



Family Trouble: Middle-Class Parents, Children's Problems, and the Disruption of Everyday Life

By Ara Francis

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Family Trouble: Middle-Class Parents, Children's Problems, and the Disruption of Everyday Life By Ara Francis

Our children mean the world to us. They are so central to our hopes and dreams that we will do almost anything to keep them healthy, happy, and safe. What happens, then, when a child has serious problems? In *Family Trouble*, a compelling portrait of upheaval in family life, sociologist Ara Francis tells the stories of middle-class men and women whose children face significant medical, psychological, and social challenges.

Francis interviewed the mothers and fathers of children with such problems as depression, bi-polar disorder, autism, learning disabilities, drug addiction, alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome, and cerebral palsy. Children's problems, she finds, profoundly upset the foundations of parents' everyday lives, overturning taken-for-granted expectations, daily routines, and personal relationships. Indeed, these problems initiated a chain of disruption that moved through parents' lives in domino-like fashion, culminating in a crisis characterized by uncertainty, loneliness, guilt, grief, and anxiety. Francis looks at how mothers and fathers often differ in their interpretation of a child's condition, discusses the gendered nature of child rearing, and describes how parents struggle to find effective treatments and to successfully navigate medical and educational bureaucracies. But above all, *Family Trouble* examines how children's problems disrupt middle-class dreams of the "normal" family. It captures how children's problems "radiate" and spill over into other areas of parents' lives, wreaking havoc even on their identities, leading them to reevaluate deeply held assumptions about their own sense of self and what it means to achieve the good life.

Engagingly written, *Family Trouble* offers insight to professionals and solace to parents. The book offers a clear message to anyone in the throes of family trouble: you are in good company, and you are not as different as you might feel...

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Editorial Review

Review

"This smart, engaging book demonstrates the complicated nature of parenthood - a salient identity for most adults in the United States today. Especially impressive is Francis's ability to weave through multiple sociological constructs and subfields, including medicalization, stigma, identity, emotion work, gender, and disability."

(*American Journal of Sociology*)

"An exquisite and magnificent piece of sociological scholarship, *Family Trouble* is clear, interesting, and highly engaging. Francis's study and analysis are rich and nuanced as she covers the many dimensions of the phenomenon she calls 'family trouble.'"

(Eviatar Zerubavel *author of Hidden in Plain Sight as well as Ancestors and Relatives*)

"*Family Trouble* offers rich, empirically based insights into the everyday, relational and emotional processes that mark the distinctive forms of 'concerted cultivation' pursued by contemporary middle-class American families with 'problemated' children."

(Robert M. Emerson *professor emeritus of sociology at UCLA*)

About the Author

ARA FRANCIS is an assistant professor of sociology at the College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts..

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