

Raising Kids in the 21st Century: The Science of Psychological Health for Children

Sharon K. Hall.

Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008.

Reviewed by Gina Wong-Wylie

In *Raising Kids in the 21st Century*, Sharon K. Hall describes seven attributes of psychologically healthy children, which she refers to as “good Ph.” In this highly accessible book, Hall cites earlier research on socialization and cognitive growth to emphasize the importance of raising children who will contribute to their community and larger society. She aptly states, “[h]ealthy, happy people who can connect well with others, see others’ perspective with tolerance, and care about their world” (2).

Although she clearly indicates that her book was written for White, middle-class families, Hall acknowledges families across a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic status, physical ability, and sexual orientation. She also cites research on key factors that buffer children who face risk and vulnerability (i.e., divorce, poverty, death of a loved one) with good outcomes: “a positive temperament, a normal level of intelligence, one good parent, one good external resource such as a teacher, and one positive context external to the home such as functioning well at school” (9). Hall asserts that socio-emotional growth of an individual begins in the home and that parents are the foundation and template through which children experience all other relationships.

Hall emphasizes the pivotal role of parents in modelling good coping strategies, imparting the value of family relationships, individual responsibility, and high academic expectations, along with providing a feeling of warmth and safety to promote good Ph and resiliency. Good parents create a “virtuous circle” (iv): when their children become parents themselves, they go on to raise happy and engaged children who become thriving adults and social activists.

Hall’s work is flawed in several respects. She focuses a good portion of her book on developmental tasks, cognitive functioning, skills, and motor development in children. I skimmed these sections in favour of the sections on childrearing, which were richly grounded in classic research and included useful, practical ideas. Surprisingly, Hall does not address the timely issue of raising environmentally astute children. Finally, the writing is at times prescriptive, which is too directed for this reader.

Nonetheless, the book’s final chapter on social justice and global awareness is novel and broadens the existing conceptions of parenting. Hall stresses

the elemental importance of adventure, humour, fun, light-heartedness, and laughter in raising children. Overall, this is a book I will recommend to culturally similar middle-class parents, teachers, clients, or practitioners working with families interested in enhancing child development and engendering psychological health in children.

Insane Euphoria Speaks: Diary of a Late Pregnancy

Katherine Dickson.
Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2007.

Reviewed by Alison M. S. Watson

This is not an advice book for the growing number of women seeking to give birth later in life. Instead, it is an account of Katherine Dickson's third pregnancy during the period 21 May 1971 to 9 March 1972. In recounting her personal journey, the author is unflinching in the way she lets the reader into her home and her private thoughts, with her emotions veering between joy and frustration over the course of a single day. This sometimes leads to an uneven writing style that nonetheless adds to the force of the narrative.

The author's relationship with her husband, Frank, is fraught; as she admits, "you can almost make it heaven or hell" (20). On the one hand, she is very much in love with him and believes he treats her well; on the other hand, she is frustrated with his work and home habits, believes he is undermining her and makes her feel unwelcome in her own home. Her relationship with her children (her two existing children, and the one she is carrying) appears similarly uneven. She either loves her children completely or seeks solitude to discover a suitable outlet for her own creative energies.

What is particularly fascinating about this book is the way it stands as a representation of the changing place of women in society in the early 1970s. Feminist thought and philosophy have immediacy and substance for Dickson and her friends. Not only is she faced with the everyday demands of being a wife and mother—and indeed of being a "good" wife and mother—but she feels the need to meet societal expectations for women.

Although this book was published in 2007, readers do not learn what happened to Dickson and her family in the years that follow her diary entries. Readers yearn to know more about her relationship with her children, for example. Did her marriage to Frank succeed? The blurb on the back cover would suggest that it has, but Dickson experiences so many frustrations in her marriage that one wonders whether they were resolved, especially in light of Frank's own reservations about his role as husband.