports. In spite of these high expectations, the teaching profession was not a prestigious one. Stearns emphasizes the strange American tension between loving education and being suspicious of intellectualism. Teachers are caught in the middle (Stearns 2003).

Gender, region and ethnicity were other factors that influenced the relationship between home and school. The fact that elementary schools began to employ many young women as teachers reinforced the similarity between home and school: women were the mentors of the young in both places (Cutler 2000). As far as region is concerned, parents in rural areas retained greater influence over educational policy and content than in urban areas. Rural teachers could expect parental presence and did not have the same ability to defer authority to complex school districts as their urban counterparts (Cutler 2000).

Cultural difference represented a source of friction in the schools, as it does today. The debate over bilingual education is not a new one: German families in San Francisco

and Chicago wanted their language used or taught in the classroom. Catholics and Protestants argued over the bibles for instructional purposes. And many parents did not like the teachers disciplining their children, as they felt they should maintain final authority in this matter (Cutler 2000). Cutler also notes that ethnicity played a big role in determining who went to school and for how long. For example, “Until at least the 1920s immigrants from southern Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Serbia were much more likely to insist that their children exchange school for work than were their Eastern European, Jewish counterparts”(Cutler 2000, 18). Differences in religion, race, ethnicity, and class continue to greatly influence who stays in school and for how long. More recent reforms in education have made a renewed attempt to equalize access to and quality of education through out the country.

Today

President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Program was promoted as one of the most significant educational reforms of the last 50 years, one that would have every child reading and doing math at grade level by 2014. The stated goal of the No Child Left Behind is to close the achievement gap between White and minority students and to hold schools responsible for the academic performance of students who have traditionally overlooked. Many researchers, however, have found it to be causing an even greater educational divide. The program is based around high stakes testing, which threatens to close or withhold funds from schools that do not provide adequate scores.

The emphasis on testing in public schools under No Child Left Behind, passed by Congress in 2001 and signed by the President in 2002, was instituted in the context of

concern about American children competing in a global economy (Apple 2005). The high-stakes testing model came out of a system that was first implemented in Texas in the 1990's. Scholars have shown that it was Texas businessmen, concerned about the quality of the workforce in Texas, who were largely responsible for proposing and passing legislation to institute the plan (Salinas and Reidel 2007). High stakes testing is based on a business model and emphasizes efficiency and accountability as goals over equity in education. "The ways in which it tacitly defines what counts as legitimate knowledge as only that which can be included on such reductive tests flies in the face of decades of struggle about the politics of official knowledge and about the inclusion of the cultures, language, histories, values and habitus of a country made of cultures from all around the world" (Apple 2006a, 553).

In an article about the effect of NCLB on English language learners, Michele Fine and her colleagues cite research (De Jesus and Vasquez 2005) showing that "the policies of NCLB have actually imposed an inequitable accountability system exclusively based on tests, delimiting possibilities for English language learners and minority student achievement, and constricting democratic and pluralistic visions of citizenship and education in this country" (Fine, et al. 2007). The very students that this program proclaims to help are finding themselves in educational settings most antithetical to learning and promoting interest in education. Teachers are forced to focus curriculum on passing math and reading tests, sidelining more creative lesson plans and other subjects such as history and social sciences.

Apple argues that the paid labor market will increasingly be dominated by low-wage service sector jobs that require little education, making lucrative jobs very

competitive (Apple 2005). An educational system that emphasizes skills necessary for low wage workers such as reading and math, and deemphasizes critical thinking skills and other culturally valuable outcomes of education, fits in well with this market rationale. And if this is the case, middle-class parents are right to be concerned about maximizing their children's education and ensuring that they stand out among their peers.

Cutler argues that schools want parents to be involved with their children's education, but not to interfere in the classroom (Cutler 2000). We can see in the following exchange that this position is reinforced in at least one parenting class.

Brianna, the facilitator who we hear from at the beginning of this chapter draws from Department of Education website in discussing the creation of an atmosphere conducive to getting homework done. The facilitator explained how important homework is and that it can be overwhelming, but that 30-60 minutes of homework is generally beneficial to the child.

One father responded that his child had several hours of homework every night. Another parent, Mary, told him if there is too much homework, he should talk to the child's teacher. The facilitator responded, "I am not sure things are going to change. I am just keeping it real. The teacher has a curriculum they need to go through."

Brianna here makes a clear distinction: it is helpful, even necessary to help your children to get the work done that they have been assigned. It is not, on the other hand, encouraged to question the curriculum that the school has set. The program where Brianna facilitates caters mostly to very poor clients, many of whom are involved with Children and Family Services. The emphasis is on learning skills to be a compassionate and involved parent and on completing all of the requirements necessary if indeed there is

an open CFS case.⁶⁷ The parents are not encouraged to question them or oppose their situation, because this may make authorities less likely to grant their requests. Brianna's statement seems to promote the same compliant attitude in regard to their children's school. On the other hand, she initiated another class discussion about advocating for children in the schools. She told the class,

If your child is in public school, they are often overwhelmed. They might get lost in shuffle. The teacher is doing a lot of things besides teach. School systems are over taxed. We live in system that is not fair. In public schools, everything from teachers to utilities are messed up. Another child is in a really good school and the teacher and utilities are the best. Society expects them to perform the same. How can you expect that? We live in a society where they are not going to fight for your kids.

One of the class participants joined in with the reminder, "You have to remember that you have the right to advocate for your child. Don't be intimidated. Principals and teachers can be intimidating." The teacher agrees, saying "Language is just bull shit. If they are using big words, they are just trying to intimidate you."

Sociologist Gilles describes parent-school interactions for both working and middle-class families. While the middle-class families felt very comfortable communicating with teachers and school administrators, many of the working-class parents described feelings of humiliation and conflict in similar interactions. These parents indicated that they felt devalued and misunderstood in their communications (Gillies 2005). It is in this context that Brianna encourages the parents in her class to not feel intimidated and to "fight for their kids." This message conflicts, however, with her

⁶⁷ Typically, if a child is taken away from a parent or there is a threat of removal, the parent will have to comply with a series of requirements, often including parenting classes, anger management classes, therapy for both adults and children, and drug or alcohol rehabilitation, if necessary.

earlier comment indicating that teachers are not likely to change the amount of homework given because of a parent's request.

Mary, the class participant who encouraged her classmate to speak to his son's teacher felt strongly about advocating in schools. Mary is a Black woman in her mid 30s who attended college and studied early childhood development. Mary has a history of mental illness and is in the class because of a bitter custody battle with her ex-husband over their five year old daughter. She has two older children as well.

In response to Brianna's comment in class about teachers not changing the level of homework, Mary replied, *"I have a teaching credential. You want things to be appropriate for your child. You want to know what kind of child you kid is and make things appropriate for them. You should identify your children's special abilities so your child is able to thrive."*

Mary later told me during an interview that her child had been having a hard time in school and was very interested in art. After struggling with the school to try to create an environment that was better suited to her daughter, she pulled her daughter out of school and started home schooling her. Eventually she found an art school in Oakland where she thrived. Her daughter was attending a college on the East Coast at the time of our interview. Mary recalled the incident in class and indicated that this exchange had made her somewhat distrustful of the teacher.

Mary is an example of a parent with middle-class values, with a good education whose upbringing suffered because her mother did not have much money, but she still placed a very high value on education and on giving her children a breadth of experiences and opportunities. Mary does not have a lot of money or income, although she does own

her own small home in Oakland. Mary's class orientation encourages her to manage her children's education and to ensure that they are receiving education that is appropriate to their own interests and temperament.

Emphasis on parental hyper-vigilance, then, so embraced by the middle class ((Lareau 2003; Stearns 2003)), is well suited to the labor market these children face. By monitoring and managing the education children receive in school, parents can improve the chance that a child will receive superior educational training. This requires not only a certain level of parental participation, but also knowledge about what should be taught at each level, and the ability to assess a child's progress in school. I will discuss this difference in expectations about involvement with the schools in the following section.

It should be noted that a significant and increasing number of parents opt out of schools altogether in order to retain more control over their children's education. In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that 1.1 million children were homeschooled and the National Home Education Research Institute estimates that over 2 million children are now homeschooled, a number that is growing from between 5% to 12% per year (Ray 2008). The homeschool movement originated in the 1960s and 1970s as a part of the countercultural left. By the 1980s, the Christian right had taken over as the vocal advocated for homeschooling with great success. Homeschooling became legal in the 1980s in most states and was legal in all states by 1993 (Cooper 2007). Though a great many homeschoolers are still conservative Christians, the population has become much more diverse. Homeschoolers of color, for example, were found to be more likely to choose this path because of dissatisfaction with the cultural influences in the public schools than for religious reasons (Collom 2005). Of the two families in my dissertation

research who chose to homeschool, both African American, one wished to shelter her children from the premature sexuality and other negative influences in the public schools. This was a Muslim family, though they did not claim religion as one of the reasons for homeschooling. The other woman felt her daughter was not being taught in a way that engaged her artistic interests and talents. She pulled her daughter out of school mid-year and taught her at home until she found an appropriate education setting for her. The homeschool movement is likely to become increasingly mainstream in the face of decreased support for public schools (Collom 2005).

Keeping Them in School

In the discussion quoted above, Brianna, the class facilitator, is reinforcing the inflexibility of the school and the teacher's relative authority to this class of parents. She tells her students, "The teacher has a curriculum they need to get through," reinforcing the notion that the school is a systematized institution with little room to cater to the individual needs of kids. Often parents who are poor or working class, while valuing education and encouraging their children to persist in school, do not feel as obligated or able to manage their children's schooling in the same way that middle-class parents do. Brianna's discussion of advocacy was intended to encourage parents who might not be inclined to engage with their children's school and make demands for their children's education.

Cheryl is an example of a parent who values education and wants her children to succeed, but has cautious expectations about what she can accomplish for her children. She is a shy, soft-spoken, 31 year-old African American woman who is a single mother,

with no steady income. She and her family live in a largely Black neighborhood of single family homes, associated with violence, poverty and struggling schools, not far from where Cheryl grew up. Her mother, grandmother, and cousins live nearby. The father of one of her children is doing a life sentence and the other lives several hours away. She has some contact with the latter. I met Cheryl in the class at Oakland Family and Youth and later interviewed her in her home. When I asked her what her most important job as a parent is, she responded simply, “Keeping my kids safe from harm and danger.”

Cheryl did not finish high school herself, though she is careful to explain that her family placed a high value on education. Her mother attended college and wanted for her daughter to do the same. “My mom always wanted me to finish school, she wanted me to be a nurse, my grandmother did too, my uncle did too.” Cheryl attributes her dropping out of school to being over protected at home. “They raised me well,” she explained, “I’m not into drugs or anything like that. They was too strict. We could never go outside. We lived in a bad neighborhood so we couldn’t go outside – that was like torture.”

Cheryl tries to be more lenient with her own children, but she wants them to finish school. She struggles with finding a balance between not being too strict and ensuring that her children get an education. In describing the kind of parent she would like to be, Cheryl says, “I like to be a fun parent.” After a pause, she says “I want my kids to basically finish school. That’s the most important thing.”

When I ask her how she tries to accomplish that, she says, “I talk to my kids and tell them how important it is to stay in school. At their school, every time there is a problem, I try to make sure they do all their work and stay in class, and tell them if they

don't finish school, they won't have anything." Her focus is on keeping them in school and getting their work done. She repeats the same concern when I ask her what aspects of parenting she feels she is best at. Apart from cooking she says, "Taking care of my kids – making sure they go to school, not hanging out, cutting."

Cheryl's apprehension about being able to keep her children in school is a very realistic one. A recent report written by the Harvard Civil Rights Project and the Urban Institute in Washington estimated that Oakland graduates only 48% of entering high school students, compared to the statewide average of 71%. In California, African-American and Latino students are three times more likely than White students to attend a high school where graduation is not the norm (in this study defined as attrition of 40% or more). Two thirds of the high schools where graduation is not the norm have 40% more of their students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which is generally used as a marker for poverty among the student body (Project 2005).

As I was reviewing my recording of this interview to clarify some of the notes I came across a conversation I had not noted down about Cheryl's son's school. During a pause in our interview I asked her casually what school her son was attending. She gave me the name of it and then said that he was there because it is in her neighborhood, but that she was not happy with it. She explains that there are many children in the school with different problems, and they bring those problems to school and start trouble with the other kids. If there are any arguments, the school sends the children right home. "It isn't right for them just to send the kids home because of an argument or something like that." When Cheryl had been telling me about keeping her children in school, she said, as I noted above, "every time there is a problem I try to make sure they finish their work

and stay in class.” The school’s policy of sending children home whenever there were problems at school worked against Cheryl’s efforts to instill in her children a sense of sticking with school regardless of problems that might come up.

I had been working with a sixth grade girl in the same neighborhood⁶⁸ that Cheryl lived in and had been looking into school alternatives for her because she needed more attention in the classroom. I found her a place, after many hours of research and phone calls in a charter program that I was impressed with, and I mentioned this program to Cheryl. She had heard of it, but did not know much about it and told me she wanted to know more. She informed me that it was housed within the public school her son was attending, which I had forgotten, but did not know what grade it started in. I offered to give her the phone number of the dean, which she readily accepted.

Much information is missing from this exchange to give me a better idea of Cheryl’s relationship to her son’s school. She did not like the way they dealt with discipline and stated clearly that she did not want her son going to that school. On the other hand, it did not appear that she had done much in the way of finding another school for him. He was going into seventh grade and this interview was conducted in the summer, so if she wanted him to be in another school, she had to act quickly. He had been out of school for at least a month, so this was not a brand new problem.

What seemed clear is that she did not, as a matter of habit, explore the educational options for her son. He was in the neighborhood public school and although there was a charter school in the very same building for children her son’s age, she did not have

⁶⁸ During my fieldwork I did an extensive training for a program called CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), in which I acted as an advocate in court for a girl in the foster care system. I helped her primarily with educational needs.

details about the program. It is not an easy task to get a child moved from one public school to another, and learning about different programs takes persistence and a certain familiarity with the vocabulary of educational approaches. This particular charter school has received much acclaim and has several programs in different parts of the country and it was recently featured in a *New York Times Magazine* article. This information was available to me because I work in education and hear about different programs, and because I occasionally read the *New York Times*. If I hadn't heard of it, I have ready access to a computer to do research on and people I could call to obtain more information. Cheryl, on the other hand, would not have heard about the charter school through professional contacts and is not likely to have read a *New York Times Magazine* article. Resources for learning about educational alternatives are not at her fingertips.

In her work with families of different social classes in the United States, Annette Lareau similarly found that poor and working-class parents feel disconnected from the schools. The parent's own education improves their access to information about the schools and their level of comfort in challenging or questioning teacher's approaches. Poor and working-class parents, she found, do not generally initiate contact with the school and tend to keep a separation between home and school, in contrast to middle-class parents who seek constant interaction with teachers and other school personnel. This was not simply because they were more deferential over all. Working-class and poor parents who might have no trouble sticking up for themselves to the telephone company or the landlord but feel particularly subject to the authority of the schools (Lareau 2003).

Cheryl had another good reason to feel alienated from schools. In April her daughter had been taken away from her because, as she explains, she gave her daughter a

“whooping”⁶⁹ because she had been acting up. Her daughter told her teacher who, as she is mandated to do, called CFS. When CFS came to the school, her daughter told them she did not want to go home and they placed her in foster care. My purpose here is not to comment on Cheryl’s disciplining methods, which I have explored in more detail in Chapter 5, but instead to point out that the school and the teachers have authority in many different areas of her life. In this case, the teacher at her daughter’s school acted as an instrument in her daughter’s placement in foster care.⁷⁰ The school is another of the many public institutions with which poor families are in contact that watch and judge parents and which can, at any moment, initiate an investigation into the child’s welfare. While in many cases the school is clearly acting in the best interests of the child, the fact remains that parents see it as a threat. Teachers were first required to be mandated reporters (required to report suspected child abuse) in the early 1970s (Zellman 1990). In Alameda County between 2005 and 2006, slightly over 20% of all referrals to Children and Family Services were made through the educational system. Parents who, like Cheryl, are African American run a greater risk of being reported to CFS for suspected child abuse or neglect. Over 40% of the cases referred are African American compared with 24.2% are

⁶⁹ I did not ask her specifically what this meant, but “whooping” was a term several respondents used when talking about disciplining their children, and I assumed it to mean spanking. Cheryl had been “whooped” as a child and her grandmother, a minister, and mother both felt that you were doing your children a disservice by not giving them the guidance they need by giving them a “whooping” when they were out of line.

⁷⁰ Cheryl had a hearing shortly before our interview and felt good about her chances of getting her daughter back in a couple of months after she had finished her court ordered counseling requirements. It was because of this incident that Cheryl was in parenting classes.

White.⁷¹ Dorothy Roberts (2002) has argued convincingly that this discrepancy is a result of racist policy and perception. Part of this could have to do with difference in interactional styles and childrearing approaches, which, when viewed through a “raced” lens is viewed as dangerous or threatening.

Parents such as Cheryl are often viewed as uninvolved and uninterested in their children’s education, which puts them at a disadvantage on a number of levels. The teacher’s perception of parental indifference could contribute to a tendency to find fault with parenting practices, contributing to suspicions about child abuse and neglect. Again, this is a reflection of the cultural (and possibly class and race) divide between the teacher and parent, which as a result of the power differential, ends up acting against the parent.

Additionally, public schools under President Bush’s No Child Left Behind program, which punishes schools that do not do well on federally mandated tests, are more focused on testing than embracing teaching methods that might engage more struggling students. Many scholars have shown the detrimental effects of high stakes testing on poor and minority students (Apple 2006a; Fine, et al. 2007). So where schools are failing students, the responsibility falls more to the parents who have the least access to resources required to encourage their success.

Optimizing Education

Middle-class parents, in contrast, feel a greater responsibility and a greater sense of urgency in taking on the primary role in managing their children’s education. This

⁷¹ Drawn from the database, **Child Welfare Services (CWS/CMS) Reports Performance Indicators Project**, which maintains statistics on the California Child Welfare System.

comes from both greater access to resources and a different sense about their role in influencing their children's outcome. In describing one of the parents she interviews, Lareau states, "Making a deliberate and conscious effort to raise their son in a way they believe will allow him to maximize his potential as a human being is top priority⁷²." (Lareau 2003, 120). This includes not only managing education in the schools but also educating at home through reading, educational excursions, and conversations directed at learning, for example.

Mike, a Black man in his early thirties grew up in Oakland. Mike graduated from high school and holds a high paying position in Alameda County in communication technology. I am using these markers, primarily his job, to locate him in the middle class. He returned home to his hometown after living and working abroad with his wife and two stepsons, and later in New York on his own. After a brief period of unemployment, Mike had found a good job close to home and was living in Oakland. At the time of our interview he was engaged in a custody battle over his three-year old biological son with his wife and was attending parenting classes to show the judge that he was serious about being a good parent. He was especially close to his middle stepson and felt very invested in the boy's life.

In response to my question about the most important job of a parent, Mike answers,

Teach the child how to be successful in life. Give them the tools they need to make good choices -- Discipline, perseverance, patience, things of that nature. Expose them to as much things as possible. If they have talents, help them develop those talents. And give as much love as you

⁷² I discuss this notion of maximizing potential further in my chapter on California's First 5 program.

possibly can. Focus on individual talents and achievements of the kids.

Contrast Mike's detailed answer about preparing a child for success with Cheryl's response, "Keeping my kids safe from harm and danger." In Mike's view, keeping kids from harm and danger are a given. He also feels the need to protect his children from failure by giving them the appropriate tools to succeed. Middle-class parents feel an acute anxiety about their children's future in an economy in which the skills children will need are constantly changing and most jobs are insecure. Over the past few decades, it has become increasingly difficult for middle-class children to afford the kind of life their parents lead. "Worried about how their children will get ahead, middle-class parents are increasingly determined to make sure that their children are not excluded from any opportunity that might eventually contribute to their advancement" (Lareau 2003, 5).

Part of this cultivation is a focus on encouraging a child's specific talents and interests, which may help that child to stand out in a crowd. When asked about a parenting moment that made her proud, Cheryl said she was proud to see her children graduate from elementary school. She was happy that they had made this step in their educational career and was proud that they were doing what they should in school. Mike, on the other hand gave me very specific memories about each of his children, which highlighted a specific talent or trait that each of them had. His eldest step-son was a great basketball player and he was proud when the coach at his school asked him to help to coach his teammates. His middle son had written a speech that he gave at their church. "He did an excellent job - I was super proud that day. He did it on his own and was really good at it." For his youngest son who was not yet two, he was proud when they

went to the beach and the little boy wanted to talk to an elderly Chinese couple who did not speak English. “He tried to talk to them and had a whole conversation. He was talking to everyone. I said - look at this kid. He is really something.” In picking out each of these memories, Mike is highlighting an individual aspect of each of them where they stand out. He is proud of their individual achievements and traits and wants to encourage each of them in developing their own strengths. It is notable that the skills that he was especially proud of were leadership, writing, and verbal or social – all of these are skills that are important in a school or business setting.

In addition to cultivating specific interests and acknowledging his children’s specific interests, Mike also takes it upon himself to monitor the schools and their decisions with a critical eye. His stepson, Kevin, was having a difficult time reading and the school wanted to put him in a special education program. Mike enrolled him in a summer reading program that his sister had attended and he excelled. Mike was proud of his stepson for doing well and proud of himself for going up against the school.

The principal said he is a special ed kid. I reamed them.
Kevin showed them I was right. He is a smart kid. They
had looked at his record. Before we were married he had
been in so many schools they thought he just couldn't read.
But he showed them he is smart and could do it.

He emphasizes here the conflict between himself and the school by saying “I reamed them” and “he showed them.” He is highlighting the need to watch out for your own best interest in interacting with the school. It is because of this monitoring that Mike and other middle-class parents like him are able to ensure that their children are maximizing their experience with the school. This monitoring seems to be related to a sense of entitlement characteristic of people with education and prestigious jobs. By

maximizing their children's educational potential and emphasizing their individual talents middle-class parents are preparing their children for an uncertain future in a rapidly changing economy.

Homework

Homework is an issue critical to understanding the relationship between parents and schools. It is the uncontested responsibility of parents to ensure that children complete their homework. If children are not regularly keeping up with homework it reflects poorly on both the children and their parents. The amount of homework assigned has been a constant source of debate.⁷³

Homework had not been standard part of 19th century school experience because most children dropped out of school after fifth grade. High schools assigned two to three hours of homework per night, but this only affected the most dedicated school goers, because high school was not at that time a middle-class essential (Gill 2004). Homework in middle schools was part of the expansion and intensification of schooling around 1900, though it was not uniformly accepted. By the 1920s, many felt homework did no educational good and drained children mentally and physically (Stearns 2003). By 1901, two thirds of American urban school districts had restricted homework. California banned obligatory homework even in the first years of high school. Doctors weighed in, saying that academic work in the evening could inhibit sleep and have negative effects on

⁷³ Homework is one more area wealthy people are paying others to take responsibility for. I have worked as a private tutor in an exclusive school (K-8) over the past five years and am paid generously to, in many cases, help children with their homework. This is a practice that is widespread in private schools in most large cities. The pressure to hire tutors for children to give children an advantage or keep them on par with peers is intense and is felt by those who can not afford such services as well.

posture (Stearns 2003). Stress and eye strain were also major concerns related to homework. These health concerns about homework were reinforced by the burgeoning field of pediatrics and by the increased role of schools in protecting children's health (Gill 2004). Children needed to play and to be outside and have fun. Home study, or homework, restricted the freedom children needed to be happy. Furthermore, homework was a burden on parents who needed to supervise. Some teachers were concerned about the ability of parents to give proper guidance. Legal bans on homework expanded during the 1920s and 1930s in some areas and in some places these continued to be in place into the 1960s (Stearns 2003).

By the 1940s, however, advocates of homework gained the upper hand. Concerns about educational performance were heightened during the cold war. The United States needed capable and competent workers and scientists and they worried about how we compared academically to other countries. "Homework was integral to a new cold war strategy that made education central to meeting the threat of Soviet technological and military superiority" (Gill 2004, 177). This was especially true after the Soviet's launched the space shuttle Sputnik in 1957. Homework was brought into the fore as a part of the national crisis, explaining why U.S. children were not as academically prepared as Russian children. Though this laxity in education was largely attributed to the progressive education movement that emphasized the "whole child": not just the intellectual growth, but physical and emotional health, as well. The cold war reformers kept some of this spirit in their promotion of homework. Homework that was activity-based and hands-on were promoted over traditional textbooks and memorization (Gill 2004). Parents were seen as potentially having a positive role in this informal as well as

formal learning. “Homework was a vital link in school-parent communication and therefore essential to building public support for higher educational standards” (Gill 2004, 178).

This heightened interest in education fell apart between 1968 and 1972 in the midst of challenges to political and cultural authority. Homework was not picked up again as an issue until the 1983 when a report called “A Nation at Risk” was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which showed American children were much less knowledgeable than students in other countries, and that part of this disparity had to do with a short school year and the reduction in homework (Stearns 2003). It was unclear as the demands of homework again began to grow how involved parents should be. Studies were divided about what would benefit children the most. Most teachers and child rearing manuals suggested that children should take responsibility for their own work, but it remained up to the parent to be sure that the work was done. A poll taken in 2000 showed that 58% of parents help their children considerably on their homework (Stearns 2003).

The line between ensuring that work is done and that children are performing satisfactorily at home, and letting the child take responsibility is evidently a difficult one to walk and is a source of great tension for parents. Homework, for this very reason, is a topic that parents constantly want addressed in class, according to Rona, a teacher at Easton Parenting Program. When I asked what three topics she would pick and the most relevant to discuss in my work, homework was amongst them. Likewise, two divorce mediators who run a joint practice pointed to homework as a huge source of tension between divorced and divorcing parents.

In one session of the Easton class, Rona was attempting to demonstrate how to resolve ongoing problems with children. The example she comes up with is, “It is my responsibility to see that your homework gets done and it is not happening.” She wants the child to suggest various options for resolving this problem and for the adult to choose an option that seems reasonable. The fact that she chose homework as an example of an ongoing problem reinforces her statement to me about homework being one that many parents struggle with.

Likewise, at OYF, Brianna chose school and homework as a topic for class discussion. The following notes describe her discussion:

Brianna tells the class how to help prepare children for homework: set a regular time, it creates routine. Pick a place, a special spot where the child knows where to go to do homework. Remove distractions: cd players, video games. Doing homework in front of the TV is hard. Provide pens, paper, a dictionary. If possible keep these items together in one place. For those of you whose kids are not with you, ask about how they are doing homework. Review and practice what they are doing in class. Explore subjects more. The structure of school is not elaborate enough. Class is 30 -45 minutes – they can't learn much in that time frame. Help to learn good study habits and teach a child to be independent minded.

Brianna’s suggestions are good ones, but they also highlight the complications of creating an atmosphere conducive to learning at home. These suggestions require homes with adequate space to designate a spot for homework away from other distractions, the resources to provide pens, papers and a dictionary, and the time to review, practice, and explore the topics they are studying in school.

During the period I was writing my dissertation I worked as a tutor. One of the boys I worked with was attending a private high school on scholarship (the school paid for my services). He had migrated from Mexico with his parents who worked at house

cleaning and construction. He lived in an apartment with his parents, his siblings, an aunt, and occasionally other family members. He slept on the couch in the living room.

Finding a quiet place to concentrate on his homework, especially the difficult reading required in many of his classes was a real challenge. There was no where at home that allowed him privacy and quiet. The neighborhood he lived in was dangerous at night and he did not feel comfortable walking home from the public library after dark. Though he was a very intelligent boy, these circumstances made it especially difficult for him to keep up with his homework assignments.

In the notes above Brianna also mentions that parents whose children are not with them can attempt to be supportive by inquiring about their study skills and reinforcing what is learned at school. This is a nod to the reality that many of the people in her class did not live with their children and were not engaged with their homework on a day to day basis. For parents who are separated from their children either because of divorce or alleged abuse or neglect, showing an interest in the child's school work is one way of showing the courts that they are attempting to be a responsible parent. This also works in reverse. Parents use a lack of attention to homework against one another. Patsy, for example, has been divorced from her 12 year-old daughter's father for about five years. At the time of our interview, they had reopened the issue of custody, because her daughter no longer wanted to have a relationship with her father, and Patsy feels he does not contribute positively to her life. Here she is describing an occasion when she allowed him to have an extra week vacation with his daughter:

One time when B was in second grade he asked if he could take her for a week. So I got her all ready and her home work and stuff and he took her up there....but when she got back she did not have her homework done. So when I got her back we had to do all her homework that night for the next day. This was outside his

summer time visit, so I did try to work with him but it always seemed to bite me in the rear end. So I started going by the court documents and I said that is all I can do because I can't work with you outside of that.

This occasion when her daughter did not complete her homework was for her an excuse to not allow the father extra visiting time with his daughter. Homework therefore becomes a point of contention and a marker for measuring whether the father is capable of fulfilling his duties as a father.

Conclusion

Education is at the heart of contemporary U.S. conceptualizations of possibility, opportunity, and equality. As previously cited, Katz contends that in lieu of considering poverty an inevitable consequence of the American political economy, Americans looked to education as a means of creating equal opportunities to gain access to resources. Parents are meant to ensure that their children are getting the best education possible to allow them access to employment and wealth. And if parents should fail to provide for their children's education –by reading to them from infancy, enhancing their vocabulary, monitoring their classroom educations and homework, and advocating for every possible opportunity – then it is the parents who have failed.

Gillies addresses this assumption and irony:

The notion that parenting practice can be separated out from socio-economic status and then used to explain the inequality it is necessarily grounded in, highlights a very particular understanding of class in terms of gradients of personal development. Structural and other constraints on action are dismissed in this model of the agentic, reflexive self, with appropriately raised citizens assumed to be able to negotiate and transcend obstacles in their path by exploiting opportunities, developing skills and managing risk. (Gillies 2005, 840)

A child's education, which her parent ensures and enhances, is one of the most important elements in transcending the obstacles confronted.

This chapter has explored the tensions involved in the responsibilities of parents in relationship to their children's school-based education. The practices of parents at home and in their relationship to the school are influenced by socio-economic backgrounds. And the practices of poor and working-class parents are blamed for their children's failure to excel, when compared with their middle-class counterparts, while the role of schools, employment opportunities, and economic resources are discounted.

The chapter has also pointed to some of the complications that arise from the parent-school relationship for parents who are under court supervision. Teachers' role as mandated reporters adds an additional level of threat for many parents, especially those already involved with child protective services. And participation in school, especially supervision of homework can become a point of contention between parents struggling with custody issues. The relationship between parents and their children's education is likely one of the most enduring issues parents contend with because of the length of a child's school career and the parent's constant negotiation of responsibility in this area.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Differences and Commonalities

The curriculum for the Oakland Family and Youth parenting class was designed by the director of the parenting program, Val. She created a binder filled with material pulled together from the internet, magazines, books, and her own personal experience. Her aim in designing the program was to develop a support system for the African American parents who live in the neighborhood around OYF that draws on their own experience and talks about different approaches without insulting their own knowledge and traditions. The classes contain elements such as the Parenting Affirmation, which brings a religious tone to the classes, and journal writing, which turns the classes into a more personal experience for the participants. The classes are small and run by a facilitator. As the title implies, the facilitators create an atmosphere of group sharing, with students sitting around a table facing one another. The facilitators are not generally people with teaching experience, and they have control over how they structure the classes, drawing from the binder or from other resources they encounter. Because of this, the classes vary greatly depending on the facilitator.

In a nearby suburb, the Easton class was designed by the teacher Rona. It is a larger class and is structured more like a traditional class than the OYF class. Students sit in desks facing the teacher. Rona does most of the talking, but she asks questions and occasionally engages the participants in exercises or role playing. She took a course,

Redirecting Children's Behavior⁷⁴, based on Dreikurs' teachings to help with her own children and found that it just "made sense." She has built her curriculum largely around this book, but adds in segments as she sees fit; for example, she has added her own section on children facing loss. Rona has been teaching parenting for many years and also draws on her experience as a day care provider. She teaches a two-hour class at the Easton courthouse for parents entering into a custody dispute. She developed the workshop and the court approved it after they had added a parent's bill of rights, which they got from a program in another state.

These classes on the surface are very different. They were developed based largely on the personal experience of these two women from very different backgrounds. A parent who is before the court may be ordered to complete twelve hours of parenting classes. She can choose any class, as long as they will write a letter to the court verifying that the hours have been completed. She might choose one class instead of another because it was closer to where she lived, her social worker recommended it, or it was listed first in the phone book. The process for finding the class or being referred varies from town to town and county to county. The road leading a parent through complying with the court's requirement is largely random. But what is remarkable, given all of these variables and differences is the similarity of the themes running through the classes.

Though varying in form and specific content, the classes promote practices and knowledge that instill values aligned with the neo-liberal political economy currently dominating the U.S.. Certain knowledge informs the field of parenting and shapes the parameters of what constitutes a good parent. This knowledge gives power to the current

⁷⁴ This is a workshop that is given across the country, based on the book by Karen Kvolts (1998) that Rona uses in her class.

political economy, which in turn reinforces and produces this knowledge. Foucault says of the relationship between power and knowledge, “We should admit that power produces knowledge...That power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute...power relations” ((Foucault 1980, 27) cited in (Hall 1996)).

In this research, this knowledge took the form of seven main assumptions that I found running through the advice given to parents in this study. First is the assumption that self-esteem is crucial for enabling a child cum adult to be a successful and contributing member of society. Second is the idea that education is the most effective way to establish equality and opportunities for children. Third is the use of scientific authorities as the ultimate source of advice, and fourth is that risk must be managed in anyway possible. The mandate to exercise self-control and to embrace freedom of choice are the fifth and sixth. Finally, the seventh is assuming individual responsibility. I discuss here each of these assumptions.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem has been a catchword related to child rearing since the 1970s. This movement takes the notion of children having fragile egos and extends it, asserting that poor self-esteem is at the seat of many social problems including crime, obesity, teen pregnancy and child abuse. If parents are careful to build the confidence of children, those children will be more apt to excel and succeed. If children do not succeed, their self confidence can be blamed, rather than structural circumstances. Cruikshank (1993) looks at the focus on self-esteem as a way of policing the population. People are constantly

acting on themselves, improving themselves in the name of self-esteem. “Individuals must accept the responsibility to subject their selves, to voluntarily consent to establishing a relationship between one’s self and a tutelary power such as a therapist, a social worker, a social problem, a parenting class, what have you” (Cruikshank 1993, 330). In order to feel confident in themselves, and to find answers to the many questions that arise in daily life about relationships, employment, finances, and childrearing, to name a few, people seek experts who produce the knowledge so critical to maintaining state power (Hall 1996).

In childrearing, preserving and building self-esteem has become the principle driving disciplinary techniques. Parenting classes promote methods of guiding and encouraging children without treating them negatively or harshly. As discussed in Chapter 5, rather than scolding a child who is misbehaving, parents are encouraged to distract them or give them alternatives. Parents are taught to communicate through careful discussion with their children about conflicts rather than making pronouncements about expected behavior. It is seen as overly harsh to expect obedience from children and to simply punish them if they don’t obey.⁷⁵ These techniques require much time and attention, making them more difficult to achieve for parents with fewer resources.

Education

Education is thought of in the United States as the ultimate equalizer. Many believe that access to proper education can give children access to the middle or upper class, regardless of their origins. For that reason, parents are meant to ensure that their children are getting the best education possible to allow them access to employment and

⁷⁵ There are gentler forms of punishment accepted such as time-outs or removing privileges.

wealth. There is pressure from early on to expose children to books before children can speak and to prepare them for classroom learning at the preschool age. We see this focus both in the expectation schools have for parent involvement and in the campaigns targeting new parents to help their children acquire “pre-literacy skills.”

In his discussion of social class, Bourdieu argues that social space is stratified and that inequality is persistent throughout capitalist societies. The spaces at the top are limited and if one marker of elite status becomes too accessible, this marker will change to restrict access once again. The markers can take the form of formal qualifications as well as informal markers such as speech patterns or dress. We can see the effect of formal requirements in the changing requirements for jobs in areas such as advertising or finance. Advanced degrees are now required for jobs that once required only college or even high school degrees. Recognizing the increasing competitiveness for these kinds of jobs, parents are scrambling for their children to be accepted into elite institutions so that they can get a leg up. So while education is certainly a valuable asset and is perhaps one of the few means of helping people access additional resources, it is misleading to claim that if children study hard they will be able to succeed financially and socially. For example, the First 5 campaign in California promotes the importance of parents reading to children from an early age and of using opportunities throughout the day for teaching pre-literacy skills such as recognizing colors shapes and letters. But there are many more factors such as the condition of the neighborhood and schools, and a family’s financial situation that will greatly affect a child’s performance in school and success in finding high paying jobs.

Scientific Authority

Much of the child-rearing advice that is given in parenting classes and in the media is validated by emphasizing its origin in scientific research. Science has become the ultimate authority not just in child rearing, but in many aspects of our society. Rose (1993), building on the work of Foucault, explained the vital role of “experts” in ordering, categorizing, tracking, and defining citizens. Experts, who are usually scientists, determine what should be considered problems in society and then offer advice on how to confront these problems. In this way, the values being promoted through expert advice are often hidden behind the guise of “scientific research,” which purports to be based on unbiased truth. Parenting classes, as well as magazines and books about child rearing, cite scientific research to back up any advice ranging from how to get children to sleep soundly to how to raise cooperative children.

First 5 California is an example of a public campaign that promotes the early childhood education by citing the scientifically proven benefits of reading and early and extensive communication to child development. Scientific authority is used to promote the maximization or optimization of a child’s development through constant stimulation and engagement. Though, as discussed above, early education may be beneficial socially, there is no biological harm done to a child who does not learn to read by first grade. This is a social priority, not a developmental one.

Risk

Closely linked to our reliance on scientific authority is the role of risk as a driving force in child rearing, as in many other areas of our society. Risk is constructed through expert knowledge to shape individuals choices about behaviors and practices. The

language of risk is used to promote certain behaviors, often linked to health or bodily well being, with the implication of moral judgments of blame if the wrong choice is made (Petersen 1996). In child rearing this has translated into increased expectations on parents to closely monitor children's behavior to avoid any injury or harm. Parental actions are judged not on what actually happened to children, but on what could have happened to them. Risk is seen as ultimately controllable as long as expert knowledge is followed (Lupton 1999).

On another scale, the concept of populations who are prone to heightened risk has changed the surveillance of parents as well. Those who meet certain criteria as "at risk" are subject to closer scrutiny and management. In terms of parenting education, this means that parents who are involved with child welfare (perhaps because they had already been under greater scrutiny) or parents involved with custody cases are pushed to improve their parenting skills.

Self-Control

Self-control is an important element of being a good and healthy citizen. To be controlled is to be "civilized" (Petersen and Lupton 1996). Discipline and control are also viewed as elements of healthy living. By carefully managing one's exercise, food, and lifestyle, it is thought that healthy living can be attained. In the classes stress management was promoted as one way for parents to take control of their lives. By dealing with stress in an appropriate way, such as through relaxation techniques or exercise, parents would be better able to deal with the daily complications of raising children. This is especially important because it would help parents to discipline their children not in reactionary ways, but in intentional ways. Parents are asked to think

about the behavior or morals they wish to elicit in their children and then use corresponding measures to achieve these results. Physical punishment is frowned upon and seen as a manifestation of a lack of control. In the one handout where physical punishment was even considered, it was deemed acceptable and effective only if done with extreme control and never in anger. Parents such as Steve felt shameful about their own behavior that showed a lack of control, such as yelling at another father on the soccer field. Furthermore, parents were encouraged to teach their children self-control by encouraging verbal communication as an appropriate means of expressing emotions and desires. Also, by allowing children to experience the consequences of their actions, parents would teach them to be mindful of the results of their behavior, exerting more control over their actions and reactions.

Freedom of Choice

Closely linked to self-control is the idea of being a responsible consumer. The freedom of choice so valued in our society comes with the responsibility of making choices. By offering children choices that are appropriate to their age (picking what pants to wear or which book to read), you can give them a sense of control and inclusion. It also gives them a chance to develop their own preferences and sense of self-expression, which are so important in our consumer culture. In some cases, however, the illusion of choices that parents are encouraged to give their children as a means of discipline (you can get dressed now or in five minutes) echoes the illusion of choice in our society. Though we talk about a freedom of choice and about choosing our path, our choices are limited by economic policy, by economic constraints, by discursively shaped

social preferences and structures. We see in this idea of giving children choice a way of distracting from the parent's true purpose (getting the child dressed).

But making choices also means that children have to learn to take responsibility for their actions, and in order to understand that they need to feel the consequences of their decisions. One example given in class was the two boys who took an uncle's car for a joy ride. The discussion was about how to make them feel the consequences of what they did so that they will make wiser choices in the future. The children will then learn to take responsibility for their actions, and to exercise self-control in the future.

Individual Responsibility

Freedom of choice can be closely linked to individual responsibility, the cornerstone of the neo-liberal approach. Though individual responsibility has been embraced and encouraged to some extent throughout U.S. history, it takes on a heightened importance at a time when government intervention and support is rejected in favor of a market driven logic. As Gordon expresses, the individual becomes an entrepreneurial being, constantly reproducing and improving his or her own human capital (Gordon 1991). This implies an assumption of responsibility for one's own actions and decisions, and for one's failure and success in the market, regardless of the structural inequalities that exist. This idea appears in parenting classes in the idea of fostering independence, and, as discussed above, for taking responsibility for one's own actions. We also see this in the mandate for parents to take care of themselves so that they are available and able to take care of their children. This includes the care for one's body and health, and financial security.

The fact that these classes are organized in such a seemingly haphazard way, but have such commonalities is significant because as Foucault has indicated, it speaks to the strength of the discursive formations shaping the field of parenting (Hall 1996). The basis of what is considered good parenting in U.S. society is pervasive enough to be promoted in all of these classes though there was no overarching organization among classes. As discussed, the relationship between knowledge and power is vital to the production of both. And parenting is a particularly important field for the continuance of knowledge and the envisioning of future generations.

Parenting education has become a common treatment for parents who are considered “at risk” – in the case of this study those involved with child welfare or in custody cases. These are most often people who do not satisfy many established norms in U.S. society—who do not look like the “good citizen.” They are living in poverty, are of color, or are single parents, making them suspect in their abilities to raise children who do conform to a middle class, married, heterosexual norm. Parenting classes are thus a venue for aligning parents to the appropriate knowledge and practices to this end. As discussed, parenting education is one form of expert advice applied to the principle of at risk populations. Unwelcome risk is thought to be stamped out by adhering to expert knowledge, which is among the most important resources then for aligning a citizen’s desires and choices with those of the state (Petersen and Lupton 1996).

This logic ignores the basic material circumstances that differentiate people’s lives. We are facing in the United States the biggest gap between the rich and middle to low income workers since the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s. In 2007, the sixth year of an economic expansion, census figures show that compared with 2001

(when the economy was in a recession) 4.4 million more Americans entered official poverty,⁷⁶ the median income dropped by \$1,100, and 6 million more people were uninsured (Heuvel 2008). Add these figures to the deep cuts in welfare, reduced spending on school budgets, and a shifting of the burden of healthcare costs to workers and we get a picture of the financial difficulties facing most families in the United States at that time, even before taking into account the serious economic downturn that started in 2008. The financial woes of individuals are seen as just that, financial woes of *individuals* and not a result of the country's political economy.

Parents are the focus of much attention as the means to reverse many social problems including poverty, crime, ill health, and illiteracy. If parents could raise children with the appropriate morals, ambitions, and abilities, the thinking goes, children could grow up to be responsible, healthy, and middle class. As Val Gillies phrases it, this assumption results in “a stream of initiatives designed to regulate childrearing as part of an almost evangelical drive to equip working-class parents with the skills to raise middle-class children” (Gillies 2005, 838). I have tried to show in this dissertation how parenting education is integral to this overall drive.

Evaluation and Effectiveness

Parenting classes are one way of encouraging people to embrace these assumptions and values that in turn promote a neo-liberal political economy. The classes are not expensive to administer, the ultimate responsibility still falls on the parent, and the state can say it is addressing the problem of at risk parents. Though court-mandated

⁷⁶ Many argue that the federal poverty guideline of \$21,203 per year for a family of four is set too low given the cost of living in many areas of the country (Heuvel 2008).

parenting classes have become increasingly available, their effects have been very difficult to measure. The classes are administered in a great variety of setting by an array of institutions and organizations, and they have different goals and targeted populations. This makes it difficult to evaluate the classes overall. There is no uniformity in the training of the teachers, which again accounts for enormous variability in the delivery and reception of the classes. Furthermore, most evaluations conducted have been short term, so that it is difficult to assess the outcome of the classes in the long term.

In this dissertation I have looked principally at two types of parent education clients: parents in divorce custody cases and parents involved with child protective services (who are often mixed in the same classes). Generally speaking, the purpose behind mandating these two groups to classes is very different. The parents in custody cases need to understand the impact of their separation on their children, how to facilitate this process for themselves and their children, and how to co-parent after divorce. Parents involved in CPS are generally sent with the goal of providing new knowledge and skills to parents with the goal of preventing further abuse or neglect. In both cases, successfully meeting these goals requires much more than the parents understanding and knowledge. They need to have the sustained social and financial resources (housing, child care, social support, health care, adequate income) available to implement their new knowledge.

In this view, in order for parent education to have a real long term impact, it has to be combined with efforts to address these other complicating issues. There are some interesting models for real integrated service programs to improve the lives of parents and children. One example in New York is the “Harlem Children’s Zone,” initiated by

Geoffrey Canada. This program encompasses a 60 block area of Harlem, containing about 7000 children, about 60% of whom live in poverty, and 75% of whom regularly score below grade level on state reading and math tests. The Zone incorporates parenting classes for parents under three, intensive pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds, classroom aides, after school instruction as well as healthcare, emergency aide, counseling, access to fresh produce and foods. Canada wanted children to participate in mainstream middle-class life and in order to accomplish that he wanted them to be able to make it through college. The difference here is that he recognized that he couldn't by changing attitudes alone; he couldn't do that if they were malnourished, lacked educational resources, or were homeless, for example (Tough 2008).

Canada used a parenting classes as his starting point, sending out recruiters to sign people up for a free nine-week program. From there he exposed the participants to other available resources, bringing in, for example, representatives from pre-kindergarten, Head Start, tenants and block associations, home visiting programs for new parents, and the public library. "Canada's objective was to create a safety net woven so tightly that children in the neighborhood couldn't slip through" (Tough 2008, 5). Harlem Children's Zone has become a model for the rest of the country. President-elect Barak Obama has held it up as a model for the strategy he would like to implement across the country to address urban poverty.

Canada's program forefronts poverty and education as its main concerns. Programs addressing child abuse or divorcing parents may look somewhat different, but the main idea of looking at a problem from all sides, and not just offering advice that is difficult to implement, could be carried over. It is an idea that takes commitment and

resources, and the true success of the program is still anecdotal. It will be a few years before the first group of children involved since birth graduate from high school, though the children in the Zone test higher than their peers (Pitts 2007).

Other organizations have voiced opposition to the demands on parents and the lack of support given to families in this country. MomsRising.com is an example, pushing for family friendly policies: child care, health care, maternity leave, flexible work, and living wages. This organization started in 2006 and has 140,000 members, and has been actively lobbying for these issues on federal and state levels. Along with Harlem Children's Zone, it represents a growing awareness of the detriments of championing individual responsibility exclusively. Movements such as this could help to address the material inequalities facing families.

In the process of analyzing my field notes and presenting my findings, I have found that the tools for analysis most often used in studies on North America were not always sufficient. Race, class, and gender are crucial categories for understanding contemporary parenting advice, but so too are culture and generation. Parenting knowledges and values reflect parents' own experience and the culture and values they were raised with, which are intricately interwoven with their own experiences with gender, race and class. But they also relate to their own aspirations and expectations in these regards. Generational and cultural differences are instructive when considering the practices parents use in childrearing.

Further, I have found it useful to draw on two overarching analytic approaches. The first is a Foucaultian approach, building on scholars such as Rose and Lupton in

addition to Foucault in understanding how knowledge and power work together through, in the present case, parenting discourse. The other approach draws on a recognition of structural inequalities that limit access to resources and by extension to ideal parenting practices. The advice given to the largely working class numbers of these classes often showed a disregard for the resources being demanded to be a good parent. This later approach is one that offers the most viable political solutions, as it identifies issues that could more easily be targeted through policy. The two approaches taken in tandem, however, make for a more thorough understanding of parenting and how parenting practices and knowledges both emerge from and reinforce existing power hierarchies in contemporary United States.

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