

Guest Editorial

The Significant Work of Parenting

*The joys of parents are secret, and so are their griefs
and fears*
Francis Bacon Sr

This special issue of *WORK*, devoted to the work of parenting seeks to insure that the joys and challenges of parenting are no longer secret. Parenting is the most important work happening in the world, yet it is often unrecognized work. Parents receive minimal training or preparation, no compensation, infrequent breaks or vacations, and insufficient validation for the significant work they do. Instead, parents are often met with criticism and blame for the difficulties that their children experience. Due to the societal oppression that parents experience, they often internalize self-criticism and self-blame.

Without the generosity of parents, complex human societies could not exist. The work of parenting must be done to fuel, sustain and elevate all human endeavors. The tremendous joy of nurturing and bearing witness to the unfolding development of infants on up to adulthood compels humans to engage in the work of parenting despite the many hardships and financial burdens experienced. Although women have historically carried out the lion's share of the work of parenting, men are assuming more and more of the responsibility.

This special issue of *WORK* reveals parenting as complex work that is accomplished in many different settings. Contributors to this special issue describe the many contexts in which mothers and/or fathers from diverse backgrounds do the work of parenting newborns, at-risk children, children with disabilities, and emerging adult children. The challenges faced by parents from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds at different points in their lives are uncovered for the readers.

Withers, Morton, Cohen Konrad, Spence and Buterbaugh emphasize that there is considerable risk for problems associated with reproductive health for moth-

ers and infants living in rural poverty. They describe a model for an early integrated support collaborative for at-risk mothers in rural Maine that successfully bridges relationships between families and services by emphasizing community-based and collaboratively-designed programs.

Similarly, Bowden and Goodman address the gender differences that exist for those with substance use disorders and the critical need to increase employment opportunities for postpartum women with substance use disorders. Professionals working with women should integrate employment assessment and promote skills training into the early stages of treatment programs. Froehlich, Donovan, Ravlin, Fortier, North and Bloch conducted surveys with white, middle class breastfeeding mothers in the early post-partum weeks and found that even this well resourced group of mothers were unprepared and often overwhelmed by the demands of breastfeeding. Given that a breastfeeding routine only began to emerge for most mothers at 10-12 weeks, a discussion of how to better prepare new mothers for the non-linear nature of breastfeeding was provided.

Several authors examine the work of parenting children with disabilities. Winston describes the complex challenges faced by mothers of 1-3 year old children with a wide range of feeding issues in negotiating daily mealtime occupations. She found that regardless of the severity of feeding issues, mothers expressed similar concerns but may not be eligible for similar services or supports. Dunbar demonstrates the value of using an antenarratological approach to understand the complexity and non-linear nature of a mother's story. She analyzed a mother's blog following the injury of her child to uncover the often disparate and inconsistent threads as well as the common themes of a mother's experience. Loukas, Raymond, Perron, McHarg and LaCroix focus on the transition to adulthood for children with autism. They explore the use of a social cognition curriculum for young adults with autism, and the

value of a parent/caretaker support group. They found that families value sharing stories to assist in facilitating occupational transformation in their children.

Parenting at various stages of life is illuminated in additional articles. Francis-Connolly and Sytniak remind us that the work of parenting emerging adults or young adults is still missing from the literature. Their qualitative research offers a beginning understanding of mothers' experiences of providing a listening ear, emotional and financial support and worrying about their emerging adult children.

Dudley-Bean describes her decision to prioritize the occupation of motherhood, including the challenges associated with the transition to motherhood as a young adult and graduate student even when good social and financial supports are in place. Morgan, Merrell and Rentschler conducted in-depth interviews with older first time mothers and discovered a paradox between their expectations and the actual realities of motherhood. Mothers were surprised by the centrality of motherhood and found themselves modifying their work to be more available as mothers. O'Sullivan raises our awareness of the physical and emotional health concerns of the sandwich generation at work, raising their own children while caring for older family members and suggests strategies for creating a sustainable work/caregiver balance.

A number of transcendent parenting concerns are presented through the work of several authors. Hermansen, Croninger and Croninger review the literature on the significant and changing role of fathers. They explore the love between a father and daughter through a case study in which each identifies the five qualities of a good parent. While "listening, not needing to win an argument, being non-judgmental, self-revealing and loving" were qualities identified by the father, the daughter identified "teaching and challenging, being supportive, spending quality time, being a role model and loving and respecting the mother" as key qualities. Yaroslwitz, Sloop, Arnold, Hamilton and De-Grace explore the impact of historical trauma and the work of parenting by interviewing Chareidi second and

third generation survivors of the Holocaust. We are reminded of the daily effort required to reverse the devastating emotional effects of generational transmission of trauma so that families can experience healthy occupations. MacDonald, Kennedy, Moll, Pineda, Mitchell, Stephenson and Cadell examine the "disconnect" between Canadian labour bereavement policies which provide for three unpaid days off from work and the long-term suffering and almost unbearable nature of the loss of a child. Reflecting on the realistic capabilities of bereaving parents to conduct their work responsibilities, they suggest a revision of this policy.

This journal issue is significant in furthering our understanding of the joys, challenges and complexities of parenting. The importance of transitions during various phases of parenting and the need for support throughout the experience of parenting is evident here. This rich scholarship on parenting may serve as a springboard for ongoing exploration, study and analysis of the needs of parents that will pave the way for re-assessment and reconstruction of social policy on multi-faceted support for the work of parenting. We hope you enjoy each article.

Guest Editors

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