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**(RE)PRODUCING THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT: CHILD-REARING ADVICE
LITERATURE FOLLOWING “THE GREAT RISK SHIFT”**

by
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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL
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INTRODUCTION

Over the final two decades of the 20th century, American historian Paula Fass writes, parents in the United States “became both the subject and the audience for a literature of complaint and disappointment.”¹ Historian of American childhood Stephen Mintz interprets this growth in parenting discourse as an indication of societal unrest, warranting that “children have long served as a lightning rod for America’s anxieties about society as a whole.”² Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century in particular, a popular account of childhood was characterized by a “discourse of crisis,”³ reflecting a public preoccupation with moral devolution and heightened financial insecurity largely wrought by social and economic transformations: the United States had embarked upon a project of economic restructuring that traded social welfare policies for privatization strategies, resulting in declining workers’ average wages, disappearing laborers’ benefits, and a greatly increased economic gap between the wealthy and the middle-class.⁴ In this era of widening economic inequality, the family, rather than the state, was framed as the site of success or failure, while individuals were held responsible for discerning and employing methods of self-investment that would ensure their economic survival. Child-rearing took on a particularly important role in this political context, as mothers and fathers worried for their children’s ability to maintain their economic standing in a society in which the state retreated from the provision of public goods which had once been vital to the liberal democracy of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Parental panic soared to an all-time high in the 1980’s, and in

¹ Paula S. Fass, *The End of American Childhood: A History of Parenting from Life on the Frontier to the Managed Child* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 217.

² Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Belknap Press, 2004), 340.

³ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Updated edition (Basic Books, 2016), 351.

response, the parenting advice market expanded fivefold.⁵

The child-rearing literature that emerged in the wake of neoliberal economic reform that largely transferred state responsibilities to individual family units proposed updated guidance on how to raise successful adults. As Coontz writes, shifts in childrearing advice, which occur across cultures and throughout historical circumstances, are indicative of larger socioeconomic shifts and “changes in environmental demands on adults and children.”⁶ Ideas about what constitutes a ‘successful’ adult, which are culturally conditional,⁷ are equally important in determining guidelines for raising children. In the ongoing process of privatization, the state imagines its ideal citizen as an entrepreneurial, self-reliant, self-governing subject. Child-rearing guides published in the last two decades of the twentieth century provided a framework for constructing this idealized neoliberal subject. As these parenting manuals framed the characterizations of and methods for cultivating culturally valuable adults, they helped foster and legitimize the transference of state responsibility to individual units, holding families responsible for inculcating aptitudes in their children that would ensure maintenance of middle-class economic status despite the increasing difficulty of class mobility in neoliberal circumstances. The guidance offered within these books not only supported the goals of the state by encouraging the cultivation of entrepreneurial, self-governing subjects; more importantly, the growth in popularity of these self-help manuals themselves accepted and obscured the transference of state responsibilities onto individual family units. In effect, these self-help parenting guides concealed and legitimized a shift in accountability from society to private households for the maintenance of economic security.

⁵ Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice about Children* (Vintage Books, 2004) 334; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 343.

⁶ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 284-85.

⁷ Valerie Walkerdine, “Beyond Developmentalism?,” *Theory & Psychology* 3, no. 4 (1993): 451–69.

SECTION ONE

Neoliberal Economic Reform and the Reshaping of Personhood

Over the course of the 1980's, the United States government engaged in a massive divestment from the social safety net, rescinding substantial budgetary support from programs and policies introduced by Lyndon B. Johnson's visionary Great Society reforms of the 1960's and fostered through the 1970's.⁸ In an effort to cure the inflation, declining wages, and rising unemployment of the 1970's, leading American economists promoted the replacement of Keynesian economics with neoliberal austerity politics, calling on a relatively obscure school of economic thought that asserted the state's primary priority should be to establish and maintain a political structure that safeguarded private property rights, rule of law, and free markets.⁹ The Keynesian economic regime which had defined the postwar era—characterized by extensive state expenditures toward investments in social infrastructure—was in their view the cause of the “stagflation” crisis and unemployment of the 1970's.¹⁰

Neoliberal economists had confidence that privatizing social services would generate the financial strain necessary to encourage citizens to seek work, thereby generating economic expansion.¹¹ Thus, under their counsel, federal legislators conducted a drastic restructuring of state responsibilities as their central objective became facilitating economic competition and growth regardless of the cost to civil society.¹² State actors confronted inflationary crisis by deregulating the market and realigning public goods as private ones, imposing cuts to education, transportation, healthcare, and social service budgets.¹³ Potential for class mobility greatly

⁸ Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Zone Books, 2019), 40.

⁹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁰ Laura Briggs, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics* (University of California Press, 2017), 37.

¹¹ Cooper, *Family Values*, 23.

¹² Harvey, *Brief History*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

diminished as the state curtailed support for public welfare programs, and income inequality subsequently dramatically increased.¹⁴ Thus began the great unraveling of the social safety net and the dissolution of the public sphere as every domain was reoriented, as David Harvey writes, “in favour of individualism, private property, [and] personal responsibility.”¹⁵

Many scholars point to Ronald Reagan’s incumbency as the first administration in which the economic theory of neoliberalism was put into full effect.¹⁶ Throughout the 1980’s, as he aspired to cure the sick and stagnant economy through the neoliberal economic logics of privatization, Reagan implemented budget reductions for social support programs, slashed industry regulations,¹⁷ and introduced tax cuts for the affluent.¹⁸ Advancing Reagan’s project of privatization, the Clinton Administration further dismantled the social safety net, drastically reducing state support for low-income housing, childcare, and welfare while average real wages declined and the rate of unemployment rose.¹⁹ As a result, an increasing share of wealth was funneled toward the upper echelons of society, while middle- and working-class laborers suffered from diminished wages, rising job instability, losses in employment protections and benefits,²⁰ and eroded assurance of social mobility.²¹ By the 1990’s, almost seventy percent of all growth in income had been directed toward those in the top ten percent income bracket, and income insecurity had multiplied fivefold since the early 1970’s.²²

As the administrations of the 1980’s and 1990’s quietly eroded democratic principles and

¹⁴ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 358; Briggs, *All Politics*, 72; Harvey, *Brief History*, 16.

¹⁵ Harvey, *Brief History*, 23.

¹⁶ Majia Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood into the 21st Century: Biopolitical Technologies of Childhood Management and Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 150; Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Zone Books, 2015), 20.

¹⁷ Harvey, *Brief History*, 25.

¹⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 28.

¹⁹ Briggs, *All Politics*, 47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 29.

²² Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, xiii.

institutions through the implementation of neoliberal economic logics, the state placed increasing responsibility on the individual for achieving economic stability and success despite privatizing essential programs and services which were once provided by the state. Subsequently, as it assumed responsibility for self-governance, the public citizen of liberal democracy was reformulated as an entrepreneurial subject,²³ who was, as Orgod and De Benedictis write, “individualized, autonomous, freely choosing, self-monitoring, and self-disciplining.”²⁴

Many scholars, drawing from Michel Foucault’s *Biopolitics* lectures, have illustrated the transformation of selfhood and its reorientation to the state apparatus as neoliberal policies become embedded in everyday life (see Rose 1989, Rhodes 1997, Edwards 2008, Stooke 2014, Brown 2015). Foucault’s concept of governmentality outlines the way that the state relies on the inculcation of certain rationalities within its subjects to accomplish its desired end of unencumbered economic growth. Consequently, according to Rose, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries citizens of liberal democracies have increasingly “experienced the governmentalization of the state—that is to say, the invention of an array of technologies that connect up calculations from political centers to thousands of micro-locales where conduct is shaped.”²⁵ Accordingly, as technologies of government such as the psychological disciplines instill the rationality of the state within citizens, Brown argues that “governance has become neoliberalism’s primary administrative form, the political modality through which it [...] conducts subjects.”²⁶

²³ N Ollsen and M.A. Peters, “Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism,” *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 3 (2005): 231–230 as cited in Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala, “Governmentality - Neoliberalism - Education: The Risk Perspective,” *Journal of Pedagogy / Pedagogický Casopis* 2, no. 2 (2011): 315.

²⁴ Shani Orgad and Sara De Benedictis, “The ‘Stay-at-Home’ Mother, Postfeminism and Neoliberalism: Content Analysis of UK News Coverage,” *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (August 1, 2015): 1.

²⁵ Nikolas S. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (Free Association Books, 1989), xxii.

²⁶ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 122-123.

Under neoliberalism, as Brown writes, the state aims to produce a self-governing subject instilled with the values of free market rationality, a subject whose ultimate purpose is to advance the state's economic standing in the global arena. The autonomous, free-market subject that emerged out of 1980's economic restructuring, according to Brown, has been "significantly reshaped as financialized human capital: its project is to self-invest in ways that enhance its value or to attract investors through constant attention to its actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of its existence."²⁷ Thus, neoliberal common sense "disseminates *the model of the market* to all domains and activities [...] and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*."²⁸

In a political imaginary that understands economic success as wrought through individual self-enhancement, structural deficiencies are read as failures to choose and employ the correct technologies of self-investment. As neoliberalism isolated and, in Brown's words, "entrepreneurialized" the individual, society was no longer a focal point of reform—instead, to protect themselves and their dependents, citizens were encouraged to self-invest to maintain adaptability to any developments within the economy.²⁹ Jacob Hacker refers to this political development as the "great risk shift," characterizing the replacement of social welfare programs with technologies of government that "individualize risks and responsibilities (for example, college education, job production and training, health, retirement, etc.)."³⁰ This development, as Boltanski notes, bestows the "burden of market uncertainty" upon individuals³¹ and their

²⁷ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

³⁰ Jacob S. Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream, Second Edition*, 2 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³¹ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007), 218.

families.³² Thus, at the same time that the state withdrew vital support for a social safety net, it presented parents with the responsibility of social reproduction, asking them to cultivate in their children the traits and skills necessary for the economic stability of their kin and of the nation.

SECTION TWO

The Nuclear Family as an Alternative to the Welfare State

As a central feature of privatization, the administrations of 1980's and 1990's relocated the responsibilities of the welfare state onto the nuclear family.³³ A belief in the individual heteronormative family as the most economically efficient provider of social services, fundamental to both neoliberal and neoconservative ideology,³⁴ underlaid the state's transference of the burden for public goods to individual households. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the state significantly withdrew from the provision of support for reproductive labor, drastically decreasing funding for public education, low-income housing,³⁵ city infrastructure³⁶ and welfare.³⁷ Subsequently, the idealized nuclear family, sustained by a breadwinning father and a dependent caretaking mother, was legitimized as the most acceptable institutional provisioner of social support.³⁸

In a political imaginary that emphasized, in Reagan's words, "intact, self-reliant families,"³⁹ the domestic household, rather than the state, was to an increasing extent held responsible for child 'life outcomes.'⁴⁰ President Reagan asserted that "strong families are the

³² Cooper, *Family Values*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁶ Briggs, *All Politics*, 72; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 358.

³⁷ Cooper, *Family Values*, 239.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁰ Sarah L. Holloway and Helena Pimlott-Wilson, "'Any Advice Is Welcome Isn't It?': Neoliberal Parenting Education, Local Mothering Cultures, and Social Class," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 46, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 96.

foundation of society” and spent his incumbency attempting to render familial responsabilization and privatization into federal law.⁴¹ Throughout the 1980’s, the Reagan administration cut public services crucial for families in an attempt to breed domestic self-sufficiency, begetting drastic consequences for middle- and working-class economic stability.⁴² Reagan’s budget amendments reduced student aid for loans and replaced the Pell grant system with a credit-based system that transferred an ever-increasing portion of student loan risk to individual households.⁴³ Further revisions to Reagan’s budget diminished social security, forcing families to independently put aside money for retirement, and decreased federal support for low-income housing,⁴⁴ imagining private family saving as an alternative to housing assistance. These reforms, which were advanced by Clinton during his tenure, legitimized the costs of education and housing as primarily responsibilities of the private nuclear family⁴⁵ while exacerbating a wide gap between the poorest families and the wealthiest ones. As a result, 80 percent of earning growth between 1979 and 1986 was acquired by the wealthiest one-fifth of Americans, and economic inequality skyrocketed.⁴⁶

The possibility of class mobility dwindled as wealth became more heavily concentrated at the top of society.⁴⁷ Most Americans in the 1980’s struggled to maintain their financial standing as declining wages and benefits intensified the challenges of raising a family, requiring more work hours to afford the suburban homeownership that was essential, as Coontz writes, to “the postwar American dream.”⁴⁸ An average thirty-year-old man’s wages in the 1950’s and 1960’s

⁴¹ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 119; Cooper, *Family Values*, 69.

⁴² Briggs, *All Politics*, 47.

⁴³ Cooper, *Family Values*, 240 and 244.

⁴⁴ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 358.

⁴⁵ Cooper, *Family Values*, 240.

⁴⁶ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 361 and 351.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 43.

⁴⁸ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 351.

allowed him, with just 15 to 18 percent of his income, to afford “the principal and interest on a median-priced home.” By 1983, however, real wages had declined so much that the proportion of an average man’s income required for homeownership was larger than 40 percent.⁴⁹ In order to maintain a growth in living standards, albeit more slowly than in the 1950’s and 1960’s,⁵⁰ families had to adapt to circumstances that required them to work longer hours if they were to fulfill the suburban fantasy. Married middle-class women returned to work out of necessity, and by 1989, almost 80 percent of homebuyers resided in households with two salary-earners.⁵¹ As the state withdrew from the provision of public goods and Americans faced longer hours for less pay, parents grew cognizant of the rising requirements for maintenance of status in the hallowed halls of the middle class.⁵² Families feared for their children’s ability to transcend or even preserve their economic standing.⁵³

In response to these heightened stakes, middle class parents significantly increased the amount of time and resources they dedicated to child-rearing.⁵⁴ By the 1980’s, parents spent 12 more hours a week on active childcare—homework assistance, extracurriculars, and activities designed to foster cognitive and emotional development—than they did in the 1970’s.⁵⁵ Even while families spent more time on caregiving, they had additional obligations due to declining wages and unraveling social safety nets.⁵⁶ Simultaneously, writes Cain Miller, “there has been little increase in support for working parents, like paid parental leave, subsidized child care or

⁴⁹ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 352.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

⁵³ Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood*, 418; Claire Cain Miller, “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting,” *The New York Times*, December 25, 2018; Fass, *End of American Childhood*, 245; Pamela Druckerman, “The Bad News About Helicopter Parenting: It Works,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2019; Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*.

⁵⁴ Cain Miller, “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting.”

⁵⁵ Druckerman, “Helicopter Parenting.”

⁵⁶ Briggs, *All Politics*, 190.

flexible schedules, and there are fewer informal neighborhood networks of at-home parents because more mothers are working.”⁵⁷

Despite the increased challenges of child-rearing in a neoliberal political reality, a public discourse among experts and politicians towards the end of the century blamed parents and their poor child-rearing skills for moral and financial decline.⁵⁸ Politicians called for a recommitment to family values as a solution to financial distress, using a racialized discourse to blame single-parent families for national ethical and economic decay.⁵⁹ Child-rearing experts and political leaders called for “parent reform”⁶⁰ as they attempted to shift policy focus away from society onto individual actors.

While American families were certainly experiencing considerable structural changes (a rising divorce rate led to almost a third of American children being raised in single-parent homes by 1997, and the employment rate for married mothers doubled from a quarter in 1948 to nearly half in 1997),⁶¹ the discourse of moral panic that blamed parents for socioeconomic crises obscured the state’s fiscal abandonment of civilians and families. Such paternalistic rhetoric calling for the improvement of parents’ moral character imagined the source of poverty to be parents’ corrupt values, rather than, as Coontz writes, the “larger economic and political factors that have widened the gap between one- and two-parent families.”⁶² This discourse of familial breakdown assisted the state in shifting accountability from society to private households.

⁵⁷ Cain Miller, “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting.”

⁵⁸ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 340; Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 292.

⁵⁹ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 341.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁶¹ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 296.

⁶² Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 345.

SECTION THREE

Economic Anxiety and the Rise of Child-Rearing Advice Literature

As families were left to manage their own risk in the context of declining wages and widening inequality, middle-class parents faced the imperative of preparing their children for the economic insecurity of austerity politics in a society that had withdrawn substantial support for fostering educational and workplace readiness. By the 1980's, a popular discourse about childhood imagined children as "at risk,"⁶³ and a deep insecurity plagued parents about their children's unstable moral and economic future.⁶⁴ As middle-class parents were held increasingly responsible for their children's positive 'life outcomes' in education and employment,⁶⁵ they looked to experts in greater numbers for advice in preserving their children's economic security.

During the 20th century, a professionalization of motherhood in combination with systemic deinstitutionalization led women to largely shift their reliance on kinship networks and social ties for child-rearing guidance to scientific expertise.⁶⁶ In addition, the establishment of child development as a scientific discipline helped legitimize motherhood as a respectable pursuit that necessitated professional expertise and instruction, offering the rising amount of women who had pursued a college education a culturally suitable avenue to channel their intellect.⁶⁷ Contemporary child-rearing advice books, though ostensibly oriented towards a gender-neutral 'parent,' continued to direct their advice towards women, who are overwhelmingly held responsible for care-taking and successful life-outcomes of their children.⁶⁸

⁶³ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 336; Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood 2*; Hulbert, *Raising America*, 329.

⁶⁴ Cain Miller, "The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting."

⁶⁵ Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, "'Any Advice Is Welcome Isn't It?'" 96.

⁶⁶ Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006) as cited in Christina Hardyment, *Perfect Parents: Baby-Care Advice Past to Present* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 311.

⁶⁷ Patricia Cohen, "Visions and Revisions of Child-Raising Experts," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2003.

⁶⁸ Hardyment, *Perfect Parents*, 312.

In the wake of economic reform near the end of the twentieth century, which left families significantly vulnerable to financial failure, a record number of middle- and upper-middle-class women turned to medical and psychological ‘experts’ for guidance. During the 1980’s and 1990’s in particular, public interest in childhood and parenting boomed⁶⁹ as the state divested from social infrastructure and accordingly transferred responsibility to parents—realistically, to mothers—for ensuring children’s economic success.

By the end of the 20th century, the parenting-guide business was flourishing: between the mid-70’s and the mid-90’s, the market in child-rearing advice manuals expanded fivefold, accompanied by a plethora of magazines, blogs, and TV shows offering analogous instruction.⁷⁰ The exponential growth in parenting advice media during the final two decades of the twentieth century reflected a political shift emphasizing parental responsibility for ensuring preparation for the ‘real world,’ legitimizing the transfer of responsibility for economic stability from society to individual families.

The child-rearing advice published near the end of the 20th century departed from the relatively relaxed postwar guidance of the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s. While experts had previously assured mothers that a child’s healthy development depended more than anything on loving care rather than on strict child-rearing guidelines, advice that emerged in the 1980’s compelled parents to engineer and direct their children towards successful development from an increasingly young age.⁷¹ This paradigm shift emerged from the economic circumstances of the later 20th century, as the relatively small financial gap between the poor and the affluent in the 1970’s made way for a heightened inequality in the 1980’s.⁷² As pay disparity between white-

⁶⁹ Hardyment, *Perfect Parents*, 310.

⁷⁰ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 334.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 211 and 337.

⁷² Fabrizio Zilibotti and Matthias Doepke, *Love, Money, and Parenting* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 4.

and blue-collar work expanded, heightened stakes required parents to adopt a more controlling, calculating approach to ensure their children's future success.⁷³ Child psychologists, neuroscientists, and pediatricians near the end of the 20th century preached a new sense of urgency as they argued that children's personalities and capabilities were vulnerable and malleable, requiring concerted early cultivation.⁷⁴

This development in pediatric psychological discourse had a significant influence on popular child-rearing literature, as experts began to urge parents to steer their children toward certain modes of selfhood suitable for the contours of neoliberal life. During the last decade of the 20th century, popular developmental psychologists, child psychiatrists, neuroscientists, and cognitive scientists called on parents to mold their children's aptitudes and personalities,⁷⁵ encouraging them to engage in the intensive engineering of a self-governing, entrepreneurial subject.⁷⁶

Knowledge produced by the psychological disciplines, writes Foucault in his lectures on *Biopolitics*, must be interpreted with regards to its sociocultural and historical contexts.⁷⁷ In this sense, the psychological disciplines have been instrumental in configuring commonly established standards of normality⁷⁸ which vary within social, economic, and political contexts.⁷⁹ Most significantly, the psychological sciences have played a key role in the expansion of neoliberal governmentality, or the way in which governments seek to produce citizens suited to uphold the

⁷³ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 314; Zillibotti and Doepke, *Love, Money, and Parenting*; Cain Miller, "The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting"; Druckerman, "Helicopter Parenting."

⁷⁴ Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (University of California Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 352 and 327.

⁷⁶ Majia Holmer Nadesan, "Engineering The Entrepreneurial Infant: Brain Science, Infant Development Toys, And Governmentality" *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2002): 401–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380210128315>.

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Picador, 2010).

⁷⁸ Rose, *Governing the Soul*, 134.

⁷⁹ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*; Hardyment, *Perfect Parents*; Hulbert, *Raising America*; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*; Rose, *Governing the Soul*; Walkerdine, "Beyond Developmentalism?"

goals of the state.⁸⁰ As psychology has established frameworks and guidelines for human development over the second half of the twentieth century, it has become the main authority in determining childhood norms.⁸¹ As a result, according to Rose, “the soul of the young citizen has become the object of government through expertise.”⁸² As key actors within the psychological disciplines, child development experts played a critical role in defining, promoting, and providing a framework for instilling a post-liberal rationality, encouraging the reproduction of a neoliberal subject.

Child-rearing guides of the late twentieth century, according to Mintz, “reflected a sharp rise in parents’ aspirations for their children,”⁸³ especially concerning intellectual capabilities.⁸⁴ In contrast to the parents of baby boomers, who celebrated conformity and were happy with their children being of average intellectual capacity, middle and upper-middle class parents of the 1980’s and 1990’s placed a heightened importance on cultivating cognitive and intellectual excellence in their children.⁸⁵

This new preoccupation with young children’s intellectual competitiveness, while in part influenced by the Sputnik scare,⁸⁶ a globalization-induced anxiety about the United States’ international economic standing,⁸⁷ and increasingly competitive college admission,⁸⁸ was primarily induced from the emergence of the entrepreneurial “gold-collar knowledge worker.”⁸⁹ This idealized neoliberal subject appeared at the junction of globalization, the information

⁸⁰ Rose, *Governing the Soul*, 222.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, xxx and 134.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸³ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 343.

⁸⁴ D’Vera Cohn, “Parents’ Top Goal: Thinkers,” *The Arizona Republic*, November 1999.

⁸⁵ Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood*, 72.

⁸⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert’s Advice to Women* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press, 1978), 411.

⁸⁷ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 341.

⁸⁸ Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*.

⁸⁹ Kelley, “Managing the New Workforce,” as cited in Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant,” 142.

revolution, and entrepreneurial capitalism,⁹⁰ and was hired, writes Kelley, for his or her “problem-solving abilities, creativity, talent, and intelligence” which were necessary for accomplishing “nonrepetitive and complex” work tasks.⁹¹ The “knowledge worker” was also enterprising, adaptable, resilient, and self-regulating—traits deemed necessary for survival in a competitive job market that valorized flexibility, creative problem-solving and leadership.

Aware of the scarcity of “gold-collar knowledge worker” positions and of the expanding disparity between the technical elite and vast majority of the population,⁹² middle and upper-middle-class parents feared for their children’s ability to exceed or even preserve their economic standing.⁹³ Economic restructuring inspired a great anxiety in middle-class parents, as they grew to understand that the coveted, “technically elite gold-collar knowledge worker” position necessitated intensive molding from birth if their children were to maintain their class status.⁹⁴ The evolution of this idealized neoliberal subject, and subsequent frenzy over its cultivation, is manifest in child-rearing advice through the end of the twentieth century. Experts encouraged middle- and upper-middle-class parents to cultivate in their children autonomy, creativity, analytical thinking, and a resilient disposition for the successful acquisition of “knowledge worker” positions.

In an effort to mold their young into qualified candidates for the competitive job market, middle- and upper-middle class domains dedicated to bringing up children have been reoriented toward a framework of investment in human capital rather than in developing rational or

⁹⁰ Nina Munk, “New Organization Man,” *Fortune*, March 16, 1998; Steven M. Shaker and Mark P. Gembicki, “Competitive Intelligence: A Futurist Perspective,” *Competitive Intelligence Magazine*, March 1999 as cited in Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant” 412.

⁹¹ Kelley, “Managing the New Workforce,” as cited in Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant” 412.

⁹² S. Aronowitz and W. Difazio, *The Jobless Future* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) as cited in Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant,” 418.

⁹³ Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant,” 418.

⁹⁴ Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood*, 91.

thoughtful citizens. Since the neoliberal transformation in the late twentieth century, child-rearing and educational goals have been redirected so that the miniature knowledge worker is the motive of education and preschool education. Accordingly, writes J. Ailwood, “the preparatory child is predominantly produced as a potential adult learner or earner,” as opposed to the previous presiding political perception of the child as a developing learner who was a prospective “rational adult.”⁹⁵ Brown echoes this sentiment, illustrating how under neoliberalism, the goals of education are oriented towards “help[ing] learners acquire skills, abilities, and dispositions that make them adaptive workers equipped psychologically to meet the ever-changing demands of neoliberal flexible capitalism.”⁹⁶ Subsequently, writes Kathi Weeks, “raising children with attributes that will secure them forms of employment that can match if not surpass the class standing of their parents [becomes] the gold standard of parenting.”⁹⁷ As the state relinquished responsibility for, as Brown writes, the cost of “reproducing human capital,”⁹⁸ and the family was held accountable for determining and pursuing “the correct strategies of self-investment and entrepreneurship for thriving and surviving,”⁹⁹ parenting pedagogy and advice evolved to encourage the sculpting of a future knowledge worker and entrepreneurial subject.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ J. Ailwood, “Genealogies of Governmentality: Producing and Managing Young Children and Their Education,” *The Australian Educational Research* 31, no. 3 (2004): 30 as cited in Kaščák and Pupala, “Governmentality - Neoliberalism - Education: The Risk Perspective,” 155.

⁹⁶ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 114.

⁹⁷ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

⁹⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 42.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁰⁰ Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant;” Kaščák and Pupala, “The Risk Perspective,” 155.

SECTION FOUR

Children as Human Capital: Raising the “Gold-Collar Knowledge Worker”

Parenting advice media that emerged near the end of the twentieth century promoted the doctrine that, as Brown writes, the “constant and ubiquitous” role of the neoliberal subject was to “entrepreneurialize its endeavors, appreciate its value, and increase its rating or ranking.”¹⁰¹ In this respect, Foucault elucidates the ideological recalibration of the child under neoliberalism, describing how “the mothers’ quality of care, affection, time, and pedagogical assistance for her child are all reduced to [...] an investment in human capital.”¹⁰² Thus, following Brown’s argument, the developing child is reconfigured as *homo oeconomicus*, tasked with self-investment to enhance his “value to attract investors [...] across every sphere of its existence.”¹⁰³ As a result, “knowledge, thought, and training” (such as the flexible thinking, communication skills, creativity and innovation required by ‘knowledge worker’ positions) “are valued and desired almost exclusively for their contribution to capital enhancement,” rather than sought for developing the subjects of liberal democracy.¹⁰⁴

This optimization doctrine is reflected in parenting advice media over the last two decades of the twentieth century. Parenting advice of this era seized on what Barbara Ehrenreich described as the middle class’s “fear of falling,” taking advantage of parents’ anxiety about their children’s ability to achieve economic security by encouraging them to employ, in Holmer Nadesan’s words, “technologies of childhood optimization” in pursuit of ‘knowledge worker positions.’¹⁰⁵ Child-rearing experts’ emphasis on self-investment in the interest of gaining

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 36.

¹⁰² Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 234-244.

¹⁰³ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰⁵ Holmer Nadesan, *Governing Childhood*, 85.

‘knowledge worker’ attributes helped legitimize a neoliberal development where the state no longer played a key role in fostering democratic society, but instead encouraged individuals to optimize themselves in service of the state’s economic advancement. By means of the influence of child development experts, parents were instructed to foster the traits of the new entrepreneurial subject, which were written into quantifiable goals of “child development.”

Drs. Stanley Greenspan and T. Berry Brazelton, two of the most influential child-rearing authorities during the last two decades of the twentieth century, were instrumental in promoting this new child-rearing agenda. A globally renowned child development expert, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton held a pediatric post at Harvard Medical and was colloquially referred to as “America’s pediatrician” throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s.¹⁰⁶ Brazelton, whose gospel spanned far and wide by way of his TV show, *What Every Baby Knows*, was widely respected in child development circles.¹⁰⁷ His nationally bestselling book *Touchpoints, the Essential References: Your Child’s Emotional and Behavioral Development* (1992) outlined the developmental checkpoints necessary for nurturing logical thinking, problem-solving skills, and autonomy.¹⁰⁸ Brazelton’s mentee, Dr. Stanley Greenspan, was an internationally distinguished child psychiatrist and a leading expert in early child emotional development near the end of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ As children’s “healthy development” became problematized in the late twentieth century,¹¹⁰ Greenspan pioneered influential research on early intervention, diagnosis, and treatment of developmental problems between the ages of zero and three. His work provided

¹⁰⁶ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 299.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁰⁸ T. Berry Brazelton, *Touchpoints: Your Child’s Emotional and Behavioral Development, Birth to 3—The Essential Reference for the Early Years*, 1st edition (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 1992).

¹⁰⁹ Laura Shumaker, “Tribute to Child Development Hero Dr. Stanley Greenspan,” SF Gate, April 29, 2010, <https://blog.sfgate.com/lshumaker/2010/04/29/tribute-to-child-development-hero-dr-stanley-greenspan/>, Thomas H. Maugh II, “Dr. Stanley I. Greenspan Dies at 68; Documented Developmental Milestones of Early Childhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 10AD.

¹¹⁰ Rose, *Governing the Soul*, 214.

anxious parents with a framework for rectifying developmental setbacks while steering children toward cognitive excellence. In *Building Healthy Minds: The Six Experiences that Create Intelligence and Emotional Growth in Babies and Young Children* (2000), Greenspan presents the essential developmental “experiences” that “enable children to reach their full potential”¹¹¹ and provide them with “a competitive edge.”¹¹²

Popular child-development experts throughout the 1980’s, 1990’s, and 2000’s recognized parental desire for and provided methods for, in Greenspan’s words, “maximiz[ing] children’s potential” by developing their cognitive skills in tandem with the character traits of “persistence, flexibility, and creativity,”¹¹³ skills paramount for their future success at “work in a complex society.”¹¹⁴ In effect, child-rearing advice literature of the late twentieth century encouraged and provided guidelines for parents to steer their children toward career success as ‘gold-collar knowledge workers.’ Accordingly, these guides reduce parenting to, in Holmer Nadesan’s words, “a set of therapeutic interventions aimed at building [...] perfection,”¹¹⁵ undermining the democratic imaginary as citizens were held increasingly responsible for managing market risks through self-investment.

Within this advice literature, parents were urged to accept responsibility for cultivating their children’s human capital by stimulating their cognitive development. Significantly, these gains in cognitive ability were valued because they were imagined to augment the child’s future ranking in a sea of competitive knowledge worker applicants. Throughout Greenspan’s *Healthy Minds*, parents are treated to expertise on “how minds grow,”¹¹⁶ suggestions for how to expedite

¹¹¹ Stanley Greenspan and Nancy Breslau Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds: The Six Experiences That Create Intelligence and Emotional Growth in Babies and Young Children* (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2000), inside cover.

¹¹² Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹¹⁵ Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant,” 424.

¹¹⁶ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, “How Minds Grow” 1-14.

this essential process, and recommendations for intervention should their child exhibit warning signs that he is falling short of his developmental markers. Moreover, each chapter within *Building Healthy Minds* contains a section, entitled “Raising the Bar,” which offers methods to even further maximize an already adept child’s capabilities. *Building Healthy Minds* offers a vivid snapshot of parental anxiety as middle- and upper-middle-class families sought out expert advice¹¹⁷ to ensure their progeny’s economic security in a job market that valorized intellectual dexterity.

The new child-rearing developmental framework reoriented all activities of care to serve the underlying goal of self-investment. Infant playtime became a site for capital augmentation by way of Greenspan’s “floor-time” system, in which parents are urged to engage with their children in baby-driven play. In Greenspan’s ideology, play serves as a site for the cultivation of ‘knowledge worker’ traits:

As he plays with you, he is taking the first steps on the road to being a creative and logical thinker. His early nonverbal play is an important part of his later scientific and analytic ability and also of his social and emotional skills.¹¹⁸

“Floor-time” provides an opportunity for the development of “nuanced and flexible thinking” which will serve children as adults.¹¹⁹ Greenspan’s focus on developing the complex thinking skills necessary for a knowledge worker is evident throughout: toddlers and infants don’t merely play with blocks and puzzle pieces. Instead, they create “action plans,” “recognize patterns,” and determinedly “keep looking for the solution to a problem.”¹²⁰ A toddler’s argumentative stage is not just a passing phase but a demonstration of her ability to “connect one idea to another in a meaningful and logical manner,” an “exciting new milestone [that] will support her ability to

¹¹⁷ Hardymont, *Perfect Parents*, 310; Apple, *Perfect Motherhood*, 311; Hulbert, *Raising America*, 334.

¹¹⁸ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 96.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

reason, to study, and eventually to work in a complex society.”¹²¹ Greenspan’s child-rearing advice helped to expand a neoliberal rationality, holding parents responsible for optimizing their children to attain financial safety while reformulating personhood from the very beginning as ultimately oriented toward capital gain.

In addition to encouraging the cultivation of flexible thinking and cognitive ability, parenting literature near the end of the 20th century cast creativity and innovation, key capacities of the knowledge worker, as sites of intervention for human capital development. Creativity is literally written into the “stages” of development in Greenspan’s *Healthy Minds*, as the doctor presents his penultimate “core experience” which “involves [a toddler’s] use of ideas [as] he explores creativity.”¹²² A toddler’s playtime served not merely as a creative outlet, but as preparation for their future career: he encourages parents to celebrate and foster their baby’s “creative” and “innovative” “complex ways of expressing herself” (such as their baby placing a block on her head as a hat)¹²³ as it will serve her as an entrepreneurial subject later in life. If parents play their cards right, he writes, “during the preschool years you will be building block-towns together and marveling at your junior architect’s creativity.”¹²⁴ In Greenspan’s view, creativity is a healthy marker of development first and foremost for its utility in the child’s future career.

Jim Fay and Dr. Foster Cline, authors of *Parenting with Love & Logic* (1990), also make it a point to encourage parents to foster creativity for its value down the line. Fay, a former school principal, and Cline, an adult and child psychiatrist, offered a child-rearing approach designed to “teach [...] children responsibility” and raise “self-confident, motivated children

¹²¹ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 254.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

who are ready for the real world.”¹²⁵ Popular in the 1990’s and early 2000’s, printed 26 times and translated into 8 languages, *Parenting with Love & Logic* implored parents to “encourage creativity in childhood” because “childhood is the time when the entrepreneurs and inventors of the future really start to bloom.”¹²⁶ In this discourse, childhood is imagined as a site of employment preparation, and the ultimate goal of child-rearing is understood as the production of the literal entrepreneurial subject. Creativity is framed not simply as a healthy developmental marker of childhood, nor a lifelong value in its own right, but as an aptitude that must be cultivated for human capital enhancement. These parenting guides offer a vivid manifestation of the death of Brown’s *homo politicus*, the subject of liberal democracy, whose creativity might have been used for pursuits of art, justice, or remedies to societal ills. Instead, as *homo oeconomicus*, children are pressured to pursue individual self-improvement for capital attainment. These popular child-rearing manuals reveal a shift in parenting advice concomitant with neoliberal economic restructuring that reoriented all arenas of care as opportunities for enhancing the entrepreneurial subject’s credit ranking.

In this capital-oriented child-rearing framework, even the most intimate corners of children’s minds became open for marketization: emotional connections became of great importance not merely in their own right but because they served as a foundation for intellectual ability. In effect, children’s most personal relationships became a training ground for human capital enhancement. Greenspan’s *Healthy Minds* strikingly emphasizes how early emotional connections unlock key developments in infant cognition.¹²⁷ These intimate bonds between parent and child are treasured not in themselves but for their enhancement of the child’s human

¹²⁵ Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility* (NavPress Publishing, 1990), 4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹²⁷ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 7.

capital. Tellingly, Greenspan writes that “we can best help our children develop tools for mastery, or a competitive edge, by continually offering them nurturing emotional interactions.”¹²⁸ In *Healthy Minds*, he underlines the importance of children’s ability to meaningfully relate to their caretakers, but offers a caveat to remind parents of the ultimate goal:

Why are we placing so much emphasis on your baby’s ability to form a relationship, rather than on her cognitive or motor achievements? [...] Emotional interactions are [...] the source of her intelligence, morality, and self-esteem. The loving, intimate connection forged between you and your baby sets the stage for your child’s higher thinking skills.¹²⁹

Greenspan frames emotional attachments as the basis for intellectual ability—thus, human capital enhancement—which is what makes them worthwhile investments. “Over time,” he writes, “your loving, nurturing relationship will foster your child’s verbal abilities and problem-solving and reasoning skills, and the development of parts of the brain that support language [...] It is fascinating to realize that your child’s eventual ability to become an engineer or physicist may stem from his early emotional interactions with you.”¹³⁰ In Greenspan’s framework, parents are encouraged to more intimately engage with their children not for mutual emotional fulfillment but to promote their child’s future career success. Significantly, parent-child emotional connections lead not to the intelligence that might create the next great American novelist or Supreme Court Justice: instead, nurturant parent-child relationships are imagined to foster the intellect that will offer children success in ‘knowledge worker’ positions.

The idea that emotional involvement was valuable predominantly for its enhancement of the child’s employability was not only manifest in Greenspan’s *Healthy Minds*. “America’s pediatrician” Dr. Brazelton also encouraged parents to be engaged in their children’s lives by

¹²⁸ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 12.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

invoking the ability of parental engagement to augment value through the cultivation of traits necessary for ‘knowledge worker’ status. Brazelton encouraged fathers to become involved with the upbringing of their children by citing evidence that it fostered growth in brain capabilities.

He writes,

All of the studies that measure the increasing involvement of fathers in their babies’ caretaking point to the gains in the babies’ development. Not only do school-aged children demonstrate significant gains in their IQ in families where the father was involved with them as infants, but they show more sense of humor, longer attention spans, and more eagerness for learning.¹³¹

Brazelton argues that a father’s engagement in his child’s life is important for the ultimate purpose of developing in his offspring the cognitive abilities necessary for employment in knowledge worker positions. Significantly, not only does Brazelton’s rhetoric demonstrate the popular belief that mothers should serve as primary caretakers, but it suggests that a parent’s engagement in their child’s life is important primarily for developing the cognitive abilities necessary for stable employment. Emphasizing the paramount importance of familial bonds for their supposed contribution to a child’s future success promotes the notion that parental behavior is the most consequential factor in determining a young person’s prospects despite the reality that a child’s economic standing at birth is much more significant to his lifetime earning potential.¹³² A child-rearing discourse that locates ‘correct’ child-rearing practices as technologies of future achievement holds parents responsible for failing to implement, in Holmer Nadesan’s words, “therapeutic interventions”¹³³ that would allow their children financial stability. This rhetoric emphasizes personal responsibility, fostering the popular conception that individuals are the

¹³¹ Brazelton, *Touchpoints*, 423.

¹³² Sendhil Mullainathan and Saugato Datta, “Stress Impacts Good Parenting: The Behavioral Economists’ Perspective,” *W. K. Kellogg Annual Report*, 2011, 1 as cited in Catherine Rampell, “Good Parent, Bad Parent,” *New York Times*, February 10, 2012, <https://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/good-parent-bad-parent/>.

¹³³ Holmer Nadesan, “Entrepreneurial Infant,” 424.

engineers of their own financial demise, and ignores the rising difficulty of maintaining middle-class status given the withdrawal of state support for social infrastructure. As these guides encouraged parents to steer their children towards knowledge worker status, they legitimized a societal paradigm shift from political reform to individual child-improvement, supporting the expansion of a neoliberal rationality that transferred economic risk from state to citizen.

SECTION FIVE

Instilling Autonomy: Children as Self-Governing Subjects

As parenting guides published in the midst of a political move towards privatization encouraged middle- and upper-middle-class parents to inculcate the necessary traits for success in their children, they were concomitantly engaged in the shaping of subjectivities necessary for self-governance in a neoliberal state. Neoliberal governance emphasizes personal responsibility, steering citizens from a perspective focused on the outside world towards a view in which the most effective governance of society is accomplished by concerning citizens with their own subjectivity, agency, and conduct. Accordingly, citizens are taught they must maintain a hyperawareness of their own behavior.¹³⁴ As neoliberal governance encouraged a mode of selfhood structured by self-reliance, individual identity, and autonomy,¹³⁵ child-rearing experts wrote agency, reflexivity, self-regulation, and resilience—essential capacities for self-governance¹³⁶—into their markers for healthy development. Child-rearing guides like Robert Bucknam and Gary Ezzo’s bestseller *On Becoming Babywise* (1993) urged parents to “govern

¹³⁴ Joseph, “Resilience,” 40.

¹³⁵ Rose, *Governing the Soul*, xxiv.

¹³⁶ Brown 131; Richard Edwards, “Actively Seeking Subjects,” in *Foucault and Lifelong Learning*, by Andreas Fejes and Katherine Nicoll (London: Routledge, 2008), 26, as cited in Rosamund Stooke, “Producing Neoliberal Parenting Subjectivities: ANT-Inspired Readings from an Informal Early Learning Program,” *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 39, no. 1 (2014): 55, <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs.v39i1.15245>; Jonathan Joseph, “Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach,” *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1, no. 1 (2013).

[their child's] life until they have developed within her heart the self-control and moral awareness that will allow her to govern herself."¹³⁷ Effectively, these experts provided middle- and upper-middle-class parents with a framework for reproducing the self-governing neoliberal subject, supporting the extension of a rationality that emphasized individual sovereignty in place of the state's support for social infrastructure. Thus, as key actors within the psychological discipline, these experts served to expand the apparatuses of the neoliberal state through the shaping of subjectivities.

In one manifestation of the effort to cultivate sovereign and self-reliant subjects, Greenspan highlighted the importance of uncovering and encouraging children's agency while promoting reflexive understanding of their own subjectivity. He identified the four- to eight-month mark as an important developmental indicator with regard to sense of self: by this point, the infant should "know herself in part as distinct from others, as a person of volition, as someone who can initiate an action and have an impact on the world." This emphasis on developing a child's sense of individuality and subjectivity from an early age aligns with a post-liberal governmentality which directs citizens to govern themselves through an imposed extreme self-awareness. Greenspan's preoccupation with agency is ubiquitous throughout his book, encouraging parents to "let [their] child be the boss" during "floor-time" play, so that she will "become assertive and guide her behavior with her own desires or emotions."¹³⁸ In this paradigm the developing child becomes, in Holmer Nadesan's words, a self-governing "entrepreneurial infant"¹³⁹ driven by personal responsibility, autonomy, and agency. "Even before learning how to walk," Greenspan writes, "[she] is busy figuring out how to get something she wants, or how

¹³⁷ Gary Ezzo and Robert Bucknam, *On Becoming Babywise* (Parent-Wise Solutions, 1993), 23.

¹³⁸ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 155.

¹³⁹ Holmer Nadesan, "Entrepreneurial Infant."

to maneuver herself so she can see something interesting.”¹⁴⁰ This emphasis on developing a child’s sense of individuality and agency from an early age imagined that healthy children operated under a framework motivated by independence, personal ambition, and enterprise. In effect, child development specialists’ new emphasis on autonomy and personal responsibility supported the expansion of a neoliberal rationality that encouraged self-reliance and personal sovereignty. While offering parents the essential guiding principles for reproducing the self-governing neoliberal subject, their rhetoric supported a paradigm shift from a perspective framed by a democratic social contract towards one focused on individual responsibility.

The new child-rearing expertise’s encouragement of self-governance promoted not only agency, but self-control as an imperative for healthy development. Neoliberal governance, writes Rosamunde Stooke, depends on the public adoption of an internalized self-regulation¹⁴¹ which has significantly been embedded in citizens’ rationalities by way of the psychological disciplines. Rose indicates that over the course of the twentieth century, psychological practices and procedures have shaped the contours of the self by educating citizens in “the minute arts of self-scrutiny, self-evaluation, and self-regulation.”¹⁴² In effect, citizens’ own interiorities become the new governing apparatus in a neoliberal state. The psychological disciplines facilitate the state’s exchange of direct control for an intimate self-monitoring, or as Boltanski writes, the transference of “external organizational mechanisms to people’s internal dispositions.”¹⁴³ These methods of regulation, Rose argues, mold subjects prepared to govern themselves. This self-

¹⁴⁰ Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 133.

¹⁴¹ Edwards, “Actively Seeking Subjects,” 26 as cited in Stooke, “Neoliberal Parenting Subjectivities,” 55.

¹⁴² Rose, *Governing the Soul*, 222.

¹⁴³ Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit of Capitalism*, 80.

conscious mentality implicitly encourages citizens to assume personal responsibility for their own welfare in a neoliberal state.¹⁴⁴

As neoliberal forms of governance became more deeply embedded in the public imagination, cognitive scientists in the 1980's began to test children's self-regulatory capabilities—as Hulbert writes, their “social and emotional control and powers of attention”—in assessments of their intellectual capacities.¹⁴⁵ Subsequently, an emphasis on self-control as an essential marker of developmental success flourished throughout parenting advice media of the 1990's as an internal self-regulatory capacity became imperative for self-governance. In the last decade of the twentieth century, as public panic abounded regarding moral devolution and the breakdown of the social sphere,¹⁴⁶ an emerging preoccupation with the cultivation of “character” of which self-control was held to be paramount¹⁴⁷ deigned a child's moral disposition just as developmentally significant as his intellectual ability.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, as neoliberal forms of governance encouraged citizens to adopt self-regulatory capacities for self-governance, child-rearing advice during the closing decades of the twentieth century highlighted self-control as an essential developmental capacity in children.

An emphasis on self-regulation is paramount throughout Greenspan's child-rearing advice. In fact, the first of Greenspan's essential milestones in his developmental theory of infant cognition is ‘self-regulation and interest in the world.’¹⁴⁹ Greenspan offered guidance for enhancing a child's ability to “regulate her impulses, stabilize her moods, integrate her feelings

¹⁴⁴ Rose, *Governing the Soul*, viii.

¹⁴⁵ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 322.

¹⁴⁶ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 339.

¹⁴⁷ James Q. Wilson, *On Character* (American Enterprise Institute Press, 1995) as cited in Hulbert, *Raising America*, 358.

¹⁴⁸ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 327.

and actions, focus her concentration, and plan.”¹⁵⁰ In his expert opinion, parents were responsible for ensuring that their child masters and hones “capacities of self-regulation,” urging parents to “reluctantly, but definitely, steer her toward self-control.”¹⁵¹ By contending that children need to hone their capacities of self-regulation and attention to be developmentally healthy, Greenspan’s rhetoric supported a rationality that reformulated active democratic citizens as private autonomous individuals, and reimagined childhood primarily as preparation for self-governance.

Brazelton, too, encouraged parents to instill self-control in their children, assessing an infant’s capacity for emotional self-regulation by way of her ability to “comfort herself by a thumb or a lovey.”¹⁵² During early pediatric visits, Brazelton evaluated infants’ capacities for self-soothing when they became irritated by the doctor’s checkup. When the infant started to flail and cry, Brazelton stopped their parents from consoling the child so that he could “see what it takes to make him contain himself.”¹⁵³ Brazelton’s appraisal of “how much [the child] will contribute to consoling himself”¹⁵⁴ placed a developmental valuation on a child’s capacity for self-regulation. As child development experts incorporated “self-control” into the checklist for healthy child development, they fostered the extension of governmental technologies that steered parents towards cultivating a self-regulating, autonomous subject. This new child development paradigm, which emphasized self-awareness and personal accountability, simultaneously obscured and fostered a neoliberal rationality that transferred responsibility for vital public resources from the state to the self-governing citizen.

¹⁵⁰ Stanley Greenspan and Nancy Thorndike Greenspan, *First Feelings: Milestones in the Emotional Development of Your Baby and Child* (Reprint edition. New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Books, 1989), 181.

¹⁵¹ Greenspan and Lewis, *Healthy Minds*, 161.

¹⁵² Brazelton, *Touchpoints*, 171.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

SECTION SIX

Cultivating “Resilience”: Self-Reliance and the Private Citizen

As a final method of cultivating self-governance, child-development advice near the end of the twentieth century valorized “resilience” as a paramount character trait parents needed to cultivate in their children. Near the end of the twentieth century, according to Mintz, “parents turned away from an older ideal of a ‘protected’ childhood and began to emphasize a ‘prepared’ childhood.”¹⁵⁵ Adopted by child-rearing experts, this shift in parenting approach emphasized the need to cultivate resilient children for an unpredictable world.

The concept of “resilience” is a form of neoliberal governmentality that, as Joseph remarks, “encourages heightened self-awareness [...] through constructing a picture of a world that is beyond our control.” Such a notion implies that citizens cannot enact significant political change—instead, they should develop “individual adaptability,” “heightened self-awareness, reflexivity, and responsibility” to survive in an unpredictable and risk-prone society. The resilience argument, Joseph contends, aligns with a neoliberal rationality that bestows the individual with the burden of self-governance through proper comportment. “Rather than relying on the state,” Joseph writes, the concept of “resilience” encourages citizens to assume “responsibility for their own social and economic well-being.”¹⁵⁶

As individuals were increasingly required to manage their own susceptibility to risk, the concept of “resilience” gained popularity through self-help and child-rearing books. Parenting advice guides helped to embed neoliberal forms of governmentality in the fabric of daily life, encouraging the cultivation of “resilience” as a technology of future achievement. If parents would only allow their children to fail, experts condescendingly counsel, their progeny would

¹⁵⁵ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 344.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph, “Resilience,” 38 and 42.

finally build up the independence and perseverance necessary for life in an unavoidably challenging and volatile world.¹⁵⁷ Brazelton held “resilience” to such high esteem that he pronounced the parent’s “hardest job” to be refraining from hovering over and coddling their children.¹⁵⁸ He writes, “At each stage of autonomy, when babies are still vulnerable, it is easy to overpower their search for their own way of doing things by showering them with too much attention and too much direction. [...] Let your child go. Let her get frustrated. Let her work things out for herself. In the long run, if you can do this, it will be her achievement, not yours”¹⁵⁹ [...] “by giving him a sense of his own capacity for achievement, parents will have fitted him for the future.”¹⁶⁰ Brazelton’s discourse, as one of many child-rearing paradigms that propagated “resilience” as key to children’s success, treated personal character traits as instruments of transcendence for the financial hardships caused by stagnating wages, the rising cost of living,¹⁶¹ and state withdrawal of social support. Such rhetoric legitimized a larger shift in focus from policy reform to adaptability for individual citizens. In effect, this discourse contributed to the dismantling of public ideas about the power of people to effect societal change while, in Brown’s words, making “individual agency and self-reliance (regardless of means, social position, or contingencies) the site of survival and virtue.”¹⁶²

Today, these sentiments are echoed and proliferated through the dozens of books on the market blaming middle and upper-middle-class “helicopter parents” for raising children “unprepared” for the “real world” (see Fay & Cline 1990, Tough 2012, Duckworth, Stixrud & Johnson 2018, Lythcott-Haims 2015, Lahey 2014). Despite research from economists and

¹⁵⁷ Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Scribner, 2016).

¹⁵⁸ Brazelton, *Touchpoints*, 12.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁶¹ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 387.

¹⁶² Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 131.

sociologists demonstrating that a child’s lifetime earning potential is best predicted by his economic standing at birth,¹⁶³ child-rearing ‘experts’ continue to locate the root of disparate economic outcomes in the character traits of individuals which, according to them, stem from parenting behaviors. Such authors lament that “it is horribly disappointing to watch kids learn to blame others for their lack of success instead of becoming people who reach goals through effort and determination.”¹⁶⁴ Highlighting the consequences of failing to adopt the traits of the autonomous, self-governing subject, these specialists urge parents to adjust their child-rearing approach. The trouble that children face these days, these books proclaim, stems not from stagnating wages, a rising cost of living, and state withdrawal of crucial social infrastructure, but from their parents’ failure to allow their offspring to face frustration and develop the “grit” supposedly necessary for adult life.¹⁶⁵

In response to increasingly intense economic inequality over the last four decades, aspiring, middle- and upper-middle class parents have indeed adopted a more intensive child-rearing style.¹⁶⁶ Finding fault with overbearing parents anxiously attempting to ensure their children’s place in a competitive economy, however, fails to engage with the larger structural issues that influenced this shift in parenting pedagogy in the first place. By underscoring individual drive and self-sufficiency as the most powerful mechanisms of success, this parenting rhetoric excludes discussions of possibilities for sociopolitical reform. Rather than framing children as potential effectual political agents, a child-rearing philosophy that emphasizes

¹⁶³ Mullainathan and Datta, “Stress Impacts Good Parenting.”

¹⁶⁴ Cline and Fay, *Parenting with Love and Logic*, 24.

¹⁶⁵ See Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (Mariner Books, 2012); William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives* (Penguin Books, 2018); Julie Lythcott-Haims, *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* (Henry Holt and Co., 2015); Jessica Lahey, *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed* (Harper, 2016).

¹⁶⁶ Zilibotti and Doepke, *Love, Money, and Parenting*.

“resilience” as a mechanism of future achievement imagines the human subject as in constant need of adaptation to an uncontrollable world. This rhetoric promotes an emphasis on personal responsibility that legitimizes and obscures the state’s abandonment of citizens in the face of an increasingly insecure global economy and rising requirements for a comfortable place in the middle class. Thus, child development experts still play a critical role in extending apparatuses of neoliberal governance.

CONCLUSION

Parenting literature today, encouraging individual child improvement, continues to accept and conceal the offloading of state responsibilities onto individual family units that has intensified since the initial neoliberal reconstruction of the late 1970’s. In the ongoing context of privatization, as the state withdraws from the provision of crucial assistance for families, individuals are required to assume the cost of supplying once public goods to compensate for the state’s neglect.¹⁶⁷ In recent decades, according to Coontz, more and more parents have become subject to stagnant or declining real wages, “a challenge made more difficult by erosion of their savings and home values.”¹⁶⁸ Middle-class families have also had to cope with growing employment instability, curtailed job benefits, rising house costs and a level of taxation that has compounded twofold since 1960.¹⁶⁹

In the face of widening inequality, parental preoccupation with ensuring their children’s economic prosperity appears even more heightened than when economic restructuring first began.¹⁷⁰ Despite research implying parental affluence (or lack thereof) is the defining factor of a

¹⁶⁷ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 105-6.

¹⁶⁸ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 387.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁷⁰ Fass, *End of American Childhood*, 215.

child's future class status,¹⁷¹ middle and upper-middle-class parents continue to turn to childrearing advice literature which contends that childhood self-enhancement, through the cultivation of particular aptitudes and character traits, can serve as an apparatus of class mobility and future success. Such discourse embedded within modern parenting guides continues to imagine economic failure to be a result of a failure to self-invest. This introspective view, which finds fault with parents for failing to implement technologies that might have allowed their children to achieve financial stability, conceals state dismantling of social infrastructure while legitimizing a shift in accountability towards private households for the maintenance of economic security. In this context, all children suffer, particularly those lower down on the socioeconomic ladder.

A child-rearing paradigm that emphasizes individual child-optimization implicitly dismisses alternatives that might allow all children, rather than only those with the resources to gain a favorable advantage, to flourish. Such a framework, based on providing individual children with 'a competitive edge,'¹⁷² necessitates the existence of prospective losers who children must beat out for a spot in a ruthless economy. A child-rearing discourse which urges that children must develop the necessary capacities for self-governance further supports the framing of people as primarily private actors, fostering an individual-oriented view of the world. In effect, this discourse erodes the democratic imaginary, reformulating people as primarily private individuals. In this framework, there is no room left for sociopolitical reforms that might enhance the future prospects of all children.

¹⁷¹ Mullainathan and Datta, "Stress Impacts Good Parenting," 1 as cited in Rampell, "Good Parent, Bad Parent."

¹⁷² Greenspan and Lewis, *Building Healthy Minds*, 12.

In so far as we understand child-rearing “only in terms of responsibility to our ‘own’ kids,” as Coontz argues, “we put both them and ourselves at risk.”¹⁷³ Rather than guidance in individual technologies of child-enhancement, families need restored state support in programs for households with dependents, such as public investment in housing, childcare, healthcare, and public education, if future generations are to stand a chance at economic mobility, prosperity, and justice.

¹⁷³ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 306.

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