

**PARENTHOOD AND CIVILISATION:
AN ANALYSIS OF PARENTING DISCOURSES
PRODUCED IN AUSTRALIA
IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS.**

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This thesis is presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Research associated with this thesis has been used to produce conference papers and journal articles. Material from this thesis appears in the following publications:

- Kitchens R. (2007) 'The Informalization of the parent-child relationship: an investigation of parenting discourses produced in Australia in the inter-war years', *Journal of Family History*, 32(4), 459-478.
- Kitchens R. (2006) "Mothercraft not learnt by instinct": an investigation of the infant welfare movement in Australia 1919-1939', *Children Australia*, 31(1), 31-36.
- Kitchens R. (2005) 'Childhood, Parenting and the Civilising Process', *Community, Place and Change*, refereed proceedings of the 2005 TASA Conference, University of Tasmania, 6-8 December 2005.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates parent education literature produced in Australia in the inter-war years. This period saw the emergence of various organisations concerned to safeguard and protect the health and well-being of children. For example, infant health clinics were established in most states, kindergarten associations were active in promoting early childhood education, and the mental hygiene movement gained a foothold in Australia. These associations engaged in parent education activities and produced a growing volume of literature. This literature contained instructions relating to various aspects of child care. Initially, advice was directed towards the management of health, but increasingly, information was provided on guiding child behaviour. Although the care of children was the main focus of this literature, it had wider implications. Authors provided comment on the emotional structure of family life and the patterning of parent-child relationships. Importantly, this literature contained advice for parents in relation to the management of their own personal care and conduct. This thesis contends that these discourses can be explained in relation to long-term changes in the history of childhood and the family, which are connected to particular developments in the structuring of social life that Norbert Elias describes as the 'civilizing process'. In particular, it is argued

that the growing distance between children and adults, and the positioning of the family as the primary site for regulating, or 'civilizing' the behaviour of children, can help to explicate the increasing emphasis placed on parent education in the inter-war years. This thesis also demonstrates how an Eliasian analysis, which emphasises long-term unintended processes of change, provides an alternative to Marxist, feminist, and Foucaultian approaches that focus on social control.

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