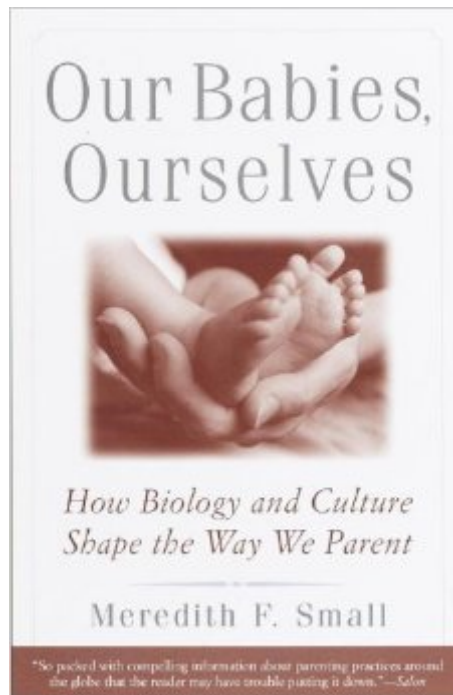


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# Our Babies, Ourselves: How Biology And Culture Shape The Way We Parent



## Synopsis

New parents are faced with innumerable decisions to make regarding the best way to care for their baby, and, naturally, they often turn for guidance to friends and family members who have already raised children. But as scientists are discovering, much of the trusted advice that has been passed down through generations needs to be carefully reexamined. A thought-provoking combination of practical parenting information and scientific analysis, *Our Babies, Ourselves* is the first book to explore why we raise our children the way we do--and to suggest that we reconsider our culture's traditional views on parenting. In this ground-breaking book, anthropologist Meredith Small reveals her remarkable findings in the new science of ethnopediatrics. Professor Small joins pediatricians, child-development researchers, and anthropologists across the country who are studying to what extent the way we parent our infants is based on biological needs and to what extent it is based on culture--and how sometimes what is culturally dictated may not be what's best for babies. Should an infant be encouraged to sleep alone? Is breast-feeding better than bottle-feeding, or is that just a myth of the nineties? How much time should pass before a mother picks up her crying infant? And how important is it really to a baby's development to talk and sing to him or her? These are but a few of the important questions Small addresses, and the answers not only are surprising but may even change the way we raise our children.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although it isn't a "How to" book, "Our Babies, Ourselves" is by far the best book I've read on baby rearing. Meredith Small presents different cultures' techniques for raising children, then

analyzes them using an anthropological perspective. Small examines how these cultures differ in such areas as nursing, where babies sleep, carrying babies, and how quickly to respond to a baby's cries. Small names specific studies as evidence. She uses research evidence, as well as her experience, to draw conclusions on benefits and drawbacks to these various approaches. She is not "objective" as one reviewer states -- she has her opinions, but she informs the reader what evidence and reasoning she bases her conclusions on. The main message I get from the "How To" baby books I've read is "You should raise your child the way we say because we're smarter than you." Whether it's "What to Expect the First Year," the Sears books (which I agree with much of) or others (not to mention "Babywise"), the most evidence these authors give is "(unnamed and unexplained) studies say we're right." Small presents the evidence in favor of quick response when baby is hungry, crying, or has another need. She also favors co-sleeping and slings for carrying babies, based on the research she presents. You can disagree with her conclusions (though I agree with most), but at least she is open with her evidence. Besides further opening my eyes to other cultures and other ways to raise babies, this book was most beneficial to me in emphasizing that evolution determines how the human race developed and why babies have the needs they do. People pushing in the 1950's and 60's for bottle feeding, putting babies face down to sleep, letting babies cry it out, putting babies in separate rooms to sleep, etc., not only did it without scientific evidence, they also were going against babies' biological needs, determined by millions of years of evolution. Now I think of evolution and what reasons babies have for a particular behavior when deciding how to deal with an issue.

I highly recommend "Our Babies, Ourselves" to any parent interested in an anthropologically and biologically-oriented approach to parenthood, especially motherhood. It provides numerous data on how biology affects the parent-baby relationship as well as the baby's behavior and objectively presents how various cultures (including the United States') worldwide accommodate and/or neglect these biological factors and the impact that accommodation or neglect has on the parent/baby relationship. I got this book when my baby was 3 months old and for me it confirmed every instinct I had as a first-time mother who knew nothing of raising a child prior to having one. I carry my baby in a pouch any time I can; I breastfeed; I'd let the baby sleep in my bed if I could (my husband and I have a waterbed and it's not safe for babies), etc. All of these behaviors are highly, highly beneficial to babies for specific biological reasons. This is not a "how to" book, nor does it promote any particular approach to child rearing. It is objective and actually rather academic in nature, yet intriguing and easy-to-understand. Read the book! It's worth it!

I love this book! From day one with my son, I felt the instinct to breastfeed him on cue, hold him all day, and co-sleep with him at night. Needless to say, I received much unwanted and ill-advised advice to do just the opposite. Thankfully I am stubborn and I refused to do anything that went against my mommy instinct. This is a wonderful book that not only validates all of the above practices, but explains why our US culture is so adamantly against them. I have given this book as a gift to moms-to-be to show them that there is another way to parent. Thank you Meredith Small!

Small's book on the biological and cultural influences on human development and parenting provides some real food for thought. I found it so fascinating that I finished it too quickly and wished I had more to read. The extensive reference list should be helpful in that respect. It can be so hard to get out of the rut of what you are used to, even when you actively attempt to do so. This book provides some real examples of how parenting is done in other parts of the world, as well as what the biological reality of the infant is (which often clashes significantly with Western practices). I found the anecdotes very helpful for adding to a repertoire of mental responses for various situations - the story of the gorilla raised in isolation from other gorillas who couldn't breastfeed her baby properly (can be used to argue for our society's need to be more exposed to breastfeeding) and the story of the "difficult" and "easy" Masai babies, in which the difficult babies were much more likely to survive a famine because they were best at alerting others to their needs (helpful in arguing with people who think "demanding" babies are bad babies). I also enjoyed the photographs. A very nice touch. This was honestly one of the most riveting books I've read. I hope that others will read it and give some of the perspectives a chance.

I've really enjoyed this book - its extremely interesting and thought provoking and well written. However, it also gets pretty in depth into evolutionary science and biology. I have enjoyed that quite a bit and learned an awful lot, but it is definitely not light reading as far as that goes. It is more scientific than I expected, which I actually like a great deal, but it is different from what I originally thought I was buying. This book is less of a "how to raise your child" type book and more of an "evolutionary and biological cross cultural study of infants and children and how different child rearing practices influence personality and culture". Which I found absolutely fascinating myself. I highly recommend the book - but with the caveat that you need time to sit down and concentrate on it, which is hard to do with small children around!

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