

Research project A9

Early Childhood Socialization and Intergenerational Transmission since 1900

Mitarbeiter

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Project description

In early childhood socialization, the first and fundamental steps of cultural transfer in society take place. This raises questions about continuing and starting anew, questions about how attributions of meaning are perpetuated or modified in society. The issues are evident not only in the ways in which infants and small children are cared for, but also in the images of humanity they presuppose. It also has implications for the integration of the individual in society—how it is thought about and how it should proceed and which futures this society ultimately has in mind.

A concrete framework for our project is Germany in the 20th century. The objects of study are scientific and popular discourses of experts on infant care and raising small children, as well as the reception of such discourses in families.

Popular advice books on raising children have proven to be a particularly fruitful source in the first phase of support for our project. Some of these, such as the famous "Die (deutsche) Mutter und ihr erstes Kind" [The (German) Mother and Her First Child] by Johanna Haarer, went through several editions (albeit only slightly revised) from the Nazi period through the postwar years and into the 1980s; they were passed down in families from generation to generation. In the second phase of the project, we are now examining more closely the paths of transmission within families. How did the specialist's knowledge come to individual mothers and fathers, what parts of it were received, and – most importantly – what was passed on to the next generation? To be able to clarify this point, crucial for historical research on socialization, we are assessing a source which has not yet been "discovered" by the scholarship: baby diaries, i.e., diaries that parents start when their children are born in order to check on their development and provide them with memories. These diaries are not only a revealing literary form about the individual processing of social views; they also serve as a family tradition extending across generations so that we are dealing with a medium which can make continuities and ruptures in families somewhat more transparent.