Professional child rearing advice in the early 20th century: american and international perspectives
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Abstract
Professional advice to parents in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries came first from pediatricians and then gradually began to include psychologists. Many of these early developmental psychologists were trained through efforts of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial in America in the 1920’s. This paper will look at the advice given to parents both from first generation developmental psychologists in America, and from psychologists who were located internationally.

Keywords: Child rearing; professional advise.

1. Introduction
Child care stretches back to antiquity. The Ebers Papyrus written about 1552 BC discussed a variety of topics including breastfeeding, a cure for worms, and treatment for eye diseases. Soranus, practicing medicine in Ephesus (c.100 BC) in what is now modern Turkey, described a fingernail test for breast milk. If the droplet clings to the fingernail, it contains sufficient fat for the baby. If it does not, it is too watery.

2. Early Scientific Pediatrics and Advice to Parents
Pediatrics as a distinct specialty began in the latter half of the 19th century. The industrial revolution resulted in the urbanization of a rural population and this population shift had a significant effect on the development of a medical specialty dedicated to the special needs of infants. And the increased cost of living in cities required many women to leave home for work in factories resulting in an increase in artificial means of feeding.

But at the turn of the last century, this could be a dangerous practice. Mahnke maintains that high infant mortality figures, at least in part due to artificial feeding, was a major factor in the development of pediatric specialty. Pediatricians were often referred to as baby feeders. If breast feeding was not possible, parents had to rely on various concoctions of questionable nutritional value. In order to combat the high mortality rate, one
mission of early pediatrics was to investigate the composition of breast milk in order to produce a safe alternative to using what was unsanitary dairy milk.

It was not until 1885 that Arthur Meigs published a reasonably accurate analysis of both human and cow’s milk. Shortly afterwards Thomas Rotch, who served as the first professor of pediatrics at Harvard introduced detailed instruction of how pediatricians and parents could produce formula, but his methods were complicated. A much more practical approach was that of L. Emmett Holt.

Emmett Holt (1855-1924) was the most visible pediatrician of his time. He was the physician in chief at Babies Hospital in New York from 1888-1924 and professor of diseases of children at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons from 1901-1920. His most famous book, Care and Feeding of Children was first published in 1894 was the most successful child care manual during the first half of the twentieth century going through 12 editions and translated into many languages.

Holt’s book devotes an entire chapter to feeding, the preparation of formula, and even provided readers with a procedure to Pasteurize dairy milk. But he also strays into areas that would today be considered a psychologist’s territory. For example, Holt advises that caretakers not play with their babies until six months and never earlier than four months or before bedtime. He explains that play with very young infants makes them “nervous and irritable” and that they may “suffer in other respects.”

3. The Transition to Psychology: Development of Applications and Results

The purpose of this paper is to take a look at early 20th century advice to parents. The scope will be to take a look at early pediatricians such as Holt, but also to survey the early contributions of developmental psychology. Hall’s advice to parents will be briefly examined (who would refer to Holt’s book in his own work), but in more detail attention will be given to the contributions from psychologists who were part of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial’s efforts to develop a scientific developmental psychology in the 1920’s (who would also refer to Holt in their work). Most of this latter group of psychologists wrote extensively for The Parents’ Magazine, between its foundation in 1926 and the mid 1930’s, and it is from these articles, editorials, and essays that this paper will be based. These authors include Leta S. Hollingworth (1929), Lois Hayden Meek (1928), and Helen T. Woolley of Teacher’s College (1931), John Anderson (1932) and Florence Goodenough (1933) at Minnesota, George Stoddard at Iowa (1933), and William Blatz at Toronto (1933). Effort is made to present the major themes and insights that this sometimes varied group of psychologists presented to parents. International psychologists and cross cultural researchers will also be featured. Some of these include Alfred Adler (1929), Bruno Lasker (1928), Margaret Mead (1929), and Angelo Patri (1932).

References