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Raising 'em by the Book

Just like kids, the number—and diversity—of parenting titles is sprouting by leaps and bounds

by *Natalie Danford* -- *Publishers Weekly*, 2/28/2005

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Childhood ain't what it used to be. Judging from the number of books covering every aspect of pregnancy and parenting—from contacting a baby's spirit before it's even conceived to convincing kids in their 20s to leave the nest—there's not a moment of childhood these days that goes unguided.

"The idea started in the 1980s that it was your responsibility to build the super child, and the total success or failure of your child was based on your efforts," says Alvin Rosenfeld, M.D., a child and adolescent psychiatrist and co-author of *The Over-Scheduled Child* (St. Martin's). "Today parents feel responsible for any less-than-perfect performance on the child's part. The focus of the standard pregnancy has gone from the pregnant woman to his majesty, the fetus."

According to Kathleen Kiely Gouley, a clinical child psychologist at the NYU Child Study Center, there are three elements in play: "First, we are clearly in the information age, so it's not surprising that parents, too, are seeking information about parenting. Second, there has been an explosion of information about the importance of parenting, as well as societal pressures on parents to give their children every opportunity. The third thing is the explosion in consumer products for babies, paralleled in the book market as well."

Aside from the parental pressures that create a market for books like *How to Give Your Baby Encyclopedic Knowledge* (Square One, May), the parenting category is also the victim of its own success—or at least the success of certain backlist titles. General parenting and pregnancy books in particular have to compete with category killers that crush newcomers. Penguin/Alpha publisher Marie Butler-Knight terms them "the juggernaut books," and Rodale executive editor Heather Jackson says, "It's hard to become one of those backlist beauties, but when you do, you have a nice long ride."

"It is a tough shelf," says Wiley publisher Diane Steele. "The standards become standards for a good long time."

They're referring to titles like Workman's 800-pound gorilla, the What to Expect series (see sidebar). This success can be summed up statistically: according to the publisher, someone purchases one of the eight books in the series every 17 seconds.

With that kind of dominance, other publishers despair of finding room in the marketplace. "The books that work work for a long time, and that's great when you get one that works, but it is harder for new ones to make a dent," says McGraw-Hill executive editor Judith McCarthy. As a result, the press is pulling back on the number of parenting books it publishes. Gail Winston, an executive editor at HarperCollins, says point blank, "I don't look for books in this category."

How to Stand Out

According to Kitty Moore, executive editor of Guilford Press, "General parenting books don't do well unless you've got T. Berry Brazelton writing them for you."

Heading that sentiment, Da Capo in 2003 launched a new paperback series, The Brazelton Way, by the well-known children's advocate and pediatrician. The sixth and seventh titles, due in April, are *Mastering Anger and Aggression* and *Understanding Sibling Rivalry*. Okay, but what about other publishers?

One approach shared by many is to slice the market into ever tinier bits to target a specific—albeit small—market. Guilford Press focuses on subclinical disorder books, such as *Taking Charge of ADHD* (1995), which has sold more than 250,000 copies. Moore says she frequently attends child psychiatry conferences to keep up on new developments.

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A press, even a small one, that gets out in front of a new syndrome or trend has a good chance of publishing the definitive title on the subject. In May, HCL will publish *HypnoBirthing* by Marie Mongan, who has already sold more than 25,000 self-published copies of the book through her Web site (<http://www.hypnobirthing.com/>). She's also garnered mentions in *Time* and *Newsweek* for her method for less painful childbirth, marking HypnoBirthing as a trend ready to pop.

That first-in-line timing also worked for Carol Stock Kranowitz's *The Out-of-Sync Child*. When Perigee first published the book on the then little-known disorder sensory integration dysfunction in 1998, it shipped 3,900 copies. There are now close to 300,000 copies in print after 22 trips back to press; August will bring a revised edition.

Senior editor Marian Lizzi says, "It's a double-edged sword. You want to have the first book, if you can, but there is a downside because often people don't know what you're talking about and may wonder, are we overdiagnosing or overmedicating? Are we peeling the onion a little too far?" In March, Perigee will publish nearly 5,000 copies of *Your Child's Hearing Loss* by Debby Waldman with Jackson Roush. The market is small, says Lizzi, but if the title can establish itself as *the* book to turn to, its long-term potential may be huge.

Similarly, Dr. Edward M. Hallowell's seminal *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood Through Adulthood* (Pantheon) has sold more than one million copies since it was published as one of the first books on ADD in 1994. But novelty doesn't seem to be the only thing Hallowell had going for him. In January, Ballantine offered the author's followup, *Delivered from Distraction: Getting the Most Out of Life with Attention Deficit Disorder*, and it was in its fourth printing after just a few weeks.

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder (Algonquin, May) by Richard Louv will be treated to a 50,000-copy first printing, a 5,000-galley mailing to media and booksellers, a 15-city author tour and a 20-city radio satellite tour, all to help a new theory—that today's children are depressed and overweight because they are out of touch with nature—make an impression.

Childhood obesity has been the focus of scientific attention in recent years and seems poised to climb to the top of the parental-concern jungle gym, at least judging by the number of upcoming titles on the subject of healthy eating, like Marialisa Calta's *Barbarians at the Plate* (Perigee, June); Lisa Tartamella, Elaine Hersher and Chris Wollston's *Generation Extra Large: Rescuing Our Children from the Epidemic of Obesity* (Basic Books, Jan.); and *Healthy Kids, Smart Kids* (Perigee, Sept.) by Yvonne Sanders-Butler, an elementary school principal who banned sugary snack foods and soft drinks at her school. Berkley is slicing the pie even thinner with *Gordito Doesn't Mean Healthy* (2006), a nutrition guide for Hispanic parents to be published simultaneously in Spanish and English.

But Nancy Miller, editor-in-chief of Ballantine, which in 2001 published *Sugar Busters! for Kids* as part of that top-selling series, says that book "sold well but didn't blow out of the stores. It's certainly a good category for grown-ups, but maybe it's the sort of thing parents discuss directly with pediatricians." Publishers always attempt to identify evergreen niches. Berkley editorial director Susan Allison says, "We have a ton of baby name books, but there seems to be room for as many as publishers can do. When people are in that moment, they're excited, and they don't want to leave any stone unturned."

And there are *some* new things about parenting. For one thing, forget it taking a village to raise a child—these days it often takes a village (or a medical practice or adoption agency) just to *have* one. Penguin/Alpha is offering an updated edition of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Adoption*, with new information on Internet-assisted adoption and international options. Guilford Press has *Mommies, Daddies, Donors, Surrogates: Answering Tough Questions and Building Strong Families* (Aug.) by Diane Ehrensaft. With the number of multiple births rising due to more widespread use of in vitro fertilization, St. Martin's is publishing *Expecting Twins, Triplets or More: A Doctor's Guide to a Healthy and Happy Multiple Pregnancy* (Apr.) as a trade paperback original.

Another way to make a mark is to take an approach that runs contrary to conventional wisdom. In *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?* (Seal Press, Apr.), author Miriam Peskowitz challenges the widely promoted idea that stay-at-home mothers and those who return to work look askance at each other. "She learned that the media created this catfight," says editorial director Krista Lyons-Gould. The title will have a first printing that falls at the high end of the Seal range, which Lyons-Gould sets at 5,000–10,000 copies.

Da Capo also looks into the secret lives of working mothers with *How She Really Does It: The Secrets of Success from Stay-at-Work Moms* by Wendy Sachs, which features interviews with high-powered women—from designer Vera Wang to New York congresswoman Nita Lowey and even the inventor of the Baby Einstein series—on why they choose to continue working and how their work makes them better mothers.

And speaking of motherhood and its attendant challenges, Riverhead earlier this month published a title that's striking a responsive chord. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* is by noted journalist Judith Warner, whose c.v. includes reportage for the *New Republic* and the *Washington Post* as well as the more germane raising of two daughters. In the words of Riverhead executive editor and father of two daughters Jake Morrissey, "Judy Warner argues that society's expectations of motherhood have created what she calls a 'widespread, choking cocktail of guilt and anxiety and resentment.'" Warner argues that society needs to reassess what it expects from mothers and what mothers expect from themselves. Proving that timing is everything, *Newsweek*'s Feb. 21 cover story featured a lengthy excerpt from *Perfect Madness*; that, plus a front-cover review in the February 20 *NYTBR* by Judith Shulevitz has helped push the book up Amazon's sales ladder—#16 as we went to press.

The inverse might be *Mom, Inc.: Parenting As If You Mean Business* by Cynthia MacGregor, which applies business principles to parenting. Taylor is also trying to rock the parenting boat with *Stop Medicating, Start Parenting: Real Solutions for Your "Problem" Teenager* by David Stein, an anti-Ritalin screed that enjoyed a 7,000-copy first printing in January. Still more books are just plain, well, wacky in their gambit for attention. In *Spirit Babies*, a Delta trade paperback original to be published in June, author Walter Makichen claims to speak to spirits before they are conceived, "acting as a go-between for prospective parents."

Since the vast majority of parenting books are about infants and teenagers, the middle years might seem like wide-open territory for parenting books. But while simply transferring a successful book to a different age group may seem like child's play, it often results in diminishing returns. "Over half of the bestselling books are baby and toddler books, which is no real big surprise," says Penguin/Alpha's Butler-Knight. "Children are quite charming during the middle years, and they can't drive yet."

McGraw-Hill has sold more than 150,000 copies of *The No-Cry Sleep Solution* (2002), but in June when the press brings out *The No-Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers and Preschoolers*, it will begin with a modest 30,000-copy printing. "In general," says McCarthy, "a similar toddler book will sell 80% of what a baby book will sell."

Rodale will attempt to crack the middle-school market with *Growing Up Too Soon: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers* (Sept.), based on author and child psychologist Sylvia Rimm's survey of more than 5,400 middle-school students from 18 states. Along similar lines is a July Free Press release, *The Mom Book Goes to School: Insider Tips to Ensure Your Child Thrives in Elementary and Middle School*, a paperback original by Stacy M. DeBroff.

Birthing Books

No matter how crowded a category appears, there are always those willing to attempt to join it. Business publisher Amacom is getting into the parenting game with two April paperbacks (*Mommy Guilt: Learn to Worry Less, Focus on What Matters Most, and Raise Happier Kids* by Julie Bort, Aviva Pflöck and Devra Renner; and *Kids Who Think Outside the Box: Helping Your Unique Child Thrive in a Cookie-Cutter World* by Stephanie Lerner) and one in August (*A Parent's Guide to Special Education: Insider Advice on How to Navigate the System and Help Your Child Succeed* by Linda Wilmshurst and Alan W. Brue).

According to Amacom executive editor Jacqueline Flynn, "One of the greatest challenges people face today is successfully balancing the competing demands of their personal and professional lives. Parenting has become a competitive sport, with everyone vying to make sure their kids get the best grades, have the right extracurricular activities and get on all the best teams."

Dearborn Trade is also suiting up to play, publishing its first parenting titles in June: *Kidnapped: How Irresponsible Marketers Are Stealing the Minds of Your Children* by Daniel S. Acuff and Robert H. Reiher and *Raising Money Smart Kids* by Janet Bodnar, which is the result of a new publishing and distribution agreement with financial adviser Kiplinger's.

The launch of a new imprint, while risky in an overpopulated field, also presents a chance to generate attention. A little over a year ago, Da Capo launched its Lifelong imprint to coral past and future pregnancy and parenting books, which executive editor Mamie Cochran terms a "bread-and-butter category."

But a slice of profitable Da Capo bread fell butter-side-down when Jenny McCarthy, author of *Belly Laughs*, which spent four weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list after Da Capo published it in April 2004, switched to Dutton for her followup, *Baby Laughs* (Apr.) While Da Capo continues to see brisk sales of the actress's original take on the joys of pregnancy—such as gas and hemorrhoids—and has delayed the paperback in order to take hardcover profits to the max, it simply could not afford her equally frank tale of mothering an infant. "We were offering a very rich advance, but Dutton doubled it absurdly," admits Cochran.

But Cochran, while recognizing that such rationalization might be sour grapes, also posits that McCarthy's second book was an attempt to do something that few writer/publisher teams have done successfully: sell a book about a cute child. Even Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions* (Pantheon, 1993), a perennial baby-shower gift, focused more on the author than her son.

And why buy the breast when you can get the milk for free? (Speaking of which, Rodale is publishing *Spilled Milk* in September. According to executive editor Heather Jackson, "We like to say it's a funny and intimate and realistic look at our very first fast food. It's an example of the kind of subject where sometimes the best expert is Mom.") As David Hochman pointed out in a late January article in the *New York Times* Style section, today's parents regularly record adventures such as bouts of the flu in a spare-no-detail McCarthy-esque tone on free-of-charge blogs.

Where the Internet isn't a threat to books, parenting publishers agree, is in the delivery of information. While a few years ago reference publishers of all types feared that the Internet might kill off their business, that's turned out to not be the case. "The Internet is not replacing books; there's no substitute for having a discrete object you can turn to on your nightstand," says Philip Rappaport, senior editor for the Bantam Dell Publishing Group.

Berkley's Allison recently acquired *Mother to Mother*, a book about postpartum depression by Sandra Poulin, who late last year launched a highly trafficked Web site (<http://www.anewdayinc.net/>) on the subject. Publication is tentatively scheduled for spring 2006. Says Allison, "If I were someone who had been helped by the Web site, I would want to buy the book anyway. Being online isn't always as convenient. It's not portable. It's not something you can do in the bathtub."

One popular pregnancy and parenting Web site has inspired its own title. Rodale will spend \$100,000 to market *The BabyCenter Essential Guide to Pregnancy and Birth* (June), based on information from the BabyCenter Web site. Says Jackson, "One out of two pregnant women in this country visits that site for advice during pregnancy."

The Internet is also influencing design, says McCarthy of McGraw-Hill, which is using, she says, "more open design, a lot of bulleted lists and lots of personal stories to make a point" in titles such as *Eat, Play and Be Healthy* (Mar.) by W. Allan Walker, M.D., and *Your Practical Pregnancy Planner* (July) by Brette McWhorter Sember.

Platform, Platform, Who's Got the Platform?

While the Internet is not the only platform available to authors, publishers agree that in a field this crowded, writers must have a built-in promotional tool—whether it's expertise in the field or a recognizable name—in order to be published.

For Stan and Jan Berenstain, authors of *The Bear Essentials* (Random House Children's, Jan.), the solid platform is their bestselling First Time series for children, which consists of more than 25 titles, with the top sellers moving 50,000 to 75,000 copies each year. The parenting title will start with a substantially smaller 25,000-copy printing and a higher price, \$10.95 as compared to \$3.99.

Likewise, Rodale is counting on the author's name to sell *100 Promises to My Baby* by Mallika Chopra (daughter of inspirational author Deepak Chopra), a collection of "short essays, reflections, poems and stories that have inspired the author." A \$100,000 marketing campaign will support this May title's 100,000-copy first printing.

Television exposure spurred sales of *Pregnancy for Dummies* (Wiley, 1999) when the book was made into a miniseries for the Discovery channel that began airing in 2002. "It's had some legs," says Wiley publisher Diane Steele. "The first three times

when we knew the series was running, we saw a spike in sales. Now sometimes we see a spike and we look back and see the series was on."

Thinking Outside the Big Box

Wiley conducted an interesting launch early last year by rejiggering five of its For Dummies books on parenting and rebranding them as the Parent's Success Guides, for sale solely at Target stores. Now that the initial year has ended, the books will be available to the general market. Though Steele calls the Parent's Success books "derivative product," she believes they were unlikely to steal the thunder of the For Dummies series: "It's going to be an either/or situation. We have the customer one way or another."

Of the five Parent's Success titles, the top two in sales were *The Parent's Success Guide to Baby Names* and *The Parent's Success Guide to Organizing*, with *The Parent's Success Guide to Managing a Household* not far behind. "Interestingly, the two titles that were dead-on parenting [*The Parent's Success Guide to Parenting* and *The Parent's Success Guide to Baby Planning*] did not meet the level of the other three," says Steele. She called that a "nice confirmation" of an effort by Wiley to try to "hook up" parenting with other categories, such as health and education.

The launch of the Parent's Success series also gave Wiley an opportunity to examine the sales pattern at big-box stores, a lucrative but sometimes elusive outlet for publishers. The "in-and-out environment" in such stores, says Steele, calls for new material every time. She explains, "One of the big-box buyers told me that if their customers see the same thing for weeks and weeks, they won't be compelled to buy it because they think they can get it next time."

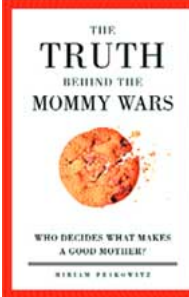
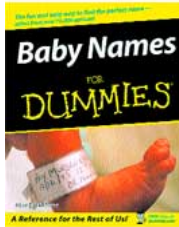
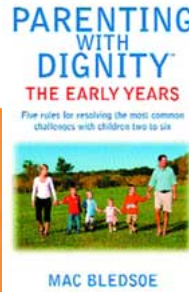
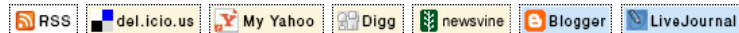
Despite innovative marketing, the question persists: How will this category compensate for its own overpopulation? What will it look like five years from now?

Perigee publisher John Duff says the trend toward seeking information from books shows no signs of abating: "Parents who started having babies a few years ago were the first generation that turned to books first rather than to their own parents. Maybe their parents ran off to Florida before they could talk to them."

"In 10 years we'll have gone through two or three cycles," says Da Capo's Cochran. "There once was 'Go ahead and smoke and drink,' then there was a backlash where you couldn't do that for 18 months and you played Mozart to the womb. In 10 years, we'll be back to 'breastfeeding is not essential and vaccinations aren't, either.'"

One thing's for certain: "Five years from now there will still be babies," conjectures Bantam Dell's Rappaport. "But beyond that it's tough to predict."

(For more on this topic, [check out a web exclusive listing of forthcoming titles](#) along with [four sidebars on teen-related books and topics](#).)



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TALKBACK

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