Book Review


The dynamics of parenting have undergone a transformation few could have anticipated forty or fifty years ago. Major shifts have occurred with the increase in mothers entering the workforce, surges in the utilization of day care centers and after-school care, and an overwhelming number of absentee fathers, just to name a few. Jack C. Westman has assembled an array of individuals with diverse backgrounds who are passionate about the plight of parents and their children to analyze the role of parenthood, and offer solutions to some of the dilemmas of parenting.

Parenthood in America Undervalued, Underpaid, and Under Siege renders persuasive commentary devoted to understanding parenthood in three dynamic settings: the home, community, and society. Similar themes are expressed by most of the authors, such as requesting more family-friendly policies from governmental institutions and increased societal compassion and understanding for individuals with children. While these are important issues that need to be addressed, other authors argue for a change in negative stereotypes associated with parenthood. For example, Roger T. Williams (Chapter 5) has the daunting task of focusing on the ambiguity of a father’s role, specifically, fathers who opt out of their children’s lives. Williams addresses this problem by giving children a chance to voice their hurt and displeasure about their absent fathers, making it evident that programs and interventions need to be put into place to halt the growing trend of truancy. To help combat the problem of fathers not being in their children’s lives the chapter mentions programs like the Million Man March, interventions like Promise Keepers, and mentorships, which can provide support for these parents.

Acknowledging further the negative stereotypes that can plague parenthood, Bernice Weissbourd (Chapter 4) expounds on the sometimes laissez-faire, sometimes hypercritical attitude that society has adopted concerning the role of motherhood. Here Weissbourd addresses the double-edged sword experienced by mothers (being labeled as “poor mothers” if they work outside the home to supplement family income, being castigated as “over-protective” if they elect to stay home with
their children) and offers solutions to remedy the negative practice of blaming mothers when something goes wrong with their children.

Elaborating on the theme of mothers in the workforce, Lois Wladis Hoffman (Chapter 12) sheds a more contemporary and positive light on maternal employment. The beneficial nature of maternal employment on children is made evident by examples in their boosts in self-esteem and scholastic accomplishments. Hoffman acknowledges the stress endured by working families, but notes that with the introduction of governmental policies that are pro-family, like after-school activities and quality day care centers, this stress can be decreased.

Sylvia Ann Hewlett (Chapter 23) pleads for change by government and big business to become family-friendly by eliminating payroll taxes for families with small children, increasing wages for childcare workers, and creating a powerful advocacy voice for parents. Hewlett offers many accounts of parents who have to choose between their families and their incomes to survive. The examples of parents trying to make the right decisions while sacrificing their families show that policies need to be created to help and not hurt parents and their children.

While many authors point to the inadequacies of governmental policies regarding parenthood, Beverly Johnson (Chapter 15) and Jean Rogers and Heidi Hammes (Chapter 21) highlight specific programs that help families increase their stability. Johnson introduces the benefits of family-centered health care and how it gives families back their self-esteem and voice. Organizations that are committed to family-centered health care establish ways for families to contribute to the drafting and planning of policies. Rogers and Hammes observe how Wisconsin has reduced the number of cash assistant welfare recipients with the advent of a new program called Wisconsin Works (W-2). The goal of this program is for all persons to become self-sufficient within the time limits (60 months) set forth for individuals who participate in W-2. Both of these programs show positive interventions that have been enacted by government officials who are committed to helping families.

Other chapters discuss models of the familial structure such as the Conditional Sequence Model (Robert Larzelere), the bioecological model (Urie Bronfenbrenner), the sociological perspective (Larry Bumpass) and the ecological perspective (James Garbarino). The Conditional Sequence Model (Chapter 7) focuses on disciplinary actions redirecting a child’s negative behaviors towards a more positive direction. Larzelere views the Conditional Sequence Model as a way to unify behavioral and cognitive development approaches, and as a technique that may clarify conflicting advice given to parents through the years. For the bioecological (Chapter 17) and the sociological perspectives (Chapter 18), a common goal is shared that spotlights the lives of children and their development from a Western point of view. Both discuss the chaotic and unstable foundations of family life in the United States, by pointing to factors (i.e., divorce, crime, and materialism) that have had a devastating effect on children’s lives. The ecological