

Generations at Risk

Peggy O'Mara

As parents, we talk about making things best for our children—living in a lead-free environment, eating organic food, having a non-toxic home, and yet we may be spanking our children, injecting them with things that are poisonous, and exploiting them with commercialism. These are the things that we can have an impact on.

I believe that the root of all of this is the tendency in our culture, starting at birth, to overpower our own natures. Pregnant women are not encouraged to trust their own nature. Pregnancy is seen as a disease in our culture. We don't appreciate birth as normal. So the very first experiences of parenthood are compromised, our very natures overpowered and dominated. I believe that when we do this, we do violence to ourselves, and to our own nature.

I want to go deeper into these first intrusions of power into our inherent natures, and to the first intrusions of technology, materialism and commercialism. These, as so much in society, make us feel that we are not enough as we are. Let's translate our environmental and social consciousness into daily life. Let's clean up the toxins and disarm the world by beginning with ourselves—the only person that we really have any control over.

Pregnancy and Birth

The womb is the child's first environment. The birth is a template for the future. Birth brings with it an imprint so that we follow the traditions of our culture in future years. But what babies often imprint to in our culture is drugs. About 80% of women take drugs during childbirth. About 30% of women give birth surgically. So that often a baby's first experience is to have his body flooded by drugs. Research in Sweden shows that babies exposed to barbiturates during labor have more of a tendency to be addicted to barbiturates in adulthood. We never hear about this. We hear a lot about freedom of choice, that women should be able to choose drugs during childbirth. I read

an article in the *New York Times* that discussed a woman's right to choice during birth about drugs and literally not once was the baby even mentioned. There was no mention of the effects on the baby. It is important to note that the placenta is not a barrier; it is a sieve. When doctors give dosages of drugs to children, it is based on weight. The drug doses given to a mother during labor are based on her weight and are an excessive amount for the baby.

We must begin to see birth as a natural process to regain our confidence in the normalcy of our biological processes. And yet pregnancy is treated as a disease and medical interventions are routine. The baby in the womb, for example, is routinely bombarded by ultrasound. What does ultrasound do? Does it change anything? We need to be more aware of its possible effects.

Remember DES? And Thalidomide? We need to be aware of the long-term effects of technologies. We rush so quickly into new technologies without adequate testing. We are enamored by their newness and don't consider possible long-term effects.

Ultrasound is an example of this. It is used routinely in pregnancy to determine information that can be determined for the most part by the good hands of a practitioner. The practitioner can tell so much just by touching the mother's womb. Ultrasound is more effective for some things, but those are not in the realm of the routine. A study from the University of Dublin shows that ultrasound actually changes cells. Another study showed an increase in left-handedness in babies after exposure to ultrasound. What does that mean? I believe it simply means there is a change. There is some effect of ultrasound on the developing baby that we are not taking into account. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology does not recommend routine ultrasound. They recommend it only for special circumstances even though it is used routinely in practices. Part of that is the climate we have created in our culture of defensive medicine.

Often physicians feel they have to use all the available technology or they will be accused of malpractice .

Many prenatal tests are not necessary. Research evidence does not support them. What I support in my work is evidence-based care for pregnant women, and it turns out that the natural approach to pregnancy and birth is what is supported by overwhelming international evidence.

Even a test that has 99% accuracy means that 1% of the people tested get a false positive. There are about four million births a year—that is a lot of women who might get a false positive reaction, making it difficult emotionally for them when the test results point to a potential problem with the fetus. This puts the pregnant woman into a heightened state of stress, activating her fight and flight hormones.

As I said, 30% of the births in the U.S. are surgical births. About 22% of those are caesarian, the rest are forceps births and vacuum extractions. Vacuum extractions are real vacuums that suck onto the baby's head, pull the baby out, and often leave trauma to the skull. It has been implicated in some later problems. Electronic fetal monitors are used frequently in births. In that case, an electrode is screwed into or attached to the baby's head inside the womb so that you can get the baby's heart rate. The same thing can be done with a stethoscope. No test has ever shown an electronic fetal monitor to be any more accurate than a stethoscope. We have lost confidence with simple methods. Midwives can tell a lot with their hands and ears.

By turning birth into a stressful experience, we are overpowering the normal chemistry of birth. There exists in our human nature, chemistry that is supposed to help us, that creates and facilitates an ecstatic birth. The chemistry of birth is supposed to unlock a dormant and instinctual intelligence in the mother so that she is then prepared to be a mother. This natural chemistry is interrupted by drugs, for when the drugs are introduced they send a different message to the mother that tells her she is in trouble—her fight and flight hormones are activated, signaling a need to protect herself and her baby. Women are so attuned in labor and are designed to adapt to a

real threat. When that threat is manufactured by medicine that is intended to help, it is very confusing and very detrimental to the whole hormonal process of the birth.

The good news is that despite birth interventions, midwifery is on the increase in the United States, up to 8% now. In the 1970's, physician-attended births were 99.1%. There is a move to improve maternity services that has created an unprecedented coalition of birth organizations all over the U.S. and who have published a statement on the "Ten Steps to a Mother-Friendly Childbirth."

In the realm of birth, there is the same power struggle that exists everywhere in society of the influences of money against the influences of nature. We can make the change within ourselves. We can come to believe that birth is normal. We can educate ourselves about birth, about real birth and the processes involved. It is important to encourage women to give birth where they feel safe. Birth can be safe in any setting, and yet over 90% of the births in this country take place in hospitals. It is empowering to have the kind of birth a woman envisions, and that empowerment sets her on the path of motherhood in a powerful way.

Vaccinations

I also want to discuss a little bit about vaccinations in terms of potential toxicity. We have covered the issue of vaccinations in *Mothering* magazine since 1979. Our coverage about vaccinations has always been about informed consent and informed choice. Recently, the issues have become a little bit more serious, related to the issue of exposure to mercury.

Within hours of birth, a baby born in the U.S. will likely be vaccinated with Hepatitis B, the first genetically engineered vaccination. Hepatitis B, is a sexually transmitted disease, for the most part. The idea is that somehow this protection is going to last until these children are teenagers, or adults. It is possible to test women for Hepatitis B, and then give the vaccination only to those babies, but we do not do that. The U.S. public health point-of-view is to give the vaccine to everybody, feeling that the collateral damage of a few reactions is acceptable. From the parent's perspective, whose child has had a negative

reaction, this is not acceptable at all. With Hepatitis B, there are five times as many reactions to the vaccine as there are cases of Hepatitis B.

At two months, infants are routinely vaccinated against several diseases. They can get up to nine vaccinations at a time, including diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, Hepatitis B. Up until recently, all of these vaccines have contained thimerisol, a mercury preservative that has been used in biologics since the 1930s. If an infant got these nine vaccines at a time, which is common, at age two months the baby is exposed 62.5 milligrams of ethyl mercury, 125 times the E.P.A. guidelines for mercury. These standards are for ingested mercury. There are no standards for injected mercury! We do even know what the safe level of this poison is. There really is no safe level. Europe eliminated thimerisol from vaccinations in 1998. Less than two years ago, the E.P.A. advised the vaccine manufacturers to see where the mercury was in their products and start phasing it out. There has just been a new recommendation on immunization practices from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to vaccinate infants at seven-or eight-month-old and then again at twenty-eight months, with mercury-containing flu vaccine. Flu vaccines are not reputed to be very effective anyway.

There is mounting evidence that parallels thimerisol and other individual toxic metal reactions. The metals may react together. There is also aluminum in vaccinations. Mercury and aluminum may be reacting together. There is a parallel between the rise in the autism rate and the use of vaccination. It used to be that the autism rate was one in two thousand. In the last ten years, it has increased to one in two hundred fifty. In the United Kingdom, it is now one in eighty-five, and more so in boys. Boys tend to be more susceptible. During this period of ten years, there has not only been an increase in autism and ADHD, but an increase in the number of vaccines that children are getting.

During this same ten-year period there has been a 273% increase in California since 1987 in autism and there is a recent study from University of California-Davis that found that this increase is not solely due to the increased

reporting of autism cases. Over 50% of the children who have autism have rh negative mothers, even though rh negative is only found in 3% of the population. Women who are rh negative also get rogam during pregnancy, something that's supposed to help decrease the incompatibility between the mother's blood and the baby's blood in the event that the baby is a positive. This rogam contains thimerisol and mercury. A possible explanation for the discrepancy between the percentages is that the exposures to mercury in a pregnant mother could be the rogam or dental amalgams. It is not recommended to have your teeth filled with dental amalgams during pregnancy. In fact, in Sweden, it is not used at all. Mercury can either have an accumulative effect, which can affect the baby, or can have what is called a bolus effect. That is the case with these vaccines that have thimerisol. Many parents whose children have developed autism believe that it was caused by the vaccinations since the onset of symptoms happened so quickly after the vaccines were administered. The government and the vaccine manufacturers continue to deny any relationship.

There was a congressional hearing June 19 of the government reform committee, chaired by Representative Dan Burton from Indiana, where CDC representatives admitted that there was an undisclosed study published that showed a correlation between thimerisol in vaccines and the whole ADHD/autism spectrum. Within two weeks, less than a month after that hearing, the vaccine manufactures were lobbying for legislation that would decrease their liability. If you have an autistic child, it costs over \$30,000 a year to care for that child. The cost to fully vaccinate a child has risen from \$107 in 1987 to \$367 in 1996, a 43% increase to vaccinate your child in the last ten years. Vaccination revenues in the U.S. are a billion dollars a year, two times what they were in 1990 and the pharmaceutical companies are among the only companies that are making a profit at this time in our economy. So, what to do? If you are inclined to vaccinate your children, ask for thimerisol-free vaccinations. I think it's fair to assume that most vaccines now are going to be thimerisol-free, but there are places where the thimerisol-free

vaccine is not yet available. You can also ask for the monovalent vaccines, which means one vaccine at a time. There are implications that some of these combinations of vaccines are causing problems. For the MMR vaccine, for example, one would very rarely get the diseases measles and mumps at the same time, and if it does occur, there is a tendency towards developing colitis. With vaccine reactions to the MMR this can happen as well. Ask to get the vaccines separately, one at a time. Also, check out the exemptions to vaccinations. All states have medical exemptions, most states have religious exemptions and many states have philosophical exemptions with regard to vaccinations.

This is a controversial issue, but is a real question that needs to be addressed. There is a lot of information on the internet about vaccinations. There's a national vaccine information center in Virginia that puts out good information on this subject. Check out www.house.gov/reform, which is the house committee on government reform. They have all the transcripts from the CDC's testimonies in last year's eleven hearings on vaccinations. Also, the CDC, because of tremendous pressure from the parents of autistic children, has now opened up the vaccine safety datalink project, which is a huge database of vaccine information, compiled by several California HMO's.

Birth to Seven and Commercialism

The first seven years of life are really the time of the dream, the time of innocence. Psychologists for centuries have studied this time of life: Eric Erickson, Piaget, John Holt, Joseph Chilton Pearce, and Rudolf Steiner. Steiner describes seven-year periods of development of the human being. In the first seven years, the matrix is the mother. From seven to fourteen, it is nature, from fourteen to twenty-one, it is the child's peers, and at twenty-one it is the divine.

We do not learn by behavior modification, we learn by going back to the matrix and getting information from that. That's why a child always comes back to the mother, hanging onto her legs, and exploring from there. We learn from going back to what we know. The child puts things in her mouth, not because she wants to eat them, but because that's her most developed sense,

and that is how she identifies the object. The first seven years is the time of play, and as mammals, we are actually designed to learn through play, which is how we gather information. Einstein said that he would rather have imagination than intellect. It is imagination that forms the basis for our later intelligence.

It used to be that the time of childhood was sacrosanct. Now there is an intrusion into that innocence with commercial interests coming into childhood. Advertising agencies are targeting children and are devising slogans called, "From cradle to grave." There are now four twenty-four hour television stations for children. Advertising is everywhere in public places—in hotels, in elevators, in airports. There is always something assaulting you in common spaces that demands that you do something, buy something, or be something different than what you are. It is very difficult to protect children from this. In schools, popular soft drinks are being sold. There is Channel One—a commercial school station. There are advertisement on clothing—children have become walking advertisements. Fortunately, there is a lot of awareness about this problem. The Motherhood Project, issued a statement called "Watch Out For Children," an exposition of the commercial influences on children. There is also Commercial Alert, www.commercialalert.org, who have issued a parent's bill of rights stating that parents have a right not to have these pervasive intrusions into childhood.

Roots of Violence

I was not very peaceful as a child and I felt it would be great if I could raise peaceful children. I have often wondered where violence comes from, where does it start? Studies show that we are not inherently violent. In one of the Dalai Lama's books, he talks about a study in which it showed that violence is learned, that it is not inherent in our nature. It is something that we learn. And how do we learn it?

We learn all of these things in the first few years of life, during what's called the attachment period. We learn, in the first three to five years of life, the rules of our culture and of our species. They are imprinted in us so they cannot be changed. That is why for so many of us, when

we try to change our habits, our behavior, and our mental dialog, we find that it is a hard job because we are undoing our hardwiring. In those first five years what we are supposed to learn in the attachment period is trust, empathy, dependency, optimism, and conscience. We learn trust by having a caretaker who says, "Come on, honey, you can do it." As opposed to, "Don't! Be careful. Watch out!" You learn trust from the way you are related to in the first years' environment. You learn empathy from somebody being empathic to you. You learn dependency because you are dependent. You learn optimism, again, from your caretaker. And you develop conscience because you care, you love that person, so that mediates your violent impulses. This is all learned from birth through the first three to five years of life.

There is a Canadian psychiatrist, Elliott Barker, who studied psychopathic killers. He found that all psychopathic killers had some extreme disturbance in their caregivers in their first three to five years of life. He found that when children have extreme disruptions in their caregivers during the first three of life, it creates a tendency toward psychosis. In the first five years of life, it creates a tendency toward neurosis. The psychopathic killer did not develop conscience, so he must do the most extreme things in order to feel anything.

These species-dependent behaviors are what really create the human being. This is all based on the availability of a consistent caregiver. Nobody else can love you like a parent, so it is imperative that we model non-violence in the home, that we disarm our own inner environment. Start with disarming your own inner environment, start with trying to change those things which you say to yourself, that are violent to yourself. Try discipline without punishment. This is hard for parents because they feel they should control their children's behavior—that they are responsible for how they grow up and who they are. You can discipline without punishment. There are many alternatives to punishment. The key is in creating cooperation at the same time you maintain your authority, because you are the authority in the family as the parent. In a healthy family, the parents are leading, not dominating. As the children get older, the parents shift from

being managers to being more like consultants in their children's life.

Communication

Learn to express nuances of anger without nuances of insult. Learn to talk from your own feelings. Learn to talk about the situation rather than about the character of the person involved. If I am upset about something, I can call somebody a name. I can say, "Oh, my God, you slob. I can't stand this." Or I can say, "I really have a hard time when the house is messy." You can talk about yourself and your feelings, rather than accusing the other person. It is like learning a new language.

It is the subtlest activities of everyday parenting, and of relating to mothers, fathers, and children that transform the culture. At the same time that we extol the virtues of non-violent political situations, we must find non-adversarial ways of relating to our children. Non-violent parenting requires us not to give up, but to claim authority as a parent and to lead rather than dictate.

Pregnancy and birth can provide normal, healthy and ecstatic environments as our first environment and template for our future creativity. We can imprint to love, not to fear. We can provide healthy attachment during the first three to five years by protecting the integrity of the mother/infant dyad. We must preserve the biological imperative that we humans cleverly think we can overcome or do not have to attend to. Just because we can survive and are resilient does not mean that it is the best environment. We can root our intelligence in the imagination developed through free, spontaneous play of the first seven years. Let your children play!

And the most important thing to do to develop the brain, according to research, is to hold your babies, simply carry them. They are used to movement. They are used to being rocked in the womb. That stimulates their cells in the brain to develop. Hold your babies. This is how we will become civilized. It is the inherent order of nature. It is how we will survive. By respecting our biological roots as humans, we insure our survival.

We must learn to develop trust. Trust in normal pregnancy and birth. Trust in the immune

system. Protect the innocence of children. Protect the common good. Accept yourself unconditionally because then you can accept others. Disarm your inner environment. Affect personal change and encourage others to change. Healing the environment begins with our relation to nature, to our own natures. If we don't dominate ourselves, we can learn to trust the inherent nature of ourselves, of others, and of our children. Let us begin now.

Peggy O'Mara is the editor and publisher of Mothering Magazine. This is a lecture that was given October 20, 2002 at the Bioneers Conference in San Rafael, California.