



CPCSForums@Kent Spring Series, 2011

(1) Militant Lactivism? Accounting for infant feeding

Part of the SSPSSR Research Seminar Series

Thursday 7th April, 4.30-6pm, University of Kent, Cornwallis North East, Room CNE08

Dr. Charlotte Faircloth, Mildred Blaxter post-doctoral fellow, Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness

Based on research with networks of mothers in London who breastfeed their children to 'full-term' (for anything up to eight-years-old), this paper presents findings from a study exploring the purported 'intensification' of mothering in Euro-American contexts (Hays 1996). Typically, these mothers narrate their decision to continue breastfeeding as 'natural': 'evolutionarily appropriate,' 'scientifically best,' and 'what feels right in their hearts' – often in quite forceful ways. These three 'accountability strategies' are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they serve as discursive threads which women weave together in the course of their narrativisation, operating both pre- and post-facto to predict, explain and justify their practices.

What follows is a reflection on how these strategies are given credence in narratives of mothering and what the implications of this are for society more broadly. As a form of 'authoritative knowledge' women typically prioritize 'science' and 'evolution' when they talk about their decision to breastfeed long-term, since – perceived as the most robust knowledge claim – it has the effect of placing these non-conventional practices beyond debate (they are simply what is 'best'). At the same time – often when these scientific and evolutionary arguments are questioned or seen to be in jeopardy - 'feeling' often provides the last resort in the demand for accountability. The paper therefore makes a contribution to wider sociological debates around the ways society and behaviour are regulated, and the ways in which particular knowledge claims are interpreted, internalized and mobilized by individuals in the course of their reproductive life, kinship relations and 'identity work'.



(2) The politics of 'parent training'

A lecture in conjunction with the *National Childbirth Trust*, Canterbury and District branch

Saturday 7 May, University of Kent, Darwin LT3, 2-4pm

Dr Ellie Lee, Director, Centre for Parenting Culture Studies

No-one with an eye on debates about the family, education and social policy will have failed to notice recent statements from politicians about the urgent need to address 'poor parenting'. In January 2011 Graham Allen MP issued comments arising from his work with the 'Early Intervention Commission', established as part of the Coalition Government's programme of activities on 'poverty and life chances'. Allen has concluded so far that there should be regular assessments of all pre-school children focussing on their 'social and economic development'. Parents in particular, he argues, need to be provided with ways to help them better understand how to interact with children in the early years. Allen's argument, that focussing on the early years in general and parenting in particular is the key to addressing poverty and social mobility, echoes the case made by Frank Field MP in December 2010. The findings of Field's 'independent review on poverty and life chances' published that month make parenting the determining factor for the development of these social problems, and Field argues (among other things) that children from primary school onwards should be taught about parenting as part of the national curriculum.

In this paper will situate these proposals as part of wider developments in contemporary parenting culture. It will explore suppositions of this agenda for parent training as set out the founding document of the Early Intervention Commission document *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* published by the think tank the centre for Social Justice (<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/EarlyInterventionpaperFINAL.pdf>). Particular attention will be paid to the emphasis placed on the brain which, it will be argued, can be thought of as a sort of new phrenology. Consideration will also be paid to the effects of the approach that now dominates political thinking for family life, and for schooling.