



# Deconstructing Developmental Psychology

By Erica Burman

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What is childhood and why, and how, did psychology come to be the arbiter of 'correct' or 'normal' development? How do actual lived childhoods connect with theories about child development? In this completely revised and updated edition, *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* interrogates the assumptions and practices surrounding the psychology of child development, providing a critical evaluation of the role and contribution of developmental psychology within social practice.

In the decade since the first edition was published, there have been many major changes. The role accorded childcare experts and the power of the 'psy complex' have, if anything, intensified. This book addresses how shifts in advanced capitalism have produced new understandings of children, and a new (and more punitive) range of institutional responses to children. It engages with the paradoxes of childhood in an era when young adults are increasingly economically dependent on their families, and in a political context of heightened insecurity. The new edition includes an updated review of developments in psychological theory (in attachment, evolutionary psychology, theory of mind, cultural-historical approaches), as well as updating and reflecting upon the changed focus on fathers and fathering. It offers new perspectives on the connections between Piaget and Vygotsky and now connects much more closely with discussions from the sociology of childhood and critical educational research. Coverage has been expanded to include more material on child rights debates, and a new chapter addresses practice dilemmas around child protection, which engages even more with the "raced" and gendered effects of current policies involving children.

This engaging and accessible text provides key resources to inform better professional practice in social work, education and health contexts. It offers critical insights into the politics and procedures that have shaped developmental psychological knowledge. It will be essential reading for anyone working with children, or concerned with policies around children and families. It was also of interest to students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels across a range of professional and practitioner groups, as well as parents and policy makers.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

*"This book by Erica Burman is lucid work."* – **Conchi San Martin in Feminist Review**

*"I think this book would make a challenging text for senior undergraduate and postgraduate courses that examine notions of development in psychology, counselling, social work, international development studies or education."* - **Lise Bird Claiborne, University of Waikato, New Zealand, in Feminism & Psychology**

*"This book is a powerful text in unearthing oppressive discourses, constructing knowledge in a way that promotes the interests of the oppressed whilst equipping the reader with not only a critical education, but also with new, less problematic, ways to engage with the world beyond the book."* - **Bróna Nic Giolla Easpaig & David Fryer, Charles Sturt University, NSW, Australia, in Forum: Qualitative Social Research**

*"This accessible book is essential reading."* – **Yvette Solomon in Gender and Education**

*"I would recommend this book for all those who work in developmental psychology, as well as parents who may also find many helpful, reassuring reflections."* – **Belinda Medhurst in Educational Psychology in Practice**

*"This completely revised new edition raises many new and compelling questions about the ways in which "experts" have tried to "understand" children. It presents a unique intermingling of discussions of contemporary research about young children with every day examples from children's lives; as such the book is refreshingly readable and will appeal to a wide ranging audience. Every aspiring scholar of childhood should be required to read this book."* - **Radhika Viruru, Texas A&M University**

*"This book brings into clear focus how history, geography, culture and politics have shaped the concerns and concepts of developmental psychology and produced powerful, often oppressive, effects for children. Engaging with Burman's detailed and compelling arguments should be mandatory for all students and researchers of children's lives. A book to provoke, debate and inspire other ways to know and be with children."* - **Professor Glenda Mac Naughton, Director of the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.**

*"This book is a vital resource for all who are engaged in trying to deconstruct and border cross the hegemonic role of developmental psychology in the field of early childhood education and childhood studies. Due to the author's own impressive familiarity both with the field, but also with discourses outside the field, it has been possible to identify and evaluate what is taken for given in the field. What makes the book particularly compelling is the effort to bring in historical accords in relation to the new geopolitical situation."* - **Gunilla Dahlberg, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Stockholm Institute of Education, Stockholm, Sweden**

*"This version is even better than the first, with new, contemporary, compelling examples of the social-political context of developmental psychology. Burman is critical yet positive, bold yet thoughtful,*

*provocative yet balanced, and deconstructive yet constructive. After reading this book you'll never think about attachment, families, or language learning in the same way again."* - **Patricia H. Miller, Ph.D., Professor and Head, Dept. of Psychology, University of Georgia**

*"The first edition of this book was cutting edge and visionary in its sustained, critical analysis of developmental psychological theories and assumptions. This new edition takes forward its innovatory focus by updating the concerns of the first edition and situating them in changes in the geopolitical and developmental psychology landscape over the last 15 years. The clarity of its writing makes it invaluable and accessible to both academic audiences and interested laypeople."* – **Ann Phoenix, Professor of Social and Developmental Psychology, the Open University and Co-Director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London**

#### About the Author

**Erica Burman** is Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is an internationally renowned researcher, teacher and activist, as well as group analyst, bringing critical methodological and interpretive resources for the re-evaluation of the uses of developmental psychology in health and educational contexts and social policy. Her work supports critical and reflexive professional practice with and for women and children.

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