

# AFIN

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With this issue, the *AFIN Newsletter* of the *AFIN Research Group* begins its seventh interrupted year of publication. Six years and more than seventy issues are a lot, especially considering that this work--from planning to delivery--is carried out by volunteers who handle content, images, coordination, translation and dissemination. Many thanks to all!

Almost as if it were part of a planned celebration, this month AFIN also launches the *AFIN Service Center*, which was recognized February 20th, 2015, by the Committee on Knowledge Transfer and Strategic Projects of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The entity will of-

fer services including training, guidance and advice, support and consulting, psychological and social therapy, and research and intervention in the areas of childhood, adolescence, youthhood and family.

The incorporation of the AFIN Service Center into the AFIN Research Group has required several changes, including an image change. For this reason, we have released a new logo that changes color depending on the context: red for the research group; green for the service center.

These changes have begun to be reflected in a new web page, which is still undergoing pro-

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gramming, building and updating. The site is being developed by the *Oficina Autónoma Interactiva Docente de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona*. We hope that it will be fully accessible soon.

When we distribute this issue of the *AFIN Newsletter*, we will again ask ourselves how many people will read it, whether it will be useful to them, whether it makes sense to continue publishing it and whether the monthly frequency is the most appropriate. Therefore, we would appreciate any comments that you may wish to send us. If you don't have time to write comments but you do find the newsletter to be valuable, please hit "reply" on the email containing the newsletter and send us a blank message. We will understand any blank replies as votes in favor of continuing the newsletter.

Thank you for your presence and support.

Diana Marre

## Reviewing attachment theory

One of the most striking features of British policy relating to parents and children is the centrality of attachment theory, and its continual re-emergence in subtly different forms over the post-World War II period. For decades, childcare provision –in the form of nursery places for young children, to provide daycare for working parents– has been fraught with concern about the potentially damaging consequences of

institutional care on the mother-child attachment relationship. But in recent years, anxiety about attachment has come to focus on earlier years, in infancy and even the antenatal period; and it has focused increasingly on the quality of the mother-child relationship itself.

Thus, health policy relating to childbirth emphasises that newborn babies should be breastfed, rather than given formula milk. Part of the justification for this is that breastfeeding leads to better maternal-infant bonding, and this policy is supported by an emphasis on keeping the baby at his or her mother's side at all times, early discharge from hospital, and encouraging 'natural' birth techniques. Even before the baby is born, the concept of 'prenatal' attachment is becoming increasingly influential in highlighting the importance of a mother's feelings towards her fetus.



In a related shift, government policy on 'early intervention' is increasingly expanding its emphasis on the 'birth to five' years, by monitoring a mother's behaviour and emotional reactions from the antenatal stage. For example, at a conference on health inequalities in 2010 Naomi Eisenstadt, a former chief adviser on UK children's services, 'stressed the value of the earliest of all possible early intervention strategies –with the minus-nine months to two age group'. The phrase 'age minus-nine months to two' is now routinely used by those promoting parent training and other early intervention initiatives.

However, there is a policy contradiction within the promotion of attachment that is dominant today. Attachment theory emphasises the importance of mother-child proximity: historically, it has emphasised the problems caused for a child by having a mother (or primary caregiver) who is physically or emotionally distant. Yet

the early intervention agenda that current promotes attachment implicitly attempts to distance the mother from the child, by insisting that this relationship is monitored and intervened in by a third party. It is this policy contradiction that I explore here.

### Bonding as pseudoscience

Scholars have criticized bonding theory, calling it a 'pseudoscience,' in that it lacks empirical support. How do we account for the persistence of theories of bonding and attachment, despite challenges to their scientific credibility? In brief, the answer lies not in the science at all, but in the way that the meaning of bonding and attachment theories are continually re-defined according to wider cultural and political anxieties and agendas.

We can see this most clearly in relation to the British phenomenon known as 'Bowlbyism'. This term derives from the name of the psychiatrist John Bowlby, whose 'maternal deprivation



hypothesis' formed the basis of modern attachment theory. Bowlby's critique was of institutional care. His findings about the consequences of maternal deprivation derived from the study of orphans in wartime nurseries, who received very little physical care or emotional interaction. The term 'Bowlbyism' referred to the way that these findings became stretched by ideologues, policymakers and others to represent a critique of all institutional care, even day nurseries at-



tended by children from stable, loving families.

'Bowlbyism' arose as a response to the instability of the post-war period. Of the many upheavals caused by the war, male/female roles had been thrown into question, and there was a widely-perceived need for a cultural turn that emphasised the importance of women's role in the home. The idea that children (of whom relatively many were born, in the post-war 'baby boom' that followed the war's end) might suf-

fer 'maternal deprivation' in a nursery environment provided a pseudo-scientific argument about children's mental health to justify restrictions on women's employment.

Concerns about the mental health impacts of 'maternal deprivation' had a powerful impact in the post-war period, and continue to be circulated today, in some claims made about the alleged negative impact of nursery care upon children's emotional development. However, in recent years attachment concerns have undergone a subtle, but important, shift. The focus for policymakers is less upon ensuring the *proximity* of the mother to the infant, than it is on attempting to ensure the presumed *quality* of the maternal-infant relationship.

With Bowlbyism, the focus was on the absence of a mother. However, with the development of Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation test in the 1970s, which attempted to observe attachment relationships between a

caregiver and child, the focus shifted to the quality of mothering. The 'early intervention' strategies that form the backbone of much family policy being developed in Britain today follow this concern about 'mothering inadequacy'. Proximity between mother (or primary caregiver) and child is emphasised, particularly in relation to the promotion of practices such as breastfeeding or other practices associated with 'intensive parenting'. However, at the same time the maternal-infant dyad is opened up to intervention. Thus breastfeeding mothers are encouraged to access support from breastfeeding counsellors and healthcare professionals, and 'early intervention' strategies designed to improve attachment relationships tend to be facilitated in group settings, such as 'parenting classes', by a professional (or quasi-professional) mediator.



### The attachment paradox

This situation, whereby the attachment relationship is constructed and monitored under the expert gaze, leads to what could be described as the 'attachment paradox'. Here, a relationship that is prized because of its 'natural', emotional quality becomes prescribed as a set of behaviours (for example, breastfeeding rather than formula feeding, or reading to your child) that can and should be artificially engineered. Furthermore, experts are expected to play a role in the attachment relationship – which is considered crucial precisely because of its intimate and personal quality.

In its own terms, the 'attachment paradox' appears to express ideas that are so contradictory as to be untenable. But within the framework of parenting policy that currently operates in Britain, it is clear why the notion of expert-led 'attachment' has achieved an impetus in recent years. First, as shown by the

example of 'Bowlbyism' in the period following the Second World War, theories of bonding and attachment have historically been open to politicisation, and used to provide a scientific veneer to the prejudice of the times.

Second, improving the quality of the attachment relationship fits well with the 'explicit' parenting policy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where parent-child interaction is assumed to be an acceptable and important site for official scrutiny and intervention.

In and beyond policy circles, the basic assumption is that intensive, proximate mothering is crucial to a child's development and behaviour – *but only if it is done in the 'correct' way*. This represents a significant shift from the assumptions enshrined by Bowlbyism, which, focused on the presence (or absence) of the mother. What we see today is an assumption that it is not enough for a mother to be there; she needs to exhibit a particular range of emotions and behaviours in her inter-





actions with her child. In this regard, the prevailing culture of expert-led, intensively-monitored parenting is starkly expressed.

From the historical critiques of bonding as a 'pseudoscience', we can infer that the scientific arguments used to support present-day ideas about the quality of the attachment relationship may struggle to withstand scientific scrutiny. From the perspective of social science, the interesting point is the way that attachment theory today

appears to provide a vehicle for an increasingly intimate regulation of the mother-baby relationship.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE TEXT

### **Dra. Jennie Bristow**

She is an associate of the [Centre for Parenting Culture Studies](#) at the University of Kent. She is author of *Baby Boomers and Generational Conflict* (Palgrave Macmillan, May 2015) and *Standing Up To Supernanny* (Imprint Academic 2009), and co-author of *Parenting Culture Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014) and *Licensed to Hug* (Civitas 2008, 2010).

## ABOUT THE IMAGES

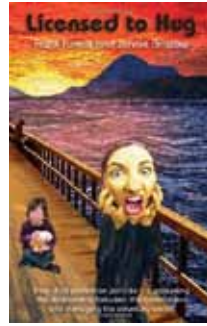
The drawings that accompany the text were made and gifted to their family by two brothers born in 1988 and 1990.

## FURTHER READING



Bristow, J. (2009)  
***Standing Up To Supernanny***  
 UK: Imprint Academic

Parenthood, we are told, requires a massive adjustment to our lives, emotions, and relationships, and we have to be taught how to deal with that. But can it really be so bad that we need constant counselling and parenting classes? It is a myth that today's parents are hopeless and lazy: in many ways, we have become too diligent, too hopeful of great outcomes and clear rewards, to the point where we lose ourselves in trying to provide some kind of professional service to our children. The current obsession with perfect parenting increases our insecurity and distrust of each other, and diminishes our authority over our kids. This book is about asking: Why have we invited Supernanny into our living rooms - and how can we kick her out? Jennie Bristow is a journalist whose writing focuses on parenting issues and inter-generational relations. attitude.



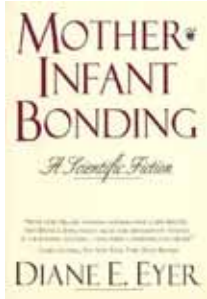
Furedi, F. & Bristow, J. (2008, 2010)  
***Licensed to Hug***  
 London: Civitas, Institute for the Study of Civil Society

Since the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau in 2002, more than a third of British adults have had to get a certificate to say they are safe to be near children, and the numbers affected are increasing. Furedi and Bristow argue that the growth of police vetting has created a sense of mistrust. Communities are forged through the joint commitment of adults to the socialisation of children. Now, the generations are becoming distant, as adults suspect each other and children are taught to suspect adults. The vetting culture encourages risk aversion: there is a feeling that it is better to ignore young people, even if they are in trouble and need help, rather than risk accusations of improper conduct. Vetting also gives a false sense of security as it can only identify those who have offended in the past and been caught, not what people will do after they are passed as fit to be near children. *Licensed to Hug* argues for a more common-sense approach to adult/child relations, based on the assumption that the vast majority of adults can be relied on to help and support children, and that the healthy interaction between generations enriches children's lives.



Furedi, F. (2001)  
***Paranoid Parenting***  
 London: Penguin (Allen Lane)

Hardly a day goes by without parents being warned of a new danger to their children's well-being. High profile campaigns convince us that our children's health, safety and development are constantly at risk. It is hardly surprising that parents become paranoid, afraid to let their children out of their sight. Even then, they are criticised by one childcare expert or another. It seems that parents can do nothing right. Parents do not know whom they can trust, but one thing is made clear to them - they cannot trust their own judgement. "Paranoid Parenting" investigates contemporary parental anxieties and suggests that these fears are themselves the most damaging influence upon children in modern society. Children are actually physically safer than they have ever been before and perhaps more in danger from the conflicting advice handed out to parents by different generations of "childcare experts". Frank Furedi explains why parents feel paranoid and looks at how they can deal with the insecurity which is fostered by experts and the media. He goes on to give examples and build a case for parents relying more on their own judgement and circumstances.



Eyer, Diane E. (1992)  
**Mother-Infant Bonding:  
 A Scientific Fiction**  
 New Haven y Londres: Yale  
 University Press.

Two decades ago two pediatricians published a series of articles and books arguing that mothers and their infants must be physically close immediately after birth in order for their future relationship to develop properly. Their studies were inspired by research on animals-especially goats-showing that they reject their offspring if they have been separated even briefly right after birth. Some child care experts expanded on this idea and proclaimed that mother-infant bonding should be continued for the first year of a child's life. In spite of the fact that the research findings on bonding have now been dismissed by most of the scientific community, women are still told that the need to bond is a reason not to go back to work after having a baby, social workers are taught that bonding is important in preventing child abuse, delinquency, and school problems, and nurses are instructed to guide new mothers through the process of bonding. Eyer traces the history of the bonding myth and explains its continuing popularity despite its demonstrated lack of validity. Most important, she shows how it reflects a disturbing tendency in our society to accept "scientific" research without question--and without awareness that it can be distorted by professional agendas and public demands.

Bristow, J. (2013). [The politics of childbirth](#). *Reproductive Review*.

Gillespie, W.H. (1952). Maternal Care and Mental Health: By J. Bowlby. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 33:73-73.

Kanieski, Mary Ann (2007). 'Best Be the Ties that Bind: Bonding and Attachment'.

Paper presented at *Monitoring Parents: Childrearing in the Age of 'Intensive Parenting.'* Hosted by the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent, May 22.

Prevention Action (2010, 23 de febrero). [Midwives – it's time to sweat that early intervention asset](#).

## FURTHER VIEWING



### **Babies**

Directed by Thomas Balmes. France, 2007. 79 min.

A documentary that follows the growth day-by-day of four babies living in various parts of the world, from birth until they take their first steps: Ponijao, in Namibia; Bayarjargal, in Mongolia; Mari, in Tokyo, Japan, and Hattie, in San Francisco, United States. (FILMAFFINITY).



### **The Physics of Love**

Directed by Diane Bonder. USA, 1998. 25 min.

Autobiographical video about the mother-daughter relationship that explores desires, domestic work, disease, violence and the ways in which the social world is inscribed on the body.



### **Who's Left Holding the Baby?**

Directed by Madeleine Morris. Australia, 2009. Two 24-minute episodes.

After having her daughter Scarlet, Madeleine Morris explores child care options in Fiji and China with an eye to social policies and the emotions surrounding the care in the West. She asks questions about our child care options, what they say about our values as a society and what we can learn from others (BBC).



## AFIN NEWS

## The AFIN Service Center has been recognized by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and other news

The first trimester has been full of events and good news for the AFIN Group:

- On February 20th, 2015, the Committee on Knowledge Transfer and Strategic Projects of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, as proposed by the vice rector of Strategic Projects and Planning approved the creation of the AFIN Service Center (Agreement 01/2015), led by Professor Diana Mare, director of the AFIN Research Group. The entity will offer services including training, guidance and advice, support and consulting, psychological and social therapy, and research and intervention in the areas of childhood, adolescence, youthhood and family.
- Diana Marre participated in the [1st International Conference on Childhood and Adolescence Moving Past Adult-centrism](#), held in Granada April 16th and 17th, 2015.
- On April 21st, AFIN researcher Yanping Liao defended her doctoral dissertation *The Culture of the Lover: Love, Emotion and Heart in the Family-based Foster Care of Disabled Children in Nanchang*. Carmen López Matheu, Joan Bestard (Universitat de Barcelona) and Anne Cadoret (CNRS Paris) served as the assessment committee.
- The AFIN Service Center and IVI Barcelona signed an agreement to collaborate in the areas

of research, the development of resources and advising on reproduction, families and childhoods.

- Bruna Alvarez, predoctoral AFIN researcher, has been awarded a scholarship to carry out an international research stay with the Reproduction Research Group of De Montfort University (Leicester, UK), under the supervision of Dr. Nicky Hudson.
- Diana Marre participated in the [4th Conference on Childhood Studies](#) *The public in the private and the private in the public: society, politics and State*, which was held in Buenos Aires April 22th-24th, 2015. She presented the doctoral seminar [Anthropological studies about politics, justice and reproductive governance in an era of "demographic anxiety" and "reproductive outsourcing": What decisions and by whom?](#) at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras of the Universidad de Buenos Aires April 27th-May 5th.

## For your calendar...

The AFIN Research Group is preparing the following events:

- The AFIN Service Center will participate in the Invitra assisted reproduction convention, which will be held at the Hotel Sants in Barcelona [May 8th-10th](#).
- Together with GRAPP and GENI, AFIN is organizing the conference *"Demographic anxiety, reproductive rights and globalized maternity/paternity in an era of 'austerity'"*, which will take place at the Facultat de Geografia i Història of the Universitat de Barcelona [May 25th, 2015](#). The conference will include the participation of Dr. Wendy Chavkin, an expert in health and reproductive policies from Columbia University (New York).
- In May, the series "Aperitius dels dijous AFIN" will host Victòria Badia's seminar *"Spaces and stigma"*, Alicia Paramita's seminar *"Questions of reproduction on the Island of Flores (Indonesia)"* and Bruna Alvarez's seminar *"Maternity and structural infertility"*. The last seminar, *"Anthropology in help and support for adoptive families"*, will be presented by Beatriz San Román on June 1st. The seminar by Dr. Dolors Comas and Dr. Paola Galbany on *"Care in the 19th and 20th centuries"*, scheduled for May 21st, has been canceled for external reasons.
- [September 5th-7th, 2016](#) the 7th Iberomeric Conference on Qualitative Health Research will

be held at the Universitat de Barcelona. The conference theme is *Citizenship and transdisciplinarity: weaving networks*. Organizers expect more than 600 researchers from Spain, Portugal and Latin America. This will permit attendees to share experiences, knowledge, perspectives, positions and proposals and strengthen collaborative work and the construction of international research networks. The event, organized by the Universitat de Barcelona and the AFIN Group of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, aims to promote qualitative health research in Latin America, as it has done in previous events in Mexico (2003), Spain (2005), Puerto Rico (2008), Brazil (2010), Lisbon (2012) and Colombia (2014). The aim is to focus on five central themes: health and disease; transdisciplinarity and group work; ethics; epistemology and methodology; and training/education in qualitative research. Health problems compounded by the economic crisis and inequality, which mainly affect the most vulnerable populations (children, immigrants, the elderly, the chronically ill, and women), will be the main focus of the conference.

## AFIN Springtime Cinema

Held on Thursdays in March, "AFIN Springtime Cinema" was a series of four film screenings focused on childhoods and reproductive politics. The series was organized by the AFIN Group with the collaboration of Cultura en Viu and the support of the *Vicerektorat d'Estudiants i Cooperació*. *Un sitio donde quedarse* (2014), directed by Maria Arribas and Ana Pérez de la Fuente, was the first film in the series. This documentary tells the story of two young people in Madrid who at age 18 leave the juvenile center where they grew up. The event's speakers were Dr. Carme López and family support specialist Josep M<sup>a</sup> Cabanes. The next film was *Els anys robats de Xavi* (2013), a documentary by Gustavo Franco that relates the story of an irregular adoption. The director as well as protagonists Xavi López and Francisco Cárdenas participated in the event. The third session focused on "prohibited" pregnancies and "maternity homes" in the US through the film *A girl like her* (United States, 2011) by Ann Fessler. Dr. Silva de Zordo offered an analysis of the film, pointing out the absence of the topic of abortion in the film. The final film in the series was the emotional *Piel color miel* (Belgium, 2012), directed by Laurent Boileau and Jung Henin. It tells the autobiographical story of Jung as he went from street child, to institutionalized child to child of Korean origin adopted by a Belgian family. Participants in the session included Dr. Aurora González, Dr. Beatriz San Román and the anthropologists Diana Arias and Chandra Clemente.



## AFIN Seminars

In March, the series “*Aperitius dels dijous AFIN*” offered four seminars. Anthropologist Diana Arias shared her ethnography and discussed “*La metodología de los itinerarios comentados en el contexto de la adopción*,” Dr. Diana Marre presented “*The appropriation of children and the theft of babies sin Spain: fear, public secrets and state of exception*,” Dr. Dolors Comas spoke about “*Political Anthropology*” and Beatriz San Román spoke about “*Fluxes in the demand for transnational adoption*.” The following seminars took place in the month of April: “*Challenges and strategies for care in Catalonia: (re) organization or reproduction of inequalities*,” by Mireia Roca; “*Adopted children in adolescence: family responsibilities and outside supports*,” by Dr. Tomasa Báñez; “*The desire to have children*” by Bruna Alvarez; and finally Antònia Arreciado and Paola Galbany presented “*Analysis of ethnographic data with Dedoose*.”

## 9th AFIN International Conference

On November 20th-21st in Valladolid, AFIN will hold its 9th International Conference, “*Is Spain a country for children and youth?: Questioning adulthood*,” organized in collaboration with the Arfacyl Association, the Council of Castilla y Leon, Social Services of Castilla y Leon and the Universidad de Valladolid.



## Fieldwork on the Island of Flores

Alicia Paramita Rebuelta Cho, FPU doctoral student in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and member of the AFIN Research Group, is working on her thesis, provisionally entitled *Gender and cosmology on the Island of Flores, Indonesia*. Paramita has recently completed her first period of fieldwork on Flores. During this first contact, her main site was RSUD Dr. T.C. Hillers, a general hospital in the city of Maumere, the capital of *Kabupaten Sikka* (one of the island's eight regencies). There Paramita was able to participate in the daily routines of the birth and postpartum room, where she observed and spoke with the protagonists. The majority of patients, family members and health personnel were of the Sikka ethnicity. Her experiences enabled her to form a general vision of the meaning of motherhood and family as well as other related cultural concepts. Her first report on her experiences will take place on May 14th 2015 at 1 pm at the a Sala de Junes de la Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona as part of the “*Aperitius dels dijous AFIN*.” These sessions are open to the public.

