

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE – POINTS OF VIEW

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE:

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BIRTH AND VIOLENCE

Abstract: It takes much neglect, rejection, humiliation, physical maltreatment and sexual abuse to transform a tiny, trusting, innocent human being into a callous, cruel and vicious youth and adult. This paper will examine some of the factors that contribute to the development of the violent personality. It is suggested that the answer to street violence is not state violence. The answer is conscious parenting supported by social institutions, laws and practices which attend to the needs of pregnant parents, particularly, the disadvantaged.

INTRODUCTION

We all decry the fact that this planet is slowly but inexorably being violated and poisoned by its inhabitants. We rail helplessly against a rising tide of child abuse, wife battering, drug addiction, serial murder, internecine warfare and suicide. We denounce, damn and blame everything and everybody in sight: the politicians, the criminal justice system, multi-nationals, the media, poverty, the decline of moral values; the list is endless. The solution escapes us because we have not looked for it in the right place. We have been blind to our beginnings. Where does a person first experience feelings of love, rejection, anxiety and sadness? Where does a person first learn about interacting with people and the world? Where are basic character traits formed? In the first school we ever attend. - our mother's womb. It is here that we receive our introduction courses in love, neglect, hate, anxiety, trust and empathy. It is here that we need to look for the roots of violence.

I have entitled my paper "Birth and Violence because I wish to focus on factors related to birth and after birth that cause an infant to become cut off from his feelings and filled with rage. Of course, we all know that way before birth, the unborn may be exposed to physical and psychological violence.

Let us consider for a moment the histories of two notorious killers, as told by David Chamberlain (1995).

David Edwin Mason and Robert Alton Harris spent their final years on Death Row before they were gassed by the State of California in 1991 and 1993 respectively for heinous crimes of violence. The dossier on Mason reveals him to have been a sad, lonely child whose mother tried to induce a miscarriage to avoid having him in the first place, and was never allowed to forget that he was unwanted. Older sisters describe a household where hugging or laughter was prohibited, and in which young David was beaten almost daily with his father's belt or his mother's switch or pancake turner.

When only five, the child attempted suicide by swallowing a bottle of pills and set his clothing on fire. At eight, he was taking out his hostility by setting fires at church and at school. His parents started to lock him away in a room they called "the dungeon"--a bedroom with the windows nailed shut. Persistent bed wetting, and worse, were countered by parading David with the soiled clothes wrapped around his head.

At age 23, Mason went on a nine-month killing spree in the neighborhood where he had grown up, strangling four elderly men and women. He later confessed that it was "something I have always wanted to do."

Harris's beginnings were strikingly similar. He was born three months premature after his mother was kicked so brutally in the abdomen by an angry husband, that she began hemorrhaging. As in the Mason family, both parents inflicted frequent beatings--the father with his fists, causing a broken jaw when Robert was not yet two. Sitting at the table, if Robert reached out for something without his father's permission, he would end up with a fork in the back of his hand.

For sport, father would load his gun and tell the children they had 30 minutes to hide outside the house, after which he would hunt them like animals, threatening to shoot anyone he found. The senior Harris was jailed for sexually molesting his daughters, while the mother smoked and drank herself to death.

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Like Mason, young Harris soon began showing anger towards animals and people. At twenty-five he shot two San Diego teenagers to death. Prosecutors told the jury that Harris taunted the victims before they died, laughed at them after he pulled the trigger, then calmly ate the hamburgers they had bought for lunch. In an editorial on the occasion of Mason's execution, former U.S. Congressman Lionel Van Deerlin of San Diego concluded: "Such persons must be put away, of course. But can society feel comfortable when providing the final touch to a pattern of violence, which may literally have begun in the mother's womb?" Congressman Van Deerlin has good insight. I just wish more scientists and health professionals would share it.

The womb is not always the safe, loving, oceanic bliss that we all, according to popular belief, long to return to. For many, in fact, it is a dangerous and often painful abode. Exiting from it can be quick and relatively easy or quite horrendous. Each physiological event will leave a psychological imprint.

BIRTH AND LIFE SCRIPTS

A number of studies report findings suggesting the possibility of a relationship between birth complications and violent behavior (Litt 1972). They offer the hypothesis that birth complications result in brain damage that predisposes a child to impulsive and aggressive behavior (Mungas 1983).

In 1960 Mednick (1971) studied the records of violent criminals in the Danish penal system. Fifteen of the sixteen most violent criminals were found to have had an extraordinarily difficult birth and the sixteenth had an epileptic mother.

In a recent Danish study (Kandel and Mednick 1991) 15 violent criminals and 24 property criminals were compared with 177 non-offenders on pregnancy and delivery events. Delivery complications such as ruptured uterus, umbilical cord prolapse, difficult labor, etc., predicted violent offending, especially in subjects whose parents were psychiatrically disturbed.

Psychologist Adrian Raine and co-workers at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, report a significant association between birth complications and early maternal rejection and violent crime at age 18. While only 4.5% of the subjects had both risk factors, this small group accounted for 18% of all violent crimes. The effect was specific to violence and was not observed for non-violent criminal acts (Raine et al. 1990).

These and other studies very clearly show that personality is shaped, for better or worse, by a chain of events or risk factors that start often before conception and continue through the life span. Because every biological process has a psychological correlate everything that happens to us, especially at the beginning of life, permanently affects us. Whether your mother was awake or asleep when you were born, whether you were delivered vaginally or by C-section, whether you roomed in with your mother or spent four weeks in an incubator--these things matter enormously.

Both children and adults report having memories of birth. What we observe in birth memories is consistent with what we find in modern research: the newborn's brain, nervous system, and physical senses are active and coordinated; a normal range of human emotions is felt and expressed while the infant's mind is alert, perceptive, exploring, and busy incorporating each new experience.

How do we welcome into the family of humankind these new, highly aware and discerning beings? From the darkness and silence of the womb we bring them out into a blaze of blinding lights, a cacophony of noise and harsh voices. Vulnerable spines which have always been curved are whiplashed as we grab newcomers by the ankles (thank goodness a diminishing practice). We further terrify children by suctioning mucus out of their mouths and placing antibiotic drops into their eyes which not only sting but also cloud vision so that everything around becomes a blur. If the babies show any signs of jaundice, their heels are lanced to obtain blood for lab work. After a few minutes of recovery on their mothers breast (if the woman is not unconscious from the anesthetics and painkillers), the babies, whose skin at this point is extraordinarily sensitive, are wrapped tightly in cloth that to them feels like sandpaper. Finally, they are banished to the nursery to recuperate from their ordeal in the midst of twenty or thirty screaming newborns. And this is "a good birth!"

If babies are premature, born with a congenital defect, or otherwise ill, they are taken to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). And God help them there!

What is the effect of this painful, sensory overload on babies? Firstly, they don't thrive as well as they should. Secondly, they become psychologically traumatized. The helplessness, the grief of separation from mother, the absence of touching, the constant fear of being hurt, the rage, the anger--these are feelings permanently recorded in their memory banks. These memories do not evaporate, they do not disappear. If subsequently, the child is loved and nurtured the negative charge attached to these memories can be gradually diminished. If, on the other hand, the child is further traumatized by rejection, abuse or neglect,

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these early experiences will be reinforced and they will come to act like pacemakers in his mind driving him towards increasingly destructive modes of behavior.

EARLY PARENTING AND ATTACHMENT

Louise Kaplan (1996), an American psychoanalyst, when discussing the importance of mother-infant bonding, says the following:

Were it for not this dialogue, the chaotic excitements and crude appetites of the infant could not be transformed into the desires and longings that enable him to live a fully human life.

And then again:

In her moments of tension and need, a helpless baby can be ruthless. She possesses and destroys the breast that feeds her. She devours the arms that hold her. She rids herself of her body products without any concern. A mother's presence in a baby's life absorbs, contains, and tolerates the baby's unruly lusts and thereby tames and humanizes them. The mother's attunement to her baby's crude and inchoate excitements transforms them into socialized human emotions and affects.

This view of the newborn as an aggressive destructive, cannibalistic creature is fairly representative of orthodox psychoanalysis in general and Melanie Klein (1952) in particular. It is based on the analyses of highly neurotic adults and severely traumatized children. It is like saying that all human livers are scarred and non-functioning on the basis of autopsies of the livers of alcoholics only.

I firmly believe that all mammalian infants including the human infant are hard-wired to develop loving relationships with their fellow species. Whether or not they do so depends entirely on how they are treated. Such an argument is strengthened by findings which show that neural pathways for altruism and aggression may be reciprocally related, so that aggression reflects a deficit in endogenous opiates, whereas their secretion reduces aggressiveness by promoting social comfort and play.

Attachment and attunement occur at a psychological as well as at a physiological level right from the beginning of the mother-infant relationship.

Studies on the importance of the maternal-infant bond (and lately--paternal bond) are relatively recent. In 1945 Rene Spitz (Garnezy 1985) studied two groups of infants who received vastly different kinds of mothering (Kaplan 1996).

In one group, the mothers were imprisoned delinquent girls, who were encouraged to care for their babies every day in the prison nursery. Most of these girls were not very intelligent and had never mothered a baby before. Yet in their easygoing, spontaneous way, they gave their babies the kind of one-to-one attention and care that human babies thrive on. In the other group, for one reason or another--the mother's death, an illness in the family, financial stress--infants had been deposited for various periods of time, ranging from a few months to several years, in a foundling home. These infants were cared for by intelligent, experienced, highly trained nurses, who efficiently dispensed the food, clothing, and physical care that human children require. But there was only one head nurse and five assistant nurses for forty-five babies. No time was wasted on play or talk.

Whereas the infants in the prison nursery were emotionally responsive and animated, and physically flourishing, the foundlings would lie in their cribs in a stupor, staring at nothing, until many of them simply withered away and died. Those who had more physical resilience did not die. They would, however, make their desperate hunger for human contact evident by spending their waking hours weaving their fingers in front of their eyes, as though eyes and hands were engaged in a meaningful dialogue.

Most of the infants who had been foundlings since birth and never experienced a human attachment, could not recover even after Spitz arranged to provide them with intimate, one-to-one attention and care. Remarkably, some of the bonding-deprived infants were still able to respond to the invitation to engage in dialogue. But their initial contacts with an animated, responsive caregiver aroused an intense and unmanageable anxiety in the bonding-deprived infants, who reacted with a violence rarely seen in children. They would tear their clothing and bedsheets into shreds. They would bite the other children in the nursery and tear their own hair out by the fistful (Kaplan 1996).

Scientists began to wonder why and how infants were affected by the loss of a mother. In the 70's Harry and Margaret Harlow (Harlow and Mears 1979) began to research these and related topics in their primate laboratories at the University of Wisconsin.

In Harlow's study, eight rhesus monkeys were separated from their biological mothers immediately after birth. Each infant was placed in its own private cage containing two surrogate mothers, neither of them alive. One was a "terry cloth mother," a block of wood layered with spongy rubber and covered with terry cloth. The other was a "wire mother," a wire mesh construction of the same size and shape as the terry

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cloth mother. For four of the infants, only the terry cloth mother was fitted with a feeding nipple, while for the other four, only the wire mother had the feeding nipple.

In a few months, all eight rhesus infants were firmly attached to their terry cloth mothers. When, in another series of experiments with a different group of rhesus infants, Harlow added heat and a rocking motion to the terry cloth mother, she became a magnet of love. The attachment of the rhesus babies became resolute. They would cling to her for sixteen to eighteen hours a day. When Harlow's infant rhesus monkeys grew up, their repertoire of emotional responses was limited to clinging attachment and destructive aggression. Aside from an urgent and almost continual need to hold onto familiar, soft, furry-like objects, they bit and tore at paper, cloth, their own bodies, and the bodies of other rhesus monkeys as though they had no way of discriminating animate from inanimate. Some carried around shredded remnants of their original terry cloth mothers, some hugged and cuddled with their siblings, but they could not tolerate any sort of reciprocal interactive relationship (Kaplan 1996).

The majority of monkeys who survived early maternal deprivation were unable to mate as adults. Those that did or were artificially impregnated were unable to take care of their young. In fact, more often than not, they attacked them viciously.

Gradually, through the pioneering works of Bowlby, and Klaus and Kennell, we have gained a deeper understanding of the sensitive period after birth during which the baby and parents learn to know and love each other. If this period is interfered with by sickness or absence of one of the participants, or if the mother or father reject the newborn child, then the child will begin to withdraw. This does not mean, for example, that every preemie who is sent to a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), will automatically be scarred for life, but it does mean that parents need to try harder to connect with babies in the NICU and thereafter.

THE UNWANTED CHILD

Studies of mothers who petitioned but were denied a legal medical abortion tell us a lot about the effects of prenatal rejection on children. Research from Finland, Sweden and Czechoslovakia is instructive in this respect. Blomberg (1980) observed that all the differences in the Swedish study were uniformly to the disadvantage of the unwanted children. In the Finnish study, which is still continuing, the incidence of infant mortality, cerebral palsy and mental retardation was significantly higher among the unwanted children than the controls (Myhrman 1986).

The Prague cohort (David, Dytrych, Matejcek, and Schuller 1988) follows the development of 2,290 children born in 1961-1963 to women twice denied abortion for the same pregnancy and pair-matched controls from age 9 through ages 21-23. All the differences noted were consistently in disfavor of the unwanted children. Over the years, these differences widened and many differences that had not been statistically significant at age 9 became so at age 16 or 21. The findings of the Prague study and also of the Scandinavian research support the hypothesis that children rejected prenatally will, more likely than controls, show developmental, psychological and social handicaps.

In a recently published paper (Bustan and Coker 1994), Ann Coker, epidemiologist from the University of South Carolina found that infants born of unwanted pregnancies are more than twice as likely to die within a month of being born than wanted children. The group studied were married, largely middle income women who were all receiving prenatal care.

A less extreme case of being born unwanted is the plight of children given up for adoption. Every study on adoptees shows that they are over-represented among children with behavior problems, and adult criminals and murderers. In fact, I have yet to find a serial killer or violent rapist who was a wanted child reared in a normal, loving family.

Across the land and all over the world too many children are dying after being beaten, tortured or shaken to death. The unspeakable horrors that are being inflicted on children of every age every hour of every day is barbaric. Those who are not killed are often crippled for life by neglect and physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The children who survive this process of abuse will repay the world and its inhabitants with rage and destruction.

The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (Rivera 1995), after a two and a half year nationwide study that included hearings in ten states, found a level of deadly abuse and neglect that is far greater than experts in the field had previously estimated.

The number of violent acts against young children in the U.S. constitutes a public health crisis, annually claiming the lives of at least 2,000 children and seriously injuring upwards of 140,000 others. Abuse and neglect in the home is a leading cause of death for young children in the U.S. outstripping deaths caused by accidental falls, choking on food, suffocation, drowning or residential fires. The vast majority of abused and neglected children are under four years old. In fact, the homicide rate among children in this age group

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has hit a 40-year high, a chilling trend similar in scope to the violence directed at teenagers from street gunfire.

The enumeration of violent acts is grim. What is even more disturbing is the failure of the child protective system. The report describes an alarming national environment of under-reported child abuse fatalities; inadequately trained social workers and medical professionals; inconsistent autopsy practices; and an American public that continues to regard child deaths as "rare curiosities." "When it comes to deaths of infants and small children at the hands of parents or caretakers, society has responded in a strangely muffled, seemingly disinterested way," states the panel.

It was only thirty years ago that a paper by Curtis (1963) first expressed the concern that abused or neglected children would become tomorrow's violent criminals and murders. Since then the notion of an intergenerational transmission of violence has become the premier developmental hypothesis in the field of abuse and neglect.

The scholarly literature on family violence has grown enormously. There is a consensus of opinion that the rate of abuse among individuals with a history of abuse is 30% which is approximately six times higher than the base rate for abuse in the general population (5%) (Parke and Collmer 1975). These studies also suggest the need to consider neglect as distinct from abuse, because in some reports (Rohrbect and Twentymen 1986) neglected children appear more dysfunctional than those abused.

In addition to studies of children directly victimized, the indirect effects on children observing family violence have also been investigated. Large-scale self-report surveys have found a modest, although fairly consistent, association between exposure to family violence and approval of violence or marital violence as an adult.

Owens and Strauss 1975; Kalmus 1984; Kratwsky 1985). Studies of the children of battered women suggest that observing abuse or extreme marital discord may be as harmful to the development of the child as physical abuse (Wolfe et al. 1985; Jaffe et al. 1986).

There is no doubt that early child abuse and neglect place one at increased risk for delinquency, adult criminality and violent criminal behavior. However, a large portion of abused or neglected children do not succumb. In one study at Indiana University (Gamezy 1985) 26% of child abuse and neglect victims became juvenile offenders; 74% did not. Eleven percent had an arrest for a violent criminal act, 89% did not.

It is essential that we learn to understand and distinguish between factors that increase destructive and self-destructive behavior and factors that build strength and competence. What are the dispositional attributes and the mediating variables that act to buffer or protect children from misfortune? I shall address that question in a future paper.

BUILD BABIES, NOT JAILS

Violence does not occur in a social or cultural vacuum. Violence is endemic to our society. Our institutions, values, beliefs and rituals are a function of who we are as human beings. And who are we? There is not one of us who has not felt anxious, helpless, dejected, rejected, angry, criticised or shamed by the time we were two years old. Most of us, in addition, have suffered some form of emotional, sexual or physical mistreatment. We are the walking wounded. Considering the hurts, the injuries to body and soul that we have all experienced in our own personal histories and the history of our species, it is a testimony to the strength of the human spirit and the power of human love that we are as civilized as we are. Our only hope for a better world lies in heightening and deepening this innate capacity to care, to nurture and to feel for others.

To achieve that, we urgently require government policies that will reduce poverty, eliminate income inequalities, eradicate homelessness, and ensure status enhancing work (if possible in paid employment) for all.

Abolishing the sexual and economic exploitation of children should be a high priority on any governments' legislative agenda. Censoring videos and television programs featuring gratuitous violence, could be expected to have a small but measurable effect.

"What is not needed is to fight street violence with state violence. We don't need more police, more courts and more jails. We need more conscious parenting. Conscious parenting leads to positive psychogenesis and is based, I suggest, on understanding and practicing the following simple rules.

GUIDELINES FOR CONSCIOUS PARENTING AND POSITIVE PSYCHOGENESIS

1. PRECONCEPTION

Future parents must receive information about what physical and chemical toxins to avoid prior to conception and during pregnancy.

Their readiness for pregnancy and raising a child needs to be assessed.

If problems, be they psychological, financial or other surface, personal counseling or therapy should be available to them.

2. CONCEPTION

Every child, ideally, should be a wanted child.

Every child should be created as an expression of the love the parents feel for each other.

3. PREGNANCY

Mothers and fathers must explore their:

Births.

Relationships to their parents.

Relationships with their partner and be willing to engage in open and honest dialogue.

Mothers and fathers need to learn:

To appreciate the fundamental humanity of their unborn child, their need for love and communication and how to give it.

How to bond with their unborn child prenatally and postnatally through talking, singing, dancing, playing with and visualizing him.

The pregnant mother should make every effort:

To have a stress free pregnancy. If there is the threat of or actual violence, she must remove herself from it.

To attend prenatal classes, if possible, with her partner.

To obtain the services of a midwife.

To resist the unnecessary use of gyne-gadgetry (amniocentesis, ultrasound, chorionic villi sampling, etc.).

To totally abstain from alcohol, tobacco, soft or hard drugs.

4. LABOR AND DELIVERY

If at all possible, the mother's partner as well as a professional support person such as a midwife or doula should be present.

Unless there is a medical problem, the birth should be as natural as possible. That means no fetal heart monitors, no anesthetics or analgesics, no episiotomies and no forceps.

Only people that the parents know and trust should be present during labor and delivery.

Only professionals who love and respect babies should assist at birth.

5. AFTER BIRTH

Say only complimentary things about your newborn.

Insist on holding your newborn and rooming in with her.

Resist the installation of silver nitrate eye drops and other unnecessary medicines and tests on your unborn.

Oppose circumcision or genital mutilation of any kind.

Leave the hospital as soon as possible.

Breast feed your baby if you can.

6. FIRST FEW MONTHS

If you are isolated, vulnerable or depressed, ask for help. Visits by nurses or social workers have a demonstrable positive impact.

If the baby develops physical problems don't wait until tomorrow; take her to a doctor now.

Don't feel that it's your fault or that you are an incompetent mother if the baby develops colic or cries a lot or does not sleep much.

If you are a single mother and you are beginning to lose your patience with the baby, get help. Call a friend, family, women's support group, or social agency. Whatever you do, don't yell, shake, or hit the baby.

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Babies need a lot of attention. They cannot take care of themselves but they are a source of great joy. Have fun with your baby.

Babies can teach us many important lessons. Be prepared to learn.

I hope you will agree with me that to transform the violent world of today into the peaceful world of tomorrow, we need to change the way we treat our children from the very beginning of their lives. I think we could learn a lot in that respect from a tribe in East Africa (Kornfield, 1996).

There is a tribe in East Africa in which the art of true intimacy (I would call it bonding) is fostered even before birth. In this tribe, the birth date of a child is not counted from the day of its physical birth nor even the day of conception, as in other village cultures. For this tribe the birth date comes the first time the child is a thought in its mother's mind. Aware of her intention to conceive a child with a particular father, the mother then goes off to sit alone under a tree. There she sits and listens until she can hear the song of the child that she hopes to conceive. Once she has heard it, she returns to her village and teaches it to the father so that they can sing it together as they make love, inviting the child to join them. After the child is conceived, she sings it to the baby in her womb. Then she teaches it to the old women and midwives of the village, so that throughout the labor and at the miraculous moment of birth itself, the child is greeted with its song. After the birth, all the villagers learn the song of their new member and sing it to the child when it falls or hurts itself. It is sung in times of triumph, or in rituals and initiations. The song becomes a part of the marriage ceremony when the child is grown, and at the end of life, his or her loved ones will gather around the deathbed and sing this song for the last time.

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EXCERPTS FROM: THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN LOVE AND VIOLENCE

The beginning of my quest to understand the origins of human love and violence was partly rooted in my doctoral training in developmental neuropsychology and psychophysiology at McGill University, where I was made acutely aware of the extraordinary importance that the early sensory-social environment has upon brain development and behavior. The pioneering studies at McGill in the 1950s and 1960s documented that social isolation rearing of puppies results in not only aberrant adult emotional-social behaviors but also in abnormal brain development and functioning. These and related behavioral studies involving the effects of sensory deprivation and the social isolation rearing of infra-human primates by psychologists Austin Riesen at Yerkes Primate Center in Atlanta, Georgia and of the Harlows at the University of Wisconsin provided a theoretical and experimental frame of reference for the brain studies which I initiated on isolation reared (maternal-socially deprived) monkeys at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), National Institutes of Health (NIH). (Meizack and Thompson, 1956; Thompson and Scott, 1956; Meizack and Scott, 1957; Hebb, 1958; Harlow, 1958; Riesen, 1961, 1966; Meizack and Burns, 1965; Mitchell, 1968; Mason, 1968; Sackett 1970ab; and Mason and Berkson, 1975).

Other significant scientific work that influenced the theoretical and experimental programs of the Developmental Behavioral Biology Program, NICHD on the effects of "maternal social deprivation" was that of Cannon (1939); Cannon and Rosenbleuth (1949); Dow and Moruzzi (1958); Essman (1971); Heath (1968); Hebb (1958); Hunt (1961); the Berkeley Group: Krech, Rosenzweig, Bennett (1960) and Rosenzweig, Krech, Bennett and Diamond (1968); Levine (1974); MacLean (1962, 1973); Mark and Ervin (1970); Money, Wolff and Annecillo (1972); Selye (1956); Sharpless (1969); Wiesel and Hubel (1963); Ainsworth (1967); Appley and Trumbull (1967); Barry, Bacon and Child (1967); Bowlby (1952, 1969 and 1973); Cairns (1966); Casler (1961); Spitz (1965); Textor (1967); Whiting and Child (1953); Yarrow (1961); Zubek (1969) and many others. From a different theoretical perspective, Francoeur (1965, 1982, 1992) and Francoeur and Rami (1979) are spiritual co-travelers on this journey of understanding the nature of human love and violence.

In 1966, I joined the newly formed NICHD where I created the Developmental Behavioral Biology Program (NICHD) to establish basic research programs on brain-behavioral development. During my tenure at the NICHD (1966-1980), I formulated a novel developmental brain-behavioral theory of emotional-social regulation to explain the pathological depression and violence that results from maternal-social deprivation or the social isolation rearing of infant animals. This theory involved the cerebellar-limbic-frontal lobe complex where I proposed that the cerebellum has a major role in the regulation of sensory-limbic (emotional) brain activity which also integrates (or not) this activity with higher brain processes (frontal-temporal cortex). I established a number of basic research programs to evaluate this theory and with other scientists documented that the failure of "mother love" results in developmental brain dysfunction and damage which underlies the depression, stereotypical movement disorders (e.g. rocking behaviors and self-mutilation), hyper-reactivity to sensory stimulation, particularly touch with, paradoxically, impaired pain

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perception; social alienation, rage and pathological violence against other animals that have been commonly described in isolation reared monkeys and in other isolation reared animals.

It is of historical significance that both Harry Harlow (1964) and Rene Spitz (1965) denied that maternal-social deprivation involved sensory deprivation and prior to my reformulation of this issue no one had suspected that the abnormal emotional-social behaviors observed in the isolation reared or maternally socially deprived monkeys was due to abnormal brain development and function.

Specifically, I redefined "maternal-social deprivation" as a special case of Somatosensory Affectional Deprivation (SAD) and identified somesthetic processes (body touch) and vestibular-cerebellar processes (body movement) as the two critical emotional senses that define the sensory neuropsychological foundations for maternal-infant affectional bonding. Sensory deprivation in the other sensory systems (vision, hearing, smell and taste) do not result in the maternal-social deprivation or SAD syndrome). I proposed and established with other scientists brain studies in isolation reared monkeys (maternal-infant separation) which documented structural and functional brain abnormalities in the limbic-frontal-cerebellar brain system of adult maternally deprived monkeys (loss of mother love) which are directly related--as a causative process--to the depression and pathological violence of these mother deprived monkeys (Prescott, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1976).

My reconceptualization of the maternal-social deprivation syndrome which involved cerebellar-limbic-frontal lobe brain functions was made possible by the pioneering studies of Mason (1968) and Mason and Berkson (1975) who demonstrated that the isolation rearing of infant monkeys on a "swinging mother" surrogate (vestibular-cerebellar stimulation) prevented the development of the classic maternal-social (SAD) syndrome. This behavioral study opened the "vestibular-cerebellar" gate to brain structures and processes not previously implicated in these emotional-social disorders and represents, in my view, a scientific study of such importance that is matched only by the original contributions of the Harlows. The implications of the Mason and Berkson "swinging mother surrogate" study for human development is profound but, unfortunately, remains unappreciated despite the fact that its dramatic effects can be seen in the Time Life documentary film "Rock a Bye Baby" (Dokecki, 1973) and which has been one of the most successful documentaries of Time Life.

It is important to emphasize that in terms of SAD theory, the different sensory-emotional systems of the body provide the neuropsychological foundations for different psychological states. Specifically, the vestibular-cerebellar sensory system provides the primary neuropsychological foundation for "Basic Trust"; the somesthetic (touch) sensory system provides the primary neuropsychological foundation for "Affection"; and the olfactory (smell) sensory system provides the primary neuropsychological foundation for "Intimacy". In normal development these emotional-sensory systems are combined in rich patterns of complex sensory stimulation which results in the development of a "neurointegrative" brain where "Basic Trust", "Affection" and "Intimacy" are integrated with one another to form an emotional brain gestalt that can be called "Love"--long before the infant can understand the spoken or written word which is mediated by the auditory and visual cognitive senses.

All three emotional sensory systems, of course, are involved in the experiencing of "Pleasure" and "Bonding". It is through the emotional senses that the infant knows when it is being loved or rejected and this is particularly true for the congenitally blind or deaf infant/child (Fraiberg and Friedman, 1964; Bowyer and Gillies, (1972); Dokecki, 1973; Prescott, 1976); Smell, as the primitive emotional-sexual brain, has been a long neglected sensory system for understanding human sexuality, intimacy and bonding (Kohl and Francoeur, 1995). The failure to encode the infant's developing brain with the smell of its mother's body through breastfeeding can only have long-term adverse consequences for bonding and for the male-female sexual relationship.

The absence of any one of these three emotional senses in the development of the infant, e.g. failure to breast-feed, removes not only the primary neuropsychological foundation for "Intimacy" (smell, the primitive olfactory sexual brain) but also precludes the formation of the brain gestalt that can only be formed when all of the sensory elements are present. By analogy one cannot form a perception of "triangle" with only two lines. It takes not only three lines but it also requires their combination in specific relationships to one another to form the perceptual gestalt of "triangle". It is my belief that similar sensory-brain processes are at work developmentally in the formation of affectional bonds; "Basic Trust"; "Affection"; and "Intimacy" which have long term developmental consequences for the development and stability of love relationships. Stated differently, Love is a "Brain Gestalt" where, indeed, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The failure to integrate pleasure into the higher brain centers associated with "Consciousness" (frontal lobes) is the principal neuropsychological condition for the expression of violence, particularly sexual violence. Pleasure that is experienced only at the genital-spinal reflex level or limbic level of brain function

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does not result in the inhibition of sexually exploitative and violent behaviors. It is at these lower levels of brain processing of sexual pleasure where sado-masochism flourishes (Prescott, 1977; 1990).

A fractured neurobiological/neuropsychological substrate which results from early sensory deprivation results in a "dissociative brain" which translates into dissociative behaviors: depression, alienation, rage, violence and chemical dependencies to self-medicate the effects of SAD.

EXCERPTS FROM PRESENTATION BY DR. JAMES PRESCOTT PANEL ON NIH RESEARCH ON ANTI-SOCIAL, AGGRESSIVE AND VIOLENCE-RELATED BEHAVIORS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Center for Science Policy Studies, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD, 9/93

My path to the moral, philosophical, and theological roots of human violence was directed by my scientific studies on the effects of the sensory deprivation of physical (somatosensory) pleasure upon the developing brain and behavior. These studies were a part and parcel of a broad program of systematic research on the origins of violence that I established a quarter century ago at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, as Health Scientist Administrator, Developmental Behavioral Biology Program from 1966-1980.

What we have learned from the programs of research on the developmental origins of violence, NICHD 1966-1980, are the following:

1. The single most important cause of violent behavior, the developmental depression that precedes it, and the later drug/alcohol abuse that is used to treat the emotional pain that underlies the rage of uncontrolled violence is the failure of physical affectional bonding in the maternal-infant relationship; the paternal-child relationship and the failure of adolescent sexual affectional bonding. In short, it is the failure of physical love in human relationships that begins with the failure of that physical love when the infant is not permitted to bond with the body of its mother which then begins the infant's journey of depression, rage, hatred and violence for not being loved. Thus, the peril of infant and child day care centers which impedes, if not prevents, the affectional bonding between mother and her infant/child and, thus, all later affectional bonds.
2. Experimental studies of isolation-reared infant monkeys documented that maternal-infant separation constitutes a specific form of somatosensory affectional deprivation (SAD) that involves the somesthetic (touch) and vestibular-cerebellar (movement) sensory systems and results in a variety of abnormalities of brain development that includes structural, neurochemical and neuroelectrical abnormalities. It is these brain abnormalities that mediate the depression, chronic stimulus seeking behaviors, including self-mutilation, and pathologic violence against other animals that are invariably observed consequent to maternal-social deprivation or isolation rearing.
3. Building upon the insights from these experimental animal studies, I conducted cross-cultural studies on 49 primitive cultures distributed throughout the world and was able to predict with 100% accuracy the peaceful and violent nature of these 49 primitive cultures from two predictor variables: a) the degree of physical affectional bonding in the maternal-infant relationship; and b) whether premarital adolescent sex was permitted or punished. There were 29 peaceful and 20 violent cultures in this study sample. There is no other theory or data base that I am aware of that can provide such a prediction of peaceful or violent behaviors and that can relate such findings to specific sensory processes and brain mechanisms of the individual.
4. It is the neuronal systems of the brain which mediate pleasure that regulate and control depression, violence and drug/alcohol abuse and addiction. This control and regulation is provided through the mechanisms of reciprocal inhibition. When the neuronal pleasure circuits of the brain are damaged by SAD-DNS (Somatosensory Affectional Deprivation/Denervation Supersensitivity) then they cannot perform their normative role of regulation and inhibition of those neuronal circuits that mediate depression and violent behaviors.
5. Depressive and Violent Behaviors cannot be understood nor prevented until we understand the neurobiological and neuropsychological role of physical pleasure that must be integrated into those higher brain structures that mediate consciousness and those transcendental states of human spirituality that we call love. Non-integrated pleasure leads to sexual violence and sado-masochism--a consequence of SAD-DNS.
6. Physical affectional pleasure is not only moral but is morally necessary if we are to become moral and spiritual persons in our common bond with humanity. The understanding of the nature of human love is a proper subject for scientific study and such studies are essential if human violence is to be understood and prevented.

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7. A science of pleasure is as essential as a science of pain, depression, violence and drug abuse/addiction. Yet, nowhere in the NIH agenda or protocols for violence research is their any mention of research "on pleasure which is essential for peaceful and harmonious behavior.

8. The enormity of the human existential problems of depression, alienation, rage-hatred, violence and drug abuse/addictions exceed the capabilities of existing institutional structures of our society to solve. These existential phenomena cannot be properly or meaningfully addressed within the confines of a biomedical model of health and disease, as the history of the NIH, NICHD and NIMH attests. Molecular biology, as a mediating mechanism, cannot solve these human existential phenomena.

The reported expenditures on violence research by the NIH, as being less than one percent of the total NIH budget, is also illustrative of the limitations of the NIH with respect to violence and peace research.

New institutional structures are needed for the study of the understanding and prevention of human violence and its converse, the development of human peace and love. A National Science Foundation For Human Development could provide the innovative institutional structure and functional leadership that is needed for such an extraordinary human mission. Significant restructuring of all those federal agencies concerned with human health and behavior is needed, as we prepare to move into the 21st Century to construct a "land of peace".

Editor's Note: A compilation of Dr. Prescott's views, with references and Tables, is available from Touch the Future, 123 Nevada St. #A, Nevada City, CA 95959. Tel. 530 265 8494. For further information, go to:

http://www.tffuture.org/pdf/download/Prescott_ALD.PDF

<http://www.violence.de>

<http://www.montagunocircpetition.org>

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PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE:

Ashley Montagu, Ph.D., D.Sc., D.Litt.

Ashley Montagu, although born in England, has become a "national treasure" to his adopted country, the United States. At ninety-one, his life virtually spans the 20th century. Educated at University of London, University of Florence, and Columbia University, he founded the anthropology department of Rutgers University, taught at University of California, Santa Barbara, Harvard, New York University, the New School for Social Research, and at Princeton. He has authored or edited over fifty books on scientific subjects, among them: Race and IQ, On Being Human, The Natural Superiority of Women, Life Before Birth, Man: His First Two Million Years, Prenatal Influences, The Elephant Man, Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin, and Growing Young.

FROM THE NATURAL SUPERIORITY OF WOMEN

(1952/1974, rev. ed.):

Woman knows what true love is; let her not be tempted from her knowledge by the false idols that man has created for her to worship.

Woman must stand firm and be true to her own inner nature. To yield to the prevailing false conception of love, of unloving love, is to abdicate her great evolutionary mission to keep human beings true to themselves, to keep them from doing violence to their inner nature, to help them to realize their potentialities for being loving and cooperative.

Were woman to fail in this task, all hope for the future of humanity would depart from the world.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY MICHAEL MENDIZZA,

published in *Touch the Future, Spring Issue, 1994.*

The basic pattern of social behavior in the human species lies in the relation between mother and child. She has carried that child in a womb for 266 and a half days, which is actually the average from conception to birth (not delivery: doctors "deliver" babies but shouldn't). Babies get themselves naturally born, in most cases, and that child is looking forward to a continuation of the life that it had in the womb, which was sort of ideal. The temperature and pressure are constant, no work is required, and he or she is looking forward to a continuation of this. What they are looking forward to is a "womb with a view."

But they are expelled rather roughly and usually taken away from their mother, which is wrong. It's physiologically and psychologically wrong. Both baby and mother need each other more at that time than they ever will again. The baby should be put to nurse at the mother's breast, whereat it induces an enormous number of wonderful changes in the mother which she needs, such as the arresting of

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postpartum hemorrhage, which no obstetrician can do as well as the suckling baby, for there is more intelligence in the upper and lower lip of the newborn than in the brains of the obstetricians put together. There is love between those two. All of this is communicated through touch, which would be lost if the baby were taken away from the mother. If you want to know what love is, interrupt what is going on between them and you will perceive the negative effects, the frustration of love. That baby is wanting to love. Striving to love. By not separating them, you not only enable them to live longer but you enable them to grow and develop rapidly in the ability to love themselves.

Q. Love and cooperation often seem distant in our world of increasing violence.

AM: We can't solve any problem without first solving the problem of human nature. We won't be able to solve the problems of homeless, impoverished, illiterate people, of murderers who would never have become murderers had they been adequately loved. You show me a murderer, and I'll show you a person who's been failed in the supreme need for love, who never learned how to love, and will hate, as I heard one saying, "I hate the whole world's guts, and the whole world hates mine." These are the victims of society, just as the doctor is a victim of society, as most of us are victims of our society.

Q. How have we most failed our children?

AM: We don't love children adequately, we don't even know what love is. It's a great help to know exactly what the criteria of love are, because these murderers, these violent people, these terribly undisciplined characters are exhibiting the frustration of love. [Love, Montagu says earlier, is the ability to communicate to others your profound involvement in their welfare, is that you will never commit the supreme treason of letting them down whenever they most stand in need of you, and that you will minister to and encourage the growth and development of their potentialities. That's love.]

What is frustration? It is the thwarting of an expected satisfaction. What every baby expects is to be loved. When you thwart that expectation, you make the person sink lower and lower into despair and frustration, and to react in hostility, aggressiveness: "I don't care a damn about you anymore. You haven't cared a damn about me; why should I worry about you? Why should I become involved in all this?" This is the massive alienation, the disengagement, the detachment which we are suffering from in our culture, for hatred is love frustrated.

Q. One of your most influential books is Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin. Why is touch so misunderstood in our culture?

AM: The first article on touch, so far as I know, was my own published in 1950. It is strange that we should have waited till the middle of the 20th century to pick up on the importance of this tremendously complex organ, the largest organ in the body, which most of us thought was just a covering to prevent us from falling apart! The skin is the external brain and nervous system of the body. It is derived from exactly the same embryological layer as is the internal brain and spinal cord. And both are very closely interrelated.

All the messages that this skin receives must go to the internal brain, and the reactions go back to the skin and every other organ of the body. These are not theories, these are observable facts. We don't understand that the touch of a hand can make all the difference to another human being--sometimes literally a difference of life or death. Doctors don't touch patients as they should...And the idea of taking babies away from a mother's touch is wrong from a hundred points of view.

Q. What are the consequences of not being touched?

AM: Rene Spitz, an Austrian-American psychoanalyst of great genius, made a classic study of small children in orphanages. He found that children who received a great deal of tactile stimulation had a much lower mortality and morbidity rate than those who were neglected. This observation was confirmed by Harry Harlow, Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin. In a series of experiments, infant monkeys were isolated from their mothers and then compared with their brothers and sisters who had not been isolated. The infant monkeys who had been deprived of maternal contact were unable to establish any kind of social relations, were in a chronic state of anxiety, were fearful, and did not know how to behave sexually. They did not know how to behave toward their young. The same thing is true for great apes and human mothers and probably most other animals.

Q. Can you say a little more about touch and how the failure to be touched may lead to violence?

AM: One of the outstanding examples may be rape. Who commits rape? If you would discuss this with rapists you would find that they invariably reject the idea that it is a sex crime. It is a crime of violence. And what is the violence about? Rejection by the mother. And they hate women for it.

**PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE:
JEANNINE PARVATI BAKER, M.A.**

ASSOCIATION FOR PRE- AND PERINATAL PSYCHOLOGY AND HEALTH - WWW.BIRTHPSYCHOLOGY.COM

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE – POINTS OF VIEW

Jeannine Parvati Baker completed the Master's program in psychology at Sonoma State University and is the founder of Hygieia College, devoted to healing the Earth by healing birth. She is the author of the books: Prenatal Yoga and Natural Birth; Hygieia: A Woman's Herbal; and Conscious Conception. Who's Who of U.S. Writers, Editors, and Poets nominated her for the Woman of the Year Award in 1993 for Contributions to Medicine. Jeannine is in private practice in central Utah, where she homeschools her family. Contact her at P.O. Box 398, Monroe, UT 84754.

ENDING CIRCUMCISION:

Where Sex and Violence First Meet

Flowers In the Rain

Cold, wet, and tired from the long morning rally, my eight year-old asks again why we are here. We are standing with about fifty other media people, organizers, and just your ordinary eccentrics, grandmothers and fathers, university professors, musicians, nurses and midwives, lawyers, artists, writers, men's rights activists and children gathered in the industrial section of Seattle in November. We are all here for one purpose: to report about and demonstrate against the manufacturers of the plastic Y-shaped cradle boards used to hold infants immobile during circumcision.

The members of NOHARMM (National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males) and NOCIRC (National Organization of Circumcision information Resource Centers, especially the local chapter in Seattle) called the action. We gathered together on Veteran's Day to hold a peaceful demonstration at the only place the boards are manufactured in the US. It was aired on three TV news stations several times the same evening, showing us filling a Circumstraint board with flowers.

Previously there had been talk of doing a guerrilla theater to get the media and manufacturer's attention. The fantasy scripts ranged from building an adult Circumstraint and staging a mock circumcision of a man, to strapping a dog on the board and circumcising the animal in public. The reasoning behind the dog circumcision was that there would surely be an outcry among animal-rights activists if that were done, which would highlight in some minds the insanity of our doing this, unabashedly, to humans as a matter of routine. These gruesome fantasies eventually yielded to the idea of placing cut flowers in a Circumstraint in front of the manufacturing offices.

I felt compelled by conscience to attend the demonstration, yet, up until this decision, was uneasy about to what degree, if any, I could participate in an expression of violence. That we chose to prayerfully and respectfully to place flowers was an action that I as a mother and midwife, could wholeheartedly embrace. Taking the idea one step further, as a midwife it was my practice to advise postpartum visitors to bring potted plants rather than cut flowers. Flowers, separated from their matrix, the earth, fade and die while a live plant, like a newborn, is still growing. Surrounded by growing plants reminds the mother that the baby grows best in her arms, close to the heart. A mother is a baby's earth. This is why we need more mothers working with the political organizations to end genital mutilation - to bring the bigger picture, the connection with our Source, to give a voice to the Earth.

MY SACRED OBLIGATION

For over a generation I have been devotedly writing and speaking against circumcision. My awakening came in the 1960s when I was training to be a primal therapist. During one session, I assisted an adult to relive his own circumcision as an infant. Since then, though my mother's religion commands circumcision, I felt I had to honor my sacred obligation and protect my babies from harm. My sons are all intact and so will be my grandchildren.

I used to say that, by nature, I wasn't very political. Of course not, for I was raised female and became a mother in a patristic culture. We were not encouraged to be effective in the political arena. When I looked up the definition of politics in Webster's, I was surprised to discover that the second definition is "practical wisdom." Who else but mothers have been practicing wisdom day and night by caring for our children? If a country is to politically thrive, it must include the voices of the mothers and grandmothers, those who have an obvious, vested interest (call it cellular or genetic) in sustaining the life that we have brought forth, in ensuring that the Earth is also intact to support that life.

To answer my youngest daughter's question, "Why are we here?" my response was, "How could we not be." When I learned that only in dominator societies, in warring cultures, does genital mutilation of the young occur, I saw a way I could be a peacemaker - by fulfilling my central responsibility as mother. By raising peaceful sons, mothers could stop the destruction of our Earth. If mothers protected their boys from the unconscious initiation into the military cult, we would create a sustainable future.

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As the Cheyenne Indians say, a nation can fall only when the hearts of the mothers are to the ground. The big problem with circumcision is mothers intuitively know it is wrong, yet they deny this natural impulse to protect their babies. This denial creates a lack of trust in a mother's own capacity to protect him from the knife (sword). She will distrust her own ability to raise her son, enrolling the "expert" or "authority," even to the extent of literally cutting off parts of his body so that he will fit on the Procrustean bed of the mythical "normal man," a warrior. When we abdicate this power to protect our babies in the early postpartum, no wonder there is rampant "postpartum depression," i.e. the mother's heart is on the ground.

"JUST SAY NO" TO CIRCUMCISION

To raise up the jubilant heart of mothering we must do everything we can to end circumcision. My daughter and I traveled from our cozy, book-lined home to rainy Seattle to be counted among those who invite the perpetrators of violence against babies via circumcision to conscience. This was in my mind with each flower I laid on the Circumstraint board on Veteran's Day. It has been a long war "the tradition of the fathers" has waged to do violence to children, to do violence to their mothers and the men these circumcised men become. It is time to say the war is over by empowering mothers to "just say no to circumcision."

After a generation's work to stop circumcision, it is heartening to witness the involvement of the men's rights community; men are giving voice to their experience of the damage done to them without their consent. For several years, at the International Symposia on Circumcision, I have presented a Healing Ceremony for those involved in ending genital mutilation. Seated in a circle, circumcisers, as well as their victims, share their stories. This "word medicine" is a deep healing balm on every soul. As men recognize what has been done to them and the mask of denial slips down, a potent force for healing and protecting the sons of the future emerges. Unmasked, the real men are now present and can effectively awaken their brothers to the horror of infant-male genital mutilation.

At the strategy meeting in Seattle, attention was given to the words we use in this movement. The term mutilation came up as a red flag which is too startling and offensive. However, again the dictionary tells it like it is: A mutilation is to cut off or damage a body part, or remove an essential part. This is precisely what circumcision does, as the foreskin is the most highly innervated tissue, with specialized secretions which are irreplaceable.

MUTILATING THE GODS OF THE INTERIOR

The etymology of the word penis includes an early meaning from Roman times - the penates are Gods of the Interior, the Inner Household Gods. By mutilating the "Gods of the Interior" we are disabling our sons from being in touch with their innermost feelings. A baby who has been circumcised shuts down his capacity to feel, as life, obviously, is just too painfully mutilating. All the immense reservoirs of psychic energy used to repress trauma could, rather, be channeled for sensitive, creative works.

Often I wonder about destiny, and how, on that particular day in the psychology lab almost thirty years ago, I realized that circumcision is devastating to the soul. If I hadn't ever seen a grown man reduced to the infantile rage and pain (to an unfathomable degree), would I have considered circumcising my boys? Having experienced first-hand in primal therapy that the traumatic pain of circumcision is imprinted and can be consciously recovered, I knew that I would not inflict such pain upon my own flesh and blood. "Flesh and blood" is not mere hyperbole: The baby and mother are still one in the early postpartum. What hurts one, harms the other.

This is true for all mothers as well: What we do to one, we do to another. I asked each mother I attended as midwife about circumcision. If the parents insisted on it, then they would have to find another midwife. I couldn't let myself bond to their baby at birth and not be able to protect the new one. This declaration saved many a foreskin.

The benefit of "saving foreskins" is the creation of a more peaceful society. There are male pheromones which signal to other males their relation. Without the foreskin that produces these scent molecular messengers, men are more anxious and quicker to assert dominance upon one another. Keeping our sons intact brings a greater likelihood for cooperative rather than competitive behaviors with their fathers, brothers, and all men.

WHERE SEX AND VIOLENCE FIRST MEET

There is another psychological benefit to keeping our sons intact. Psychiatrist Rima Laibow finds that men carry an unconscious rage against their mothers for betrayal, abandonment, and the assault of circumcision. In other words, the unconscious mind of the son blames his mother for his circumcision, not

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE – POINTS OF VIEW

"the tradition," the circumciser, or the father who wanted his son to look like himself - only the mother. It's just like some bad Jewish-mother joke.

Indeed, for a newborn, his world is mother. If she cannot protect him from violation at the beginning, a baby loses trust. And isn't lack of trust an issue in relationships between the genders nowadays? Can circumcision be a symptom of profound resentment between the genders? Can sexuality be healed on a very deep, unconscious level during the perinatal period?

A connection exists between crimes of sexual violence, rape and circumcision. The first heterosexual encounter is when a female nurse preps the infant penis with antiseptic, often creating an erection, followed by painful cutting! This and the betrayal by the mother, is revenged in sexual assaults against women. As Marilyn Milos, Founder and director of NOCIRC says, "Circumcision is where sex and violence meet for the first time."

MAY OUR EARTH BECOME THE GARDEN

I know of many courageous parents who, once informed, not only changed their minds about circumcision, but also became active in helping babies stay whole. Sometimes this means going against "tradition." And a family's attachment to tradition can be tenacious. However, we must choose only those rituals from our rich traditions which are best-for-life. We are free to co-create a new way to show the world what our love looks like by bringing forth whole children.

By our participation, our marching through Seattle to make a point, my daughter and I were demonstrating more than our desperation that circumcision is still happening. (Believe me, it is a sign of desperation that I'd be motivated to travel from my warm home in this harvest season). We were also demonstrating that we have trust - trust in people to remember how to be kind to one another, especially to babies.

With every flower I placed on the Circumstraint I thought to myself (then sent through my eyes to one of the workers gathered at the big front office windows), "May you remember to be kind to babies; may you stop circumcision."

In closing, my prayer today is for the Circumstraint board to go the way of the cradle board. We have been taught that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." But, if we truly want to cease "ruling," i.e., dominating one another, we must keep our babies safe in mothers' arms. Let the Circumstraints become archaic tools, post-industrial museum pieces depicting torture in a less enlightened time. Or, better yet, let them become planters.

May our Earth become the Garden again!

For more information about [Jeannine Parvati Baker](#).

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE:

PETER LEVINE, PH.D.

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WE ARE ALL NEIGHBORS: HEALING THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

"...despite our differences, we're all alike. Beyond identities and desires, there is a common core of self--an essential humanity whose nature is peace and whose expression is thought and whose action is unconditional love. When we identify with that inner core, respecting and honoring it in others as well as ourselves, we experience healing in every area of life."

JOAN BORYSENKO, MINDING THE BODY, MENDING THE MIND

The very fabric of society as we currently know it is threatened, literally being torn apart by violence and the rising fear of it. Children are terrorized in their schools and even the elderly and middle class families are being held hostage in their once safe neighborhoods. The alarming rise in gang violence and the coming to age of a whole generation of babies raised in violent neighborhoods--many born addicted to cocaine--threatens us with future violence on a nightmarish scale not even dreamed of!

While building new prisons, effecting tougher sentencing, more police, improving welfare, restricting guns, and limiting TV violence all of which have their legitimate and necessary place, they are not addressing the root cause of violence. Even during the Great Depression, when large portions of society lived in desperate poverty, there was vastly less violent crime than there is today. Something has happened in our society that has led to the breakdown in our basic cohesion and ability to function peacefully. These problems of violence and crime seem insolvable. The course of life as we know it in this nation will be permanently altered (and in horrific ways) if we cannot find effective solutions.

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE – POINTS OF VIEW

There may be no quick fixes, but there are long-term solutions suggested by rigorous research carried out--some decades ago--in governmental and university laboratories. This work in the biological and social sciences not only identifies critical roots of violence but suggests effective and inexpensive grassroots programs which can begin to turn this rising tide of violence.

In the 1960's revolutionary studies were carried out at the National Institute of Mental Health by Dr. James Prescott. Prescott traced the records of several tribes from throughout the world and ranked them in terms of violent behaviors including rape, murder, and torture. He showed that in societies that were peaceful there was a high degree of physical contact with infants, including being carried and rocked. Violent societies showed the opposite profile: These societies demonstrated little appropriate touch and interaction in the early stages of life. Building on the experimental work carried out by Harlow, Prescott and colleagues showed that when infant monkeys were separated from their mothers and raised by cloth surrogates, they were withdrawn as adults and became aggressive with other monkeys.

Even with their children these deprived monkeys were negligent or violent. Remarkably, when the monkey infants were raised by similar cloth surrogates but who could rock and swing on a rope, their behavior as adults was more normal and the extreme violence was not evident. Of course, normal mothers which both held, nourished, carried and swung their babies on their backs produced the most peaceful progeny.

Where there has been violence and trauma in human groups, there has been severe disruptions in normal health-promoting behaviors between mothers and infants. The deep urges of the mothers to bond and the deep needs of their infants for secure love are disrupted. A vicious cycle is set up under the stress of violence and trauma that will derail the bonding process and will be amplified into the next generation. When these infants later become parents their capacities to nurture will be impaired, leading to a progressive deterioration of cohesive peaceful behaviors. Violence will beget more violence in this trans-generational destructive vortex, each generation becoming more violent than the last.

In Scandinavia, we are currently involved in some exciting work inspired by our Norwegian colleagues. This project uses what we know about this critical period around infancy to allow not just one individual, but an entire group of people to begin transforming the trauma, stress and violence of past encounters. This method of bringing people together requires only a room, a few simple musical instruments, and some blankets strong enough to hold a baby's weight, all of which are readily available nearly anywhere at little or no cost. Once a group of people have participated in the experience they can easily be trained to replicate it with others. The impact of this experience is so powerful that many participants want to spread it throughout their communities.

The process, which we originally envisioned for use in the Middle East, Bosnia, Africa, Latin America and other international "hot spots," works as follows: A group composed of mothers and infants (interested fathers are normally welcome) are brought together at a home or community center. The encounter begins with this heterogeneous group of mothers and their infants taking turns teaching one another simple folk songs of their respective cultures. Holding their babies, the mothers dance while they sing the songs to their children. A facilitator uses simple instruments to enhance the rhythm in the songs. The movement, rhythm, and use of the voice in song strengthen the neurological patterns which favor peaceful alertness and receptivity. As a result, the rigidity and fixation that generations of strife have produced begin to soften. At first the children are perplexed by these goings on, but soon they become more interested and involved. They are enthusiastic about the rattles, drums and tambourines which the facilitator passes to them. Characteristically without rhythmical stimulation, children of this age will do little more than try to fit objects such as these into their mouths. Here, however, the children join in generating the rhythm with great delight, squealing and cooing as well.

Because these infants are not blank slates, but highly developed organisms, even at birth, they send signals which activate their mothers' deepest sense of serenity, responsiveness and biological competence. In this healthy exchange, the mothers and the ir young feed off each other in an exchange of mutually gratifying physiological responses which in turn generate feelings of security and pleasure. It is here that the cycle of traumatic damage begins its transformation.

The transformation continues as the mothers place their babies on the floor and allow them to explore. Like luminous magnets the babies gleefully move toward each other, overcoming barriers of shyness as the mothers quietly support their exploration from a circle around them. The joy and mutual connection that is generated by their small adventure is difficult to describe or imagine-- it must be witnessed. The group then continues with smaller groups of a mother and infant from each culture working together. The two mothers swing their infants gently in a blanket. These babies aren't just happy, they are completely blissed out. They generate a roomful of love which is so contagious that soon the mothers are smiling at each other and enjoying an experience of deep bonding with members of a community that earlier they

PERSPECTIVES ON VIOLENCE – POINTS OF VIEW

feared and distrusted. The mothers leave the gathering with renewed hearts and spirits that they are eager to share with others. The process is almost self-replicating.

The beauty of this approach to community healing lies in its simplicity and its effectiveness. An outside facilitator begins the process by leading the first group. After that, certain of the mothers who have participated can be trained as facilitators for other groups. The primary attributes required by a facilitator are an acute sensitivity to timing and to interpersonal boundaries. It is our experience that for certain individuals, these are skills that can be easily learned through a combination of participatory experience and didactic explanation. Once trained, the mothers become ambassadors of peace within their own communities.

Experiences such as this can bring people together so that they can again live in harmony, even if the experience itself does not completely heal all the aftereffects of trauma. Trauma's impact is different for each individual and these individuals must at some point accept the responsibility for their own healing, healing which will never happen if they are busy waging war on their neighbors.

Nationalities and others who live in close proximity can break the generational cycle of destruction, violence and trauma which often holds them hostage. By utilizing the human organism's capacity to register peaceful aliveness, even in the web of violence and traumatic defensiveness, we can all begin to make our communities safe for ourselves and our children. We can begin the process of healing that the traumatized psyche so desperately needs.

HEALING COCAINE BABIES

The tragic plight of cocaine babies and their mothers is another societal problem that cries out for solution. These infants are gestated in a minefield of stress and trauma. If that pattern is not quickly reversed, these children will have profound difficulties in regulating stress, arousal, and in bonding with others. They typically exhibit extreme deficits in emotional and impulse control, making them likely candidates for violent acting out. As ever increasing numbers of drug babies are born, the potential for pervasive mass violence in our society is greatly amplified. Unfortunately, politicians seem unwilling to deal proactively with such a long term problem. If anything is to be done, we must begin it ourselves.

Because deep neurological responses are generated when mothers and their babies move rhythmically together with music, there is every reason to believe that this will help facilitate the normal neurological development and bonding these children so desperately need. The process is simple and inexpensive, making it ideally suited for the socioeconomic group from which most of these babies come.

The experience of gathering to sing and swing each others babies offers a gentle alternative to the destructive cycle of trauma, suffering, and violence, allowing the biological imperative for natural bonding and love to assert itself. By helping to promote neurological responses which enhance relaxed alertness, security and trust, this experience interrupts the cycle of trauma and violence at three key points:

it reduces stress in the newborn. While we would like to promote healing measures even during pregnancy, our first opportunity to intervene in the cycle of trauma is in infancy. The experience just described helps to neutralize the effects of the mother's stress that has already been passed to the fetus. The timing of this intervention is critical. The mother under stress is less able to meet the increased demands of a stress-gestated newborn, leading to greater frustration and worry. And in a horribly vicious cycle, her agitation will be "absorbed" by the already distressed infant, making it ever more difficult to provide comfort, causing the mother to feel less adequate and more helpless.

Gathering to sing and entertain the babies helps reduce part of the distress-frustration-distress cycle by restoring the relaxed alertness that is lost in the wake of trauma and stress.

Second, the experience promotes the mutually beneficial effects and maternal-infant bonding which can occur only when relaxed alertness is established in both infant and mother. And, as Prescott's studies suggest, without close physical touch and movement these children are likely to add to the violence of society.

Third, in this experience, mothers and infants of tribes, nations, ethnicities, colors, and religions are developing close bonding and engaging in cooperative behaviors with each other. It is, of course, through cooperative bonds that the conflicts and tensions which can trigger war and violence are diffused.

"Give me a place to put my lever" exclaimed Archimedes, "and I will move the world." In a world of conflict, destruction, and trauma, we find this fulcrum in the close physical, rhythmic, pulsation between mother and infant. It lies within the human organism's capacity to register peaceful aliveness, even in a matrix of traumatic defensiveness. It is through the body's capacity for aliveness and bonding that the generational circle of destruction, violence and trauma begins to unwind towards the circle of cooperation and grace for which we all so deeply yearn.