

of access visits to have been given more than three lines.

Petropulos seems to presume at times, that parents reading her book have a strong predisposition to critical, pejorative and condemnatory behavior toward their child. She unfortunately falls into the position of telling parents what is right and wrong on a number of issues. She tends to state her opinions very strongly in certain areas and does not necessarily attempt to remain impartial. She is very evangelical about breast-feeding, and fails to give sufficient acknowledgement to mothers who may feel more comfortable bottle-feeding and who, on this basis, may be best able to provide a satisfying experience for themselves and their baby. In presenting her bias so strongly, Petropulos offers little assistance and reassurance to mothers who may fail in their attempts to breast-feed.

Frequent references are made throughout the book to various drugs used to treat medical conditions, with generally little or no attempt to explain the workings of these drugs in either lay or medical language. Petropulos would do better to provide a more comprehensive description of problems with recommendations and encouragement to parents to explore treatment options with their General Practitioner, rather than include very incomplete and explained suggestions regarding treatment with medication.

The lay-out of this book leaves a lot to be desired. The frequent variation in print type is confusing for the reader, and the organisation of subject matter under relevant headings is poor and lacking in appropriate sequence.

This book was originally published in Australia in 1983 and again in 1987. However, Petropulos appears to have made little or no attempt to update her original information. She fails to mention car safety capsules for young infants which have been in production for at least a couple of years. The use of aspirin for infants and children has been strongly recommended against in recent years, due to a serious possible side effect. The use of a contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera) has also been recommended against in recent years. Ample press coverage has been given regarding this information, yet Petropulos has failed to update information in this area. There has been a failure also to update certain parts of the organisations and addresses section, for example, Children's Protection Society, Victoria, was dissolved well before 1987. In the information and referral guide, no mention is made of reputable private organisations and professional bodies specialising in certain aspects and difficulties of childhood and parenthood.

My general impression of this book is that although it contains some useful practical

suggestions to parents, it has too many gaps to be regarded as a sufficiently comprehensive guide for parents. The author appears to lack sufficient depth of knowledge of child and parent development to enable her to present a book with at least as much, if not more to offer than existing well known books written for contemporary parents.

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TOYS TO MAKE – OVER 60 SIMPLE, EDUCATIONAL TOYS FOR BABIES AND PRE-SCHOOLERS

Susan Esdaile and Angela Sanderson
Viking O'Neil Penguin Books, Australia,
1987.

135pp. PB: \$12.95

"Toys to Make" was produced by two women whose combined personal and professional experiences in parenting and child and family services give this book a very solid grounding.

The stated aim of the book is "to enhance child development and the enjoyment of parenting and child care through participation in the creative process of toy making". The authors begin with the notion that keeping pace with a child's development can be an expensive process. It does in fact appear that the emphasis in the media on the importance of educational toys designed to stimulate children's learning has sent many parents racing to the toy store for the latest Fischer-Price gear, only to be let down in later days by both the bankcard statement and their child's apparent disinterest in the toy. What has been lacking is a concurrent emphasis on the reasons for which specific toys can be educational and the ways in which parents can and should become actively involved in the play process with their children.

"Toys to Make" goes some way to redressing this imbalance. Many parents will be comforted by this book's philosophy that "when making toys for your child you don't need to make an "educational" toy. Try to be just as concerned with *why* a child likes a particular toy . . . it will only stimulate learning if the child likes it and finds it fun to play with".

The book is divided into seven chapters on different types of toys to make: Babies playthings, toys from recycled materials, dolls, soft toys, puppets, sound and percussion toys. Each toy making activity is set out with a brief description of the possible uses, the material needed and illustrated step by step instructions. The book concludes with a section on play, covering developmental stages from birth to five, ideas for active play, ideas for outside play, ideas for play around the house and ideas for quiet play. There are also some useful comments on organising Toy Making workshops.

While many of the toys are indeed simple and inexpensive to make, many people have commented that there are an equal number which are in fact quite difficult, requiring much motivation, skill and in some instances, expensive equipment to achieve the desired outcome. Our chief concern with this book was that, while offering a great source of knowledge for people living or working with young children, its presentation and style are such that it will probably only reach and interest those who already know a great deal about children. We would love to see the authors extend their work to cater for families who may be experiencing difficulties in raising their children, who may be unskilled or unmotivated and who are in great need of encouragement and education about the importance of play. The emphasis needs to be on very simple, very inexpensive toys and ways to enjoy them together with their children. It is crucial that material such as this be geared toward these families and ideally used in small workshop settings. While this is beyond the mandate of this particular book, it is a challenging area which deserves the benefit of the knowledge and experience which have gone into "Toys to Make".

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FAMILIES IN COLONIAL AUSTRALIA

Edited by:

**Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville
and Ellen McEwen.**

George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985,
227pp. PB: \$12.95

Although the study of variations in the structure and experience of families has long been central to sociology, only in the last two decades have historians paid serious attention to these issues. The growth of the 'new social history' in Europe, Britain and North America was triggered in part by the explosion of quantitative demographic analysis made possible by computers, but also by radical historians' interest in those neglected by traditional historiography, the poor, ethnic minorities and women. *Families in Colonial*

Australia collects together the work of several leaders of social history in Australia. It includes papers by those primarily interested in demographic questions, those interested in lifestyles and ideologies, and those foremost concerned with the economic basis of everyday life. It does not claim to provide a definitive picture of 'the colonial family' but, by contrast, takes as a major theme the enormous variety of familiar experiences in the Australian colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In a concluding paper, Ellen McEwen notes that the book contributes not only to the historical study of family roles and organisation but to 'the broadstream of Australian history' (p. 186). She sees it throwing light also on the role of ethnicity even before the major post-World War 2 wave of European Migration and to the relationship between kinship ties changing cultural and economic circumstances. In addition, many of the chapters in the book, as the editors claim in the Introduction, 'broaden political history to take into account the personal worlds of farm wives, of casual workers, and of mining families. They extend questions of economic history and class politics into the home' (p.xv.). They thus show the extremely important interconnections between supposedly 'public' and 'private' life.

Several chapters explore the extent to which immigrant groups retained their cultural distinctiveness and the ways in which their familial behaviour was affected by the move to Australia! The Irish, as described by McConville, behaved differently in the Australian colonies than either at home or in North America. Family migration was not encouraged by Victorian authorities and no large 'ghettoes' formed as in England and the U.S. Rather, political and religious bonds maintained 'Irishness' as the Irish increasingly married 'out'. By contrast, Hellier's analysis of the Scottish highlanders, the 'humbles', indicates a different pattern, joint migration of extended kin provided the basis for maintenance of Gaelic culture. Nonetheless, like the Irish, or the Cornish in Castlemaine, described by Grimshaw and Fahey's chapter, such distinctiveness did not survive long.

Other chapters however do stress the central role played by kin relations in the establishment of Australian communities.

Whether it be the coal miners on the South coast of New South Wales, Germans in Boonah in Queensland, or settlers on early selections around Horsham in Victoria; in all these cases links between kin groups were significant. Fathers and sons worked together in mines as well as children's labour being indispensable to much farming enterprise. Some selectors

managed to achieve much more viable, larger selections by joining forces with relatives (see Ch. 11).

Vital records, those of birth, marriage and death, are essential evidence for studying both family formation and dissolution, and the interaction of the family, economy and society. Compared to those in Britain and elsewhere, Australian historians have been enormously handicapped by the destruction of the nineteenth century manuscript censuses and have had to rely on aggregate demographic data. However other more detailed source material is now coming to light for many localities, and the historians whose work is reported in *Families in Colonial Australia* are an enterprising breed. Grimshaw and Fahey used vital registration returns for the gold mining town of Castlemaine in Victoria. They are thus able to provide a clear picture of the changes in the district throughout the late nineteenth century, including the evening up of the sex balance and the development of more complex occupational structure as Castlemaine became a small rural service centre. The demographic transition from large families of over six children to the smaller family of the twentieth century is a major theme of the demographic analysis.

The bald statistics however come alive when, as in Fahey's chapter on the population structure of Bendigo, they are combined with other sources such as diaries and newspaper reports. Most chapters manage a happy combination of valuable, but dry, statistical detail, and often quite vivid personal accounts.

This is particularly interesting with regard to women's experience of marriage and reproduction. The details of domestic violence and desertion and of the dangers of childbirth are a warning against over-romanticising the past. Without state support or adequate independent income women were economically vulnerable and forced to stay in unsatisfactory marriages. Furthermore, at least until contraception became more widespread in the twentieth century, women entered not only marriage but 'a repetitive cycle of pregnancy, childbearing and lactation which could occupy the next fifteen to twenty years' (p. 52). Several chapters document the fertility of colonial women, but also the fragility of life, both their own and their children's. What stands out in this collection is the difficulty of generalising about our colonial mothers however. Many had little kin support to draw on, but others had strong networks. Although we can gain a sense of these differences from this volume, no overall picture is possible.

What does stand out is the crucial interlocking of the structures of production and reproduction. Although few chapters move to broader theoretical issues, confining themselves primarily to

analysis of quite circumscribed data, they provide very significant evidence for the ways in which the organisation of family resources was affected by, and also affected, the broader economy. Marilyn Lake's chapter on soldier settler families, and Ian Davey's on working-class families in Hindmarsh, South Australia, show that children's labour was essential to the family economy. Farm work needed all available hands, particularly in busy times, and schooling had to be neglected. Women too faced contradictory expectations – on the one hand the bourgeois ideology of women as mistresses of the hearth, on the other the harsh necessity of wheat or dairy farming chores. Some objected to their role as 'slaves' and to the harsh patriarchal authority of their husbands. Sons too in circumstances such as McEwen's chapter on Newcastle mining families shows, found that paternal authority was reinforced when they worked with fathers in the mines. The complex mix of economic and ideological factors varied according to the particular conditions of each locality and over the years. Fisher's discussion of the poor in Sydney documents the impossibility of meeting bourgeois family norms in the often appalling living conditions, but that family connection were in some cases strengthened by struggle to survive the stresses of intermittent work and grinding poverty.

In conclusion, *Families in Colonial Australia* is a rich collection of accounts of family experience set in the diverse economic and social circumstances of farms, rural towns and the cities of the nineteenth century colonies. It is dense reading but full of fascinating snippets and repays close attention. However, the Introduction does not tie the range of themes together adequately, nor develop their theoretical importance for understanding historical patterns of family change. As the papers range widely in terms of evidence, yet are sometimes repetitive in demographic detail, more drawing out of central issues would clarify the significance of the undoubtedly valuable contributions. The final chapter, 'Family History in Australia' attempts this integrative task but succeeds rather as a discussion of Newcastle families. Furthermore the thorny question of what is meant by 'the family' tends to be dodged, yet the volume provides ample evidence to confirm the point made explicitly by one contributor, Marilyn Lake, who emphasises the competing interests of women, men and children within the often precarious unity of the 'family' (p. 173). The greatest success of the book is in illuminating the struggles of otherwise obscure 'ordinary people' who 'made history' through their everyday lives. While of special interest to those teaching about varieties of family experience? the book

serves as a reminder to all of us of the significance of seemingly ordinary experience in the changing context of the social whole.

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*Edited by:
Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville and
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George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985,
pp. 227, \$12.95*

A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW – STEP-PARENTING IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

**Whelan, Thomas & Susan Kelly,
Penguin Books, 1986.
184pp. PB: \$9.95**

A Hard Act to Follow reports on the experiences of forty Australian step-parents, partners of step-partners or both who tell with feeling of their trials and tribulations as well as their pleasures, achievements, and challenges.

This book is important in the 1980's in that increasing numbers of couples in Australia are living in step-family units and more often than not have at least one of the couple's child/children living with them. It is also timely because there is a dearth of Australian literature and research which address the complex and sensitive issues which pertain to the relationships between members of these families, particularly those between step-parents and step-children. Our understanding of the dynamics which exist in such families has often been based on the assumption that there is little difference between biological families and step-families and that once such a group comes together the relationships and dynamics will be similar. A Hard Act to Follow dispels this assumption and challenges many of the myths that surround step-parenting.

The book is based on the findings of research carried out by the authors in Melbourne. Their study comprised interviews with 20 couples all of whom were living in step families! Both parents were interviewed in order to elicit the perceptions of both the step-parent and the biological parent in the relationship.

Broadly, the objective of the study was to examine the major stresses on step-families as well as their strengths and achievements. The result provides the reader with a balanced description and some analysis of many of the delicate dynamics which exist in step-families.

The in-depth interviews provide a rich source of information about a wide range of key issues. These include: What is a

step-family? The images held by the community and the effects of these on families; the roles and expectations of the family members and the fantasies and realities about these; the centrality of the couple relationship in the development of positive and harmonious relationships within the family; the step-parent/step-child relationship; the influence of ex-partners and absent parents and some of the difficulties around specific issues such as discipline, caring and sharing behaviours, the rights of individual members and maintenance, custody and access arrangements.

The book draws on other literature and research findings as well as the author's own findings to describe and discuss the various themes. It is expressed simply and is easy to read. The style is anecdotal with the findings of the study illustrated by direct quotes from the respondents. This makes what might have been a dry report of psychological research into an interesting and human account of the perceptions of step-parents as they live their daily lives in their most recent family. For practitioners working with step-families, A Hard Act to Follow offers insights into the complex and fragile dynamics of step-family life. For those contemplating entering a step-family arrangement it highlights some of the dilemmas and difficulties which one might have to confront but which might be less of a problem if the couple is alerted beforehand. For those living in step-family units, as I am, it affirms and validates many of the ambivalences experienced. Knowing that others have shared similar experiences and found ways to handle them, engenders hope that the relationships will develop positively for all members and offer the support and companionship which in our society we have come to expect from our families.

As the authors point out, time is of the essence in establishing a new family unit. The number of people involved, each with their own history, and the intimacy of the situation in which they find themselves makes the task of building a life together a complicated and challenging one. Relationships of this kind cannot be established overnight and great patience is required to allow the family to evolve in its own way, meeting the individual needs of its members over time. In addition to patience, hard work and commitment are required. However, in all of this the overriding sense of the book is optimistic and it suggests that the struggles and hurdles are worthwhile grappling with in the long term.

A Hard Act to Follow is a welcome addition to the literature about step-families. It furthers our understanding of the complex dynamics of such families and is all the more relevant being based on the experience of Australian couples. It

provides a useful reference for practitioners and students interested in working with such families and is particularly helpful to those living in step-families or contemplating doing so.

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YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING HOME IN AUSTRALIA

by Christabel Young

**Published jointly, Australian National
University, Department of Demography
and the Australian Institute of Family
Studies, Canberra, 1987.
188pp. PB: \$10.50**

This study is based on a major survey of young adults carried out by the Institute of Family Studies in 1981-82 as part of its Family formation Project.

Australian households were approached to obtain a random sample of 2,500 young people aged between 18 and 35.

These years were chosen as the crucial years of decision making about further education, finding a job, leaving home, partnering, getting married, having children.

Every one of these decisions is affected by the family of origin, by one's personal values, by broad social values and expectations and by the state of the economy and the labour market.

Christabel Young, an academic staff member of the Department of Demography at the Australian National University, was contracted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies to analyse their survey in order to produce this analysis.

One of the main purposes of the study on which this monograph is based was to test whether or not young Australians were changing their attitudes with regard to life decisions.

The Institute holds the data which is available upon request for further analysis by researchers.

The views and opinions expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the position, policy or endorsement of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The book begins by providing detail on the patterns of leaving home by Australian Youth including some comparison with other countries e.g. West Germany, Britain and the United States.

Following this, Young explains the limited nature of information available about young people leaving home – apart from what could be assumed with regard to young adults leaving home at marriage.