

## Book Review

***Womb Prints: Discover Life's First Impressions*** (2017) by Barbara Findeisen. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. ISBN #1-4951-8228-0

*Womb Prints*, by Barbara Findeisen, explores how the environment experienced in utero can not only affect the fetus and its infancy but also has the capability of affecting them the rest of their life. Throughout the book, Findeisen delves into many different situations and environments that occur in pregnancy. She begins with stories about individuals who were surrounded by love in utero. She then discusses environments that were extremely stressful for the mother. This stress is not just experienced by the mother, it is experienced by the fetus as well. The stressful environments that are described range from physiologic complications, abuse to the mother, lack of love for the child, and even situations where the mother does not want to carry the child.

The book includes stories about individuals who have experienced different environments. It looks at their lives from a perspective that has often never been considered—the environment in the womb. Findeisen meets with the individuals and lets them share their story while asking about their birth. Many of them participate in her STAR Foundation and Workshops (Self-Analysis Toward Awareness Rebirth) to overcome and heal from negative effects caused by the environment in utero. In every case, she found that there was an unexpected or unhealthy event related to their time in utero, or during or shortly after their birth. These ranged from a multitude of experiences. Some of the common experiences that were found were a traumatic birth, an unhealthy environment in utero, or separation of the newborn from the mother. The healthy, loving environments are compared to those environments that are not as healthy or welcoming. Many of the individuals who were in utero where stress was present or had a traumatic birth experience often struggle with some aspect of their life. These included not being able to form relationships, longing for a feeling of acceptance and love, living with anxiety and stress, or being afraid to have children themselves. These struggles eventually cascade into a crisis that led individuals into the STAR Foundation. While

the other individuals who did not have a stressful in utero experience had characteristics in adulthood such as resilience, acceptance, and altruism.

There are many aspects of *Womb Prints* that I find intriguing. I believe that the environment inside the womb can play a role in the growth and development of the baby. If the mother is stressed, then the hormones, tension, and feelings are all experienced by the fetus. This can result in growth and development of a fetus that does not reach its full potential. However, I never took into consideration the psychological aspect of it. The fetus feels these stressors in utero as well as during birth. If this occurs during birth, the stress can be seen physiologically through signs such as fetal heart rate. Unfortunately, there are not visible signs of psychological impact, which may be why it is not addressed or frequently goes unnoticed. Findeisen does a great job of illustrating the emotions and feelings that the fetus and newborns may be going through. She then relates them to the lives of the adults she sees in the STAR program and explains how they translate into behaviors and feelings they encounter every day.

Another aspect that I resonate with is that there are many aspects of trauma. Some are a result of the mother's actions, some naturally occur, and some can be induced by healthcare professionals. As a student nurse, it is important to insure that one's actions are grounded in evidence-based practice (Goer and Romano, 2013). There is evidence that many of the interventions seen in labor and birth, both on fetuses and mothers, are not proven to be beneficial. In fact, as Findeisen says, many interventions do not improve the situation. They make it more dangerous and place more stress and trauma on the mother and fetus than if there were no interventions carried out.

*Womb Prints* does an excellent job of shedding light on the impact that the time in the womb has on individuals. I feel there are many different environments and experiences that people encounter after pregnancy, labor, and birth to become the person they are in adulthood. Although the womb is vital to a fetus and is the first environment it is in, it is not the only one that effects that individual. There are many experiences that occur between utero and adulthood that contribute to the creation of a person. Many individuals who are in a toxic womb environment are often placed in a toxic environment right after birth and throughout their childhood. This also impacts their lives, takes a toll on the individual, and contributes to the crisis. It is difficult to remove oneself or escape toxic environments, especially as a child.

On the other hand, many individuals who do not have a stressful birthing process are brought into loving and nurturing environments and do not experience those crises. If they do experience an unstable environment in the womb or at birth and are immediately brought into a

nurturing environment, those psychological effects can be diminished or even erased. I experienced this at birth. I was born at 26 weeks and was immediately taken from my mother and placed in the NICU for nine weeks. This is a traumatic experience and according to Findeisen, I should be able to recall how I felt in this time and be able to explain how it made me feel. In *Womb Prints*, those who had an experience like mine are now coping with crisis. For me, this is not the case. I was brought into a loving family and a very stable and healthy environment. I believe that I felt trauma and loneliness when I was a neonate, however, my innate objective was most likely to survive. Unfortunately, I am unable to recall how I felt, unlike some of Findeisen's clients, so I am unable to relate. Although there was some sensitivity to the environments that these fetuses are brought into, I think there needs to be more emphasis on this, as they spend much more time in those environments than they did in the womb. My impression while reading *Womb Prints* was that the sole reason for the crisis that the individuals presented in the book was their traumatic or unhealthy womb environment or birth experience. As an individual who experienced that, I can see her point of view, but do not agree fully.

Findeisen's *Womb Prints* is a great read for all audiences. It opened my eyes and made me consider the feelings and psychological impact that the womb environment and birth has on individuals and that can have long-lasting effects for the rest of their lives.

Reviewed by Haylee Haas, BS Biology  
Duke University ABSN Student

### References

Goer, H., & Romano, A. (2013). *Optimal care in childbirth: The case for a physiological approach*. London, UK: Pinter and Martin.