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Parenting Representations

The study of parents from their own perspective, not just as socializing agents of their children, has been long neglected. This book summarizes and presents the new and surging literature on parenting representations, namely parents' views, emotions, and internal world regarding their parenting. Within this area, several prominent researchers typically coming from the attachment tradition suggested various ways of assessing parenting representations, mostly by way of semi-structured interviews. This book presents their conceptualizations and includes detailed descriptions of their interviews and their coding schemes. In addition, a review and summary of the growing number of findings in this domain and an integrated conceptualization that serves as a theoretical base for future research are presented. Finally, the clinical implications of the study of parenting representations are discussed at large. Clinical notions and conceptualizations regarding parenting representations are presented and thoroughly discussed, including detailed case studies that demonstrate, among other things, intergenerational transmission of representations.

Ofra Mayseless received her Ph.D. from the Psychology Department of Tel-Aviv University in Israel in 1984. She is a certified clinical psychologist and a professor of Developmental Psychology at the Faculty of Education at the University of Haifa in Israel. She has taught in University of California, Berkeley, and Mills College, California, as well as in the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC, Canada. She is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD), International Association for Relationship Research (IARR), International Society for the Study of Behavior Development, and the International Society for Research on Adolescence. She has written more than 50 articles and chapters in the area of close relationships, in particular adolescents' and adults' attachment and caregiving manifestations.

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אורי מייזלס

This book is dedicated to my precious, wonderful son – Ouri Mayseless.

On August 20, 2003, not yet 22 years old, he was killed with his friend, Oren Simon, by a careless driver in the painfully beautiful, lush green landscapes of Alaska, far from his home – Israel.

Ouri was a bright-eyed child with a breathtaking life force, a creativity that always took us by surprise, an endless curiosity, and an open heart to love and embrace everybody – a heart of gold. From early on, I was highly curious to see what would become of him. How would he integrate these extraordinary capacities? I was sure it would be something unexpected and astonishing. Ouri grew up to be an amazing young person, naive, yet mature, fun-loving and yet highly dedicated and serious in his studies and sport pursuits, extremely bright, and above all exceptionally imaginative and creative. He studied electrical engineering and was a top A student. He had a wonderful, amazingly loving relationship with his one (and only) girlfriend, in which intimacy, trust, respect, and love were so vibrant and glowing – they both served as a model couple for their friends and for us. Before his last semester of studies, he went on a trip to Alaska. He wanted a relatively safe place of nature, to relax, have fun, and to contemplate.

As we flew to Alaska to bring him back home with us and I was all torn from within, I was struck by the sharp, excruciating realization that as a researcher whose passionate professional life was devoted to the study of the marvelous encompassing love of parents for their children, I now was witnessing firsthand how unbearable, unthinkable, and crushing such a blow to this bond can be.

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Psychologists often wonder what makes people choose a certain subject for research; why researchers find certain topics challenging and captivating. For me the answer seemed quite obvious. I was fascinated with the strong force of loving and caring, which is manifested all around us in myriad ways and relations but which seemed to me to be most powerful, all-encompassing, and so wonderfully giving in the case of parents. I have been, of course, aware of the obvious evolutionary "explanation," but this did not "explain" or clarify what I found so fascinating – the love (physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral) that parents have and express toward their children. Out of this focus grew the work on this volume, as I found like-minded scholars who were attracted to understand, reveal, and uncover more about the working of the parents' mind and soul.

Little did I know that an almost impossible lesson about parenting awaited me just as I was about to finalize the work on this volume.

My friends and colleagues were not sure that I would be able to touch these topics again as they so directly bear upon my pain. But for me, the work on this volume and in particular my other parallel path to find meaning "through time and space" have been like a lighthouse in the middle of the storm. I did not search to elude pain, nor did I sink into it and embrace it, but in my personal life as in my professional life I wanted to see what does it mean. And mostly, I wanted to understand why.

I miss my son incessantly – in a physical sense as a part torn from my own body leaving me cut open, in an emotional sense as a flowing love and energy that now does not have an earthly address, and in a psychological sense as a friend and companion, as a growing evolving wonderful person, and as a fun and bright ally.

Ouri had two names and they both become him so well – *Ouri* which means in Hebrew *my Light* and *Shmuel* (in English – Samuel – who was a prophet and by God's order nominated the first and second kings of Israel – *Shaul* and *David*). The meaning of the word *Shmuel* in Hebrew is "given/received from God." I believe in a way Ouri had some of the qualities reflected in his two names – having both *Truth* and *Love* as his inner guiding lights, with a highly inquisitive mind and a passion to give and help others – he was God's present to me.

I know that in a different sphere Ouri knows about this book and about this dedication, and that he – there – and I – here – know that it does not even come close to expressing how and what I feel for him and what he might have been able to accomplish – had he lived.

I know that like me when writing this dedication, his heart is aching and his tears are running, but he is content that the mission has been accomplished.

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Preface

This book grew out of my deep interest in caregiving, a central encompassing motivation that, as I see it, "makes the world go round." Parenting seemed to me to be the prototypical example of this motivation, yet the most taken for granted. From my own experience as a mother, I knew how powerful this bond and commitment to the well-being, happiness, and survival of your children is, and how central in my being, though not always in my doing. As I was focusing more on this emotion/feeling/bond/motivation, it became clearer to me that our motivation to give care, our love for our children, and the great many concessions and sometimes sacrifices that we are willing to make for them without expectation to be reciprocated and for the "sole" purpose that they will be healthy, happy, and fulfilled are not at all the same as our needs to be nurtured and protected. In other words, I became quite convinced that the caregiving motive is very distinct from attachment. Yet, unlike attachment which has been examined and studied from various angles, caregiving and in particular parenting have been much less explored.

This last statement is not fully true because developmental researchers as well as clinicians have devoted considerable contemplation and study efforts to uncover what a good parent is. In an effort to understand this issue, they explored for the most part parental behaviors and practices (and less so parental emotions and cognitions) and in particular looked at the effects of these on child outcomes. Thus, in most of the extant literature on parenting, the effects of parents' actions and practices on their children were the focus of the investigation in an attempt to provide the world with a valid answer to the question how best to parent. Parents were viewed as a vehicle to promote the child's success, welfare, and well-being. The focus on the parental subjective world, parents' feelings and thoughts, emotions and attributions, love and

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hate, dedication and guilt were considered less central in and of themselves. For example, whereas it seemed quite natural to fund investigations aimed at uncovering normative changes within the child, few such studies were conducted with regards to the normative development of parenting, before and after people become parents.

Recently (for the past two decades), a surge of interest in the subjective world of the parents has emerged. This involved a focus on the parents' subjective experience and grew out of the social cognition literature (as reviewed in Rudy and Grusec – Chapter 3), the psychoanalytic literature (see chapters by Scharf and Shulman – Chapter 11 – and by Wiseman, Hashmonay, and Harel – Chapter 12), and the attachment paradigm (see a review in Mayseless – Chapter 1 – and Steinberg and Pianta – Chapter 2). Most of the chapters in this volume reflect the growing interest within this latter paradigm – the attachment point of view – in parental representations as reflecting their internal subjective world.

As reviewed in Mayseless (Chapter 1), most researchers used interviews to explore parents' mind, which they analyzed in various ways. The chapters in this volume present a diverse set of studies with such interviews and describe the interviews they used and their coding scheme. Steinberg and Pianta (Chapter 2) present their work with the adapted version of the *Parent Development Interview* (PDI), which includes also issues of achievement and compliance. They demonstrate that these concerns have unique associations with child and mother characteristics as well as with her behavior and that they are distinct from attachment-related issues. Applying another adaptation of the PDI with mothers of six-year-old children, Scher, Harel, Scharf, and Klein (Chapter 5) show that mothers' sensitivity in infancy is associated with their parenting representations, which in turn are correlated with the children's representations of the maternal figure. Using the *Working Model of the Child Interview* (WMCI), Rosenblum, Dayton, and McDonough (Chapter 4) show that mothers' representations have a marked effect on emotion activation and regulation of mothers and infants. Finally, applying the *Parenting Representations Interview-Adolescence* (PRI-A) with mothers of adolescents, Scharf and Mayseless (Chapter 7) show that mothers' representations are associated with their own AAI and with the sons' psychosocial functioning one year and three years later.

In two chapters, the fathers', not mothers', parenting representations are assessed using interviews – the *Parent Attachment Interview* by Bretherton, Lambert, and Golby (Chapter 6) and questionnaires by Sharabany, Scher, and Gal-Krauz (Chapter 8). In both chapters the associations of these

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representations with the fathers' perceived relationships with their own parents are described. Both studies suggest that fathers learn from their own fathers what not to do; that is, instead of emulation, fathers use compensation and reworking to define their own paternal role vis-à-vis that of their fathers.

Solomon and George (Chapter 9) too examine how parents' experiences with their own parents affect their parenting and the child's functioning. They suggest that childhood experiences of helplessness exhibited in a parental rage pattern are associated with similar helpless parenting representations and child's disorganized attachment. Four other chapters directly address clinical issues related to parenting representations. Ackerman and Dozier (Chapter 10) examine representations of foster parents and demonstrate the significant and central role of parental investment assessed using a special parenting interview (*This is My Baby Interview*). Like Solomon and George, Scharf and Shulman (Chapter 11) examine intergenerational transmission of parenting. They look at parents of adolescents and use interviews to examine the parents' own experiences as adolescents as well as their current parenting. Using case studies they demonstrate the powerful, and in many cases unsuccessful, attempts of parents to correct and undo past experiences with their own parents when they themselves were adolescents in their current relationships with their adolescents. Similarly, Wiseman, Hashmonay, and Harel (Chapter 12) examine processes of intergenerational transmission as they observe the connection between parents' representations of the child and the child's representations using the WMCI and the Core Conflictual Relational Theme method. Similar to Scher et al., they describe powerful associations between these two sets of representations. Interestingly, the three chapters that present clinical cases (Chapters 9, 11, and 12) underscore in particular cases of role reversal and enmeshment. Each suggests different ways by which parents can succeed to break the chain of intergenerational transfer of negative experiences.

Different conceptual issues are addressed in all the chapters. Here I would like to pinpoint in particular three of the chapters. Rudy and Grusec (Chapter 3) address the extant literature in social cognition that has been applied to parenting representations. This literature provides a rich conceptual base for researchers focusing on parents' minds. Similarly, Mayseless (Chapter 1) provides an overview of studies of parenting representations and offers a general conceptual model as well as highlights future directions. Finally, Crittenden (Chapter 13) presents a challenging and valuable model of parenting representations of parents whose parenting goes awry. This model can serve as a very significant point of departure for clinicians who wish to understand

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"what's on this parent's mind" when treating parents who mistreat, neglect, or abuse their children.

Together this whole collection of chapters presents new ideas, avenues for research, and clinical implications in the realm of parenting representations, as well as new insights into parents' mind and soul – their feelings, emotions, and cognitions, their origin and their effect on children.

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This work would not have been done had I not received extensive help from many people. First and foremost of them is Miri Scharf, my dear friend and colleague – whose encouragement, great ideas, and above all good and sound advice helped steer this work in the right direction at so many junctions. Other friends as well and in particular Anat Scher, Hadas Wiseman, and Ruth Sharabany have been highly helpful at different phases, when the idea first came up and when I was wholly invested in it, and at different levels, professional and personal.

Naama and Oded, my children, are the ones from whom I learned firsthand about parenting and about this great gift. They are the well and source of my love and insights – flowing and originating in them.

On a different sphere, the work on this topic and on this book would not have been realized at all – had I not my husband, Meir, at my side serving as my "holding environment" and anchor, a web of confidence and security.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues and friends who have contributed to this volume. Their enthusiastic participation, openness to my requests and suggestions, and professional investment in writing the chapters have made it a successful realization.

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