

## Partners Becoming Parents: Talks From the Tavistock Marital Studies Institute

Edited By CHRISTOPHER CLULOW

Sheldon Press, 1996, 206 pp.

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Because our developmental theories give so much weight to the positive and the negative impact that parents have on their children, fresh ideas and information pertaining to parenting itself are sorely needed. What environmental, relational, and intrapsychic features enhance a parent's capacity to nurture? How are the demands of parenthood most felicitously balanced with the adult's own emotional, social, and economic needs? These are important and poorly understood questions, which *Partners Becoming Parents* attempts to illuminate. This edited volume of essays on the interplay between marital relationships and parent-child relationships, composed of a compilation of talks from the Tavistock Marital Studies Institute, is an uneven effort. Some of the essays undertake to do too much in far too little space, with the result that little is actually presented beyond generalizations and truisms. At times, it is not always clear what audience (i.e., lay or professional) is being addressed. Perhaps such problems are inevitable in a book that is a collection of talks. Still, the book has much to offer.

The introduction, by Christopher Clulow, offers a balanced and thoughtful review of the evolving nature of parenting in the light of technological, sociopolitical, economic and cultural changes, and the often polarized attitudes these new realities evoke. Noting that traditional links between marriage and child-rearing have been called into question, Clulow poses a challenge of clarifying if and how a couple's relationship and a parent-child relationship augment, conflict with, or depend upon each other.

Penelope Leach's contribution "Who Comes First? Partner or Child?" scathingly debunks the notion of "quality time" as a substitute for huge amounts of ordinary time, and counters the argument that children will benefit when adults fulfill their own needs first. Leach asserts that the family must be seen as a unit, not as a conglomerate of competing individuals. According to Leach, the real polarization today is not between the competing needs of different family members, but between family and work, between earning and caring. This conflict has been exacerbated by the increasing demands of the workplace, and the decreasing social supports for caregiving. The clarity, focus, and bracing prose style of this essay are refreshing.

In "Reproductive Narratives of Pregnancy and Parenting," Joan Rafael-Leff offers a much condensed account of her research on parenting styles as they evolve from their roots in childhood through pregnancy and beyond. She has identified three major patterns, which she calls Facilitators, Regulators, and Reciprocators. These correspond roughly to what Carolyn and Philip Cowan term "permissive," "authoritarian," and "authoritative" in Chapters Eight and Nine. This is fascinating research, distinguished by its wealth of nuanced observational detail, a feature that is not done justice in an overview such as this.

"Daughters Becoming Mothers," by Jennifer Johns, is a charmingly written, imaginary

ideal biography of a little girl who grows up to be a mother, which highlights the ways early experience determines how women experience and respond to pregnancy and motherhood. This is accessible and could be helpful to the parents of young girls.

Andrew Samuels, in “The Good-Enough Father of Whatever Sex” seems to be arguing that, because gender identity as historically constituted in Western cultures bears traces of patriarchal oppression, the politically correct approach is to assert that gender makes no difference at all, or, in the words of the song, “Anything you can do, I can do better!” However (arguably) commendable such a state of affairs might be, Samuels fails to present evidence of its actuality.

The heart of this volume, and by far the most useful and substantive contribution is presented in Chapters Eight and Nine by Carolyn and Philip Cowan, psychologists from the University of California, Berkeley, who have been conducting research for two decades on the etiology and impact of parenting styles, with particular reference to the connections between marital harmony and child outcomes. The complex interplay of influences between parental security, marital adjustment, parenting style, and child development is examined in detail, yielding intriguing results.

For example, their studies indicate that the daughters of insecure, dissatisfied fathers fare worse than their brothers, or than the daughters of insecure, dissatisfied mothers. The Cowans’ research helps clarify how and when marital relationship amplify or buffer the stresses of child development. They also describe some interesting work on preventive intervention.

The chapter by Joanna Rosenthal, “Love is Lovelier the Second Time Around,” looks at some of the psychological dimensions of step-parenting, especially the pernicious effects of incomplete mourning for lost or failed previous relationships, and of the apparent “Oedipal triumph” of divorce. She points out that couples often use defensive idealization to protect their relationship, with concomitant demonizing of step-children or ex-spouses.

In the concluding chapter, editor Christopher Clulow asks, “Are Two Parents Necessary?” Clulow poses important questions about the impacts of dyadic versus triangular parent–child relationships, about the significance of parental gender and sexuality to child development and about the differing impacts on the marital relationship of pregnancy and parenthood. Simultaneously, he tries to review and consolidate the contributions of the other authors. At times, it seems that this is simply too much freight for a 16-page essay to carry.

This volume is successful in drawing the reader’s attention to the crying need for more research and more literature, and to the vitally important issues it addresses.