TRANSITIONS INTO PARENTHOOD: EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITIES OF CHILDREARING

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TRANSITIONS INTO PARENTHOOD: EXAMINING THE COMPLEXITIES OF CHILDREARING

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PREFACE

A common sentiment shared in many cultures around the globe is that parenting is "the hardest job you will ever love." For many, this association is related to the many long, sleepless nights spent attending to the needs of infants. During this time, feeding, bathing, and the seemingly endless diaper changes lead many to assume that their decision to have a child was perhaps a bit premature, as they had not accounted for the tremendous physical demands that childrearing places upon mothers and fathers. However, while the needs of children will change as they age, the truly complex nature of parenthood begins to reveal itself. Around their second birthday, children begin to speak, thus opening up a completely new set of needs, as parents now have to engage their child in conversation. At this point, children can now express not only their physical needs, but also their wide array of emotional and cognitive needs to parents. Later, as children grow and are able to leave the home for school, their needs become ever more complicated, as interactions with peers and the larger society outside the family begin to influence their development. The middle childhood years offer little relief for parents, nor do their often turbulent adolescent years. Simply, there is considerable recognition that parenting is, indeed, a most demanding role for mothers and fathers.

The complex nature of contemporary parenting has its foundations within societal change. Modernization, coupled with the transition of societies through their respective agriculture, industrial, and post-industrial forms have dramatically changed how parents view both their children and their own roles and responsibilities to them. Within agricultural societies, wherein families were dependent upon farming for their livelihoods, children were typically regarded as an economic asset, such that they could provide labor, tending to crops, animals, and other manual labor tasks. In her book, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, Viviana Zelizer (1985) posited that as societies modernized, thus becoming more urbanized, with most adults working in service sector occupations, the relative value of children began to change. Specifically, societal modernization and urbanization led to substantially lower fertility rates, leaving parents with fewer children. Within modernized societies, mandatory education and anti-child labor laws meant that children were effectively left unable to provide labor support to families. As their economic value dissipated, the emotional value of children began to be emphasized. For most parents, children were viewed as objects of affection, someone to whom they could commit their love, time, and money. The emotional and affective value of children has become a driving force in parenthood, itself, thus contributing to its complexity.

Around the globe, mothers and fathers typically have the best of intentions in regard to how their efforts as parents will ultimately affect the development of their children. Obviously, and hopefully, most parents want their children to

grow into adults who are kind, intelligent, creative, and who have the character and personality traits which will allow them to be happy and successful in their respective lives. Achieving these rather straightforward goals, though, can be quite challenging, and many parents struggle with how to best raise their children. In this volume of *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research*, researchers address the complicated nature of parenting and the roles of mothers and fathers. Within the studies contained in this volume, researchers examine a variety of childrearing issues, and offer considerable insights into the very complex roles of parents. In keeping with the goals of the *CPFR* series, this volume emphasizes a global perspective, with research from around the world. Given the dynamic and ever-changing nature of parenthood, it is absolutely necessary to maintain a sharp focus on childrearing, as it will certainly continue to vary from one culture to another, as well as over time.

Parenting can be quite stressful, as demonstrated by Amira L. Allen, Wendy D. Manning, Monica A. Longmore and Peggy C. Giordano, in "Young Adult Parents' Work–Family Conflict: The Roles of Parenting Stress and Parental Conflict." Their work focuses on factors associated with observed variability in reports about work–family stress and consider the role of child characteristics as well as parenting conflict. Drawing on data from employed young adult parents, the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, a longitudinal study based on a stratified random sample of adolescents registered in Lucas, County, Ohio, the chapter concludes on the relations between having a child perceived as more difficult and work–family stress, highlighting the importance of providing institutional and informal support to such parents.

"Experiences of Family and Social Support during the Transition to Motherhood among Mothers of Biracial and Monoracial Infants" by Roudi Nazarinia Roy, Yolanda Mitchell, Anthony James, Byron Miller, and Jessica Hutchinson was written in a way to explore the lived experiences of a diverse group of women in biracial and monoracial relationships experiencing the transition to motherhood (e.g., biracial or monoracial motherhood). Informed by the symbolic interaction framework, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the expectations and experiences of first-time motherhood on a sample of US women. Specifically, this chapter explores a transversal overarching theme of racial/ethnic differences in appropriate infant care, which surfaces during engagement in family and social support interactions.

In "Narratives from Community-based Organization Staff and Black and Coloured Mothers in South Africa: A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Participation in Parenting Programs on Maternal Behaviors," Simone Martin-Howard explores perceptions about the impact of program participation on parenting styles and behavioral changes using observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black and Coloured staff and mothers at a community-based organization in the Western Cape Province in South Africa. The combined results from data analysis collected from staff and mothers come to point the many factors that impact program participation, either from the broader context (e.g., child abandonment and neglect and the abuse of women) or individual (e.g., domestic abuse and personal issues with alcohol and drugs). While the chapter

presents successful outcomes among parent participants, namely improved self-esteem, positive life changes and changes in parenting styles it draws attention to the important role played by community-based parenting programs for low-income and underserved populations, both in South Africa and internationally.

The experiences of parenting are also linked with the relationships between spouses and partners. In "For Us or the Children? Exploring the Association Between Coparenting Trajectories and Parental Commitment," Heidi M. Williams focuses upon coparenting relationships. Situated in commitment theory, the chapter estimates latent growth curve models to determine whether there is an association between coparenting trajectories and parental commitment five years after the birth of focal children. Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a study focusing on families in the United States, showed that, net of covariates, coparenting relationships among unmarried parents are strong across the first five years of their children's lives. Overall, results suggested that supportive coparenting among unmarried, cohabiting parents increases the strength of parental relationships over time – substantiating the argument that a "new package deal" exists.

"Mediating Effects of Maternal Gatekeeping on Nonresident Black Fathers' Paternal Stressors" by Katrina A. R. Akande and Claudia J. Heath, introduces the topic of nonresident fathers, who have the task of negotiating childrearing responsibilities while residing away from their children. Parenting stress arises when nonresident fathers perceive childrearing power differentials as maternal gatekeeping behaviors. In this pilot study, a mediation model was tested with a sample of Black fathers from a US southeastern state, who reported coparenting a nonresident child or children with only one mother. Findings explore the power of cooperative coparenting in lessening parental stressors, namely the ones regarding concerns about role functions and concerns about their child's behavior in the presence of controlling maternal gatekeeping behaviors.

Kishani Townshend and Nerina Caltabiano's "A Conceptual and Methodological Exploration of the Cognitive Processes Associated with Mindful Parenting: Reflections on Translating Theory to Practice" brings together mindfulness and parenting. Mindful parenting is a parenting style which has grown in popularity in recent times to support parents during pregnancy, birth and beyond. The current study aims to clarify clinicians' perceptions of cognitive change processes associated with mindful parenting, particularly how theory is translated to practice. In doing so, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyze semi-structured interviews with female Australian clinicians using Mindful Programs. Kishani and Nerina explore both change and cognitive processes pointed out in the interviews, thus contributing to the development of a more comprehensive theoretical model of mindful parenting.

The interaction between parents and children will certainly be affected by their basic form of communication, language. "In Which Language(s) Do You Parent? How Language(s) Used by Migrant Parents Influence the Realization of Parenting Functions?" by Maria Siemushyna and Andrea S. Young analyzes how languages used in families with migrant backgrounds influence the realization of "parental functions," such as everyday communication with their children, the

transmission of knowledge, and the expression of emotions. In fact, in families with migrant backgrounds some parents use only the language of the country of origin with their children, while others use only the language of the host country, and some parents use both of these languages. Based on a thematic analysis of non-directive interviews of parents and children with the members of migrant families in Strasbourg (France) and Frankfurt-am-Main (Germany), the chapter discusses which of these language use situations enables parents to fuller realize their parental functions.

Elaine S. Barry's "Co-sleeping as a Developmental Context and its Role in the Transition to Parenthood" reviews the literature on mother–child co-sleeping (bedsharing) and integrates it within a developmental theoretical approach. The author discusses how rates of co-sleeping in the West are increasing and evaluates the current Western controversy over co-sleeping as an important part of understanding how individuals and families make the transition to parenthood. Specifically, Dr Barry reviews research from anthropology, family studies, medicine, pediatrics, psychology, and public health through the lens of Evolutionary Developmental Theory to place co-sleeping within a developmental, theoretical context for understanding it. Viewing co-sleeping as a family choice and a normative, human developmental context changes how experts may provide advice and support to families choosing co-sleeping, especially in families making the transition to parenthood.

"Mother–Child Relationships and Depressive Symptoms in the Transition to Adulthood: An Examination of Racial and Ethnic Differences," by Xing Zhang, focuses upon depressive symptoms in the transition to adulthood, which according to many studies are higher among racial and ethnic minorities. Given that adolescents spend most of their time at home when they are not at school, it is important to understand how parents may moderate negative experiences at school, and how mother–child relationships may serve as a protective buffer for depressive symptoms in emerging adulthood. The chapter analyses data from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health and explores relations between school disconnectedness in adolescence, depressive symptoms in emerging adulthood, and maternal relationship quality as an important protective factor for mental health in the transition to adulthood.

Of course, parenting often extends across generations, as well as kin networks. In "Parenting in Three-generation Taiwanese Families: The Dynamics of Collaboration and Conflicts," Yi-Ping Shih delineates how a mother in a three-generation family implements her ideal parenting values for her child while being encumbered by the constraints of her parents-in-law and how does this intergenerational dynamic vary with family socioeconomic status. Part of a major study, this chapter purposely focuses on two families in Taipei, Taiwan, to illustrate distinctive approaches toward childrearing. While the paper foregrounds the negotiations that these mothers undertake in defining ideal parenting, and how it varies by social classes it underlines how Asian mothers are moving towards a new parenting culture, given that the cultural ideal of concerted cultivation has become a popular ideology.

Overall, these studies provide a very comprehensive examination of childrearing and its numerous dimensions, providing considerable insight into the complex nature of parenthood. Beyond their empirical findings, the researchers also provide multiple suggestions for future research on parenting and child development, as well as numerous recommendations for both practitioners and policymakers. We offer them our most sincere appreciation for their efforts, and also express our thanks to the members of the editorial board, the external reviewers, and the wonderful staff at Emerald Publishing for their tremendous assistance.

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