

SHARING SPACE: Do Real Feminists Attachment Parent?

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Publication info: Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health 21. 4 (Summer 2007): 363-385.

[ProQuest document link](#)

Abstract: None available.

Full Text: Headnote ABSTRACT: As attachment parenting has become more popular, many feminists condemn it as fundamentally oppressive to mothers. Their critique is based on misinterpretation and misrepresentation of attachment theory, the neuro-psychological body of research that underlies attachment parenting. In contravention of the great weight of scientific evidence, many feminists downplay the nurturance needs of young children as a defensive measure against the neo-conservative backlash against changing women's roles. Mothers and their children would be better served by a feminist articulation of a real family values agenda that calls for society to support fathers and mothers engaged in the socially meaningful work of child-rearing. KEY WORDS: Attachment parenting, attachment theory, feminism, family values, child-rearing, nurturing. INTRODUCTION It is not my child who has purged my face from history and herstory.. .Not my child, who in a way beyond all this, but really of a piece with it, destroys the planet daily, and has begun on the universe...We are together, my child and I. Mother and child, yes, but sisters really, against whatever denies us all that we are -Alice Walker (1979). I am a feminist. I am also a mother, and do not wish to think of myself as one who has betrayed feminist principles by staying home with my son and practicing the bogeywoman of feminist motherhood-attachment parenting. This essay is my attempt to rehabilitate attachment parenting from a feminist perspective and restore to new mothers the freedom to practice it without fear that they are pawns in a neo-traditionalist conspiracy (Ingman, 2006). ATTACHMENT PARENTING Attachment parenting is a collection of highly nurturing infant care techniques that promote attachment and bonding between the infant and her primary caregivers. These techniques include natural childbirth, homebirth or rooming-in, demand breastfeeding, co-sleeping in a family bed, child-led weaning, responsiveness to crying (as opposed to leaving the baby alone to "cry it out"), and "babywearing" (carrying the baby in a close-fitting sling or carrier rather than leaving the baby in a bouncy seat or crib for long periods of time). No single element is necessarily critical, and many parents choose to practice some techniques and not others. For many new parents, attachment parenting affirms their instinctual desire to keep their newborns snuggled up close. When your mother-in-law cannot refrain from suggesting that your three-minute old infant is well on her way to becoming a spoiled brat unless she is placed in her bassinet and left there until the next scheduled feeding (preferably from a bottle), a citation to highly respected baby care authorities and attachment parenting proponents, William and Martha Sears, comes in very handy. For others, however, attachment parenting and its proponents inspire wrath. Marrit Ingman (2006), in her memoir, lambastes Dr. Sears for framing his baby care advice in such an overstated and self-righteous way as to generate guilt and anxiety for mothers like her who find the advice to be ineffective or difficult to implement. Ingman did everything by the book and still had a colicky baby who cried nonstop-she and her baby in no way resembled the idyllic illustrations and descriptions of blissfully enmeshed mother-infant dyads in *The Baby Book* (Sears & Sears, 1992/2003). In *The Mommy Myth*, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) satirically propose a ritual burning of *The Baby Book*. Their contempt extends beyond Sears' arrogance to the essence of attachment parenting itself-the notion that sensitive, empathetic caregiving is part of a parent's job description. Though no one has come out and said it so bluntly, there circulates in feminist vogue the presumption that real feminists don't attachment parent. The notion that a woman might choose to attachment parent, free from the cultural pressure to be a perfect self-sacrificing mother, is even less popular than the idea that a woman can freely choose to stay at home and raise her kids without betraying her self (and the feminist movement that fought so hard to give her the choice). In both cases, feminists view the woman's decision with

disdain as the product of the false belief that she controls her own life, a belief that, in the context of sex discrimination, abortion restrictions, wage inequality, male privilege, and the cultural idealization of motherhood, is nothing short of delusional. At the risk of exposing the deluded nature of my own thinking, I wish to suggest that women are in fact quite capable of making rational decisions about how to care for their babies if they approach attachment and other child development theories as exercises in informed consent: Here is what we know about the risks and benefits of caring for your baby one way or another way; there is no magic formula for raising mentally healthy children, but here are some of the problems we've seen arise when parents do or don't do x, y or z-given this knowledge, make your choice, and do the best you can in the context of your life circumstances. Alternatively, a woman may attachment parent without having consulted the experts at all or even being aware that there is a label for her parenting style. She may be modeling her parenting style or that of a relative or friend or may simply be guided by intuition. (Here we must reject as chauvinistic not only the claim that women more than men rely on intuition but the tacit denigration of intuition as a second-rate form of intelligence). So long as her decision is based on something other than guilt and anxiety engendered by overzealous attachment parenting proponents, it is a legitimate one, and the only question feminists should be asking her is, "How can we [society] help?" Instead of looking for ways to support attachment parents, feminists have gone on the offensive against attachment parenting itself. A number of factors have engendered their antipathy: (1) feminist misinterpretation of attachment theory; (2) the paradoxical devaluation and valorization of mothers; (3) defensive protection of women's employment rights against chronic backlash; and (4) uncritical subscription to the capitalist values of hyper-individualism and the glorification of the earning and spending of money. The feminist critique of attachment theory must be taken as seriously as attachment theory itself, for it exposes many of the ways in which cultural, social, and economic pressures undermine the best efforts of mothers and fathers. At the same time, the condemnation of attachment parenting reveals a degree of inadequacy and contradiction in feminist discourse around parenthood and early childhood development. If feminism is to remain true to itself as a movement for human liberation, it cannot achieve its goals by making the needs of infant girls and boys secondary to the needs and aspirations of women and men. By critiquing the critique, we can begin to form an outline of a third-wave feminist movement that champions the needs and rights of all family members and calls upon the broader society to give families the support they need to nurture healthy kids.

Attachment Theory and Practice The attachment parenting philosophy is based on attachment theory as well as anthropological understanding of a baby's bioevolutionary need for close physical contact. Infants have good reason for wanting to stay close to their caregivers. Close proximity assists in their physiological and psychological organization by enabling the baby to share in the steady regulation of an adult body and facilitating the kind of emotional attunement between baby and caregiver that ensures the caregiver's responsiveness to the baby's needs. For premature babies, the importance of skin-to-skin contact reaches lifesaving proportions. Premature babies who receive round the clock "Kangaroo Care" (Ludington-Hoe & Golant, 1993) substantially increase their survival odds and are able to leave the hospital earlier than premies kept in incubators. In a recent study of premature twins, researchers made the remarkable observation that, if each baby were held against one of the mother's breasts, the temperature of each breast would adapt to regulate the baby's body temperature, thus making Kangaroo Care a far safer option than incubators (Gross-Loh, 2006). Mother Nature apparently has not read *The Mommy Myth*. Jean Liedloff (1975/1985), whose book *The Continuum Concept* helped launch the attachment parenting movement, puts the issue in existential terms. She describes being held and carried as the means through which an infant derives her primal sense of "unconditional lightness" and "goodness," the very basis for her sense of self-worth and ability to trust others. Her theory, developed on the basis of her observations of the indigenous Yequana people of South America, has been corroborated many times over by researchers in as diverse of fields as anthropology, child psychology and neurobiology (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Though they wouldn't label it as such, most mothers around the world practice attachment parenting and have done so as far as back as anyone can tell. Only in industrialized

societies have parents experimented with child-rearing techniques that are, from a baby's perspective, revolutionary. As ethnopediatric anthropologist Meredith Small (1998) notes, "Culture may change, and society might progress, but biology changes at a much slower rate. Babies are still stuck with their Pleistocene biology despite our modern age, and no amount of technological devices or bedtime routines will change that." Beginning in the 1950s, attachment theory pioneers like John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth observed the physical and psychological benefits of secure parent-child attachment, as well as the tragic consequences of touch deprivation and emotional misattunement or neglect. Their initial conclusions followed on the heels of and helped usher out the behaviorist view of child-rearing that had prevailed for the previous thirty or forty years—the cold-blooded notion that parents should not "spoil" infants by kissing or cuddling them and should rigorously train them from birth to be independent and morally upright by imposing rigid feeding and toilet-training schedules and employing draconian measures to prevent them from touching their genitals and other unseemly habits. Attachment theorists believe that a child who is forced into premature self-reliance may appear independent, because most children try to meet their parents' expectations as a matter of sheer survival. They become highly compliant and project a false invulnerability to mask the unmet needs and abandonment terror that lurk beneath the surface. When such children get older, their hidden wounds are likely to expose themselves in various ways, including neuroses, depression, substance abuse, and violence. Whereas securely attached children feel connected to others and demonstrate emotional resilience, cooperativeness and social competence, insecure children tend to be emotionally stunted and inarticulate, anxious, aggressive, clingy, defiant or overly compliant, unaffectionate and/or easily frustrated. While only the most extremely neglected or abused children are at risk of developing severe psychopathologies, children raised by well-intentioned, but emotionally unavailable parents miss out on the kind of intimate nurturing they need in order to avoid the commonplace but destructive compulsions, depressions, anxieties, and addictions that plague so many adults. Attachment theorists have shown that the attachment style of an infant remains remarkably stable over the course of childhood and indeed for the rest of his life. An adult is very likely to recreate with significant others relationships that enjoy the same degree of intimacy as his relationship with his parents. If he has children of his own, chances are they will be only as securely attached to him as he was to his own parents. For insecure parents, this intergenerational reproduction of attachment styles is a difficult cross to bear, for it can powerfully undermine the efforts of even the most well-intentioned of parents to create a secure bond with their children. More recent attachment research (Seigel & Hartzell, 2003) suggests that the way in which parents nurture their children after infancy may be a strong co-factor in the development of secure or insecure attachments but, because parents who practice attachment parenting are also likely to be emotionally available and nonauthoritarian, it can be difficult to correlate attachment outcomes to nurturing during early or later childhood. Suffice to say that, as a matter of common sense, establishing and maintaining a secure attachment during all stages of childhood, and even prior to birth, are key ways in which parents can enhance their children's ability to form and enjoy intimate relationships for the rest of their lives. Feminists who have been skeptical of the long term stability of early attachments will now have to contend with the publication of an unprecedented longitudinal study, now its 30th year, that demonstrates a high degree of predictability. The Minnesota ParentChild Study (Stroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005) has tracked 180 low-income mothers since before the birth of their first child. They concluded that nothing affects a child's development more than the care he receives in early childhood and that a child's attachment style at eighteen months usually remains stable throughout childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Ongoing assessments of the study's subjects will test the durability of attachment style into middle age. Sadly, attachment experiments again and again conclude that one third of U.S. children are insecurely attached, with even higher rates among high-risk families, the nightmarish legacy of the behaviorist dream. High-risk factors for insecure attachment include teenaged parents, poverty, premature births, parental depression, domestic violence, and substance abuse (Karen, 1998). The attachment parenting movement that sprung up during the late 1970s took note of the findings of

attachment researchers and honed in on the common features of modern parenting that were inconsistent with attachment principles-isolating infants in cribs, car seats, and playpens; bottle-feeding and the cry-it-out approach to sleep training. For each problematic element, attachment parenting advocates promote a more nurturing alternative that can make infancy a more satisfying experience for parents and babies. During the early decades of attachment research, mothers were, even more consistently than today, the primary caregivers; hence, the research failed to address paternal and non-parental relationships. In the eyes of early attachment theorists, "good enough" mothers were exclusively responsible for meeting their babies' attachment needs and entirely to blame for the consequences of "maternal deprivation." Nor did attachment proponents seem to be aware of the socio-cultural obstacles in the way of mothers striving to be "good enough." The expectation was that, if Trobriand Island, Yequana, and Balinese mothers could do it, so could western mothers, despite the fact that western families live in isolation from one another without the assistance of extended family, clan, or community. Just as attachment theory was gaining ground, so too was feminist discontent with the state of modern motherhood. With the publication of Betty's Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1976), unfulfilled mothers began to unleash an outpouring of pent-up anger, guilt, and despair over the constrained course of their lives, their entrapment in their biological destiny to bear and raise children, their exclusion from the non-domestic realm and their ambivalence toward their children and the entire mothering enterprise. They felt they had been set up to fail-burdened with exclusive responsibility for their children's well-being with little to no support from fathers and the broader society and then bashed for failing to give their children everything the experts said they needed or, alternatively, giving them too much and "smothering" them with overprotective love. Moreover, to the extent that their mothering abilities were inhibited from the get-go by the psychological legacy of their own childhood experiences, they were being emotionally oppressed twice over-first as little girls whose needs were not met and again as mothers made to feel guilty for not doing what they were not capable of doing. Such a psychological double burden was a recipe for post-partum depression for mothers tormented by feelings of inadequacy, leading many depressed and overwrought mothers to prescription pills and early afternoon cocktails. It was an awkward time, to say the least, for attachment proponents to be suggesting that parents, namely mothers, needed to be doing still more and that the consequences of failure to foster a secure attachment were potentially dire.

MODERN ATTACHMENT THEORY

Modern attachment theory has evolved in three significant ways. First of all, there is growing recognition of the role of non-maternal caregivers. secondly, the theory is now grounded not only in observational experiments but in the exploding new science of neuropsychiatry. Finally, there is a growing trend to contextualize parenting styles by examining the cultural, material, and psychological challenges parents, particularly mothers, face in trying to care for young children. As Alan Sroufe (et al, 2005), head of the Minnesota Parent-Child Study, commented in his latest book, "The tendency to blame parents is greatly reduced when one sees the challenges parents are facing...[B]laming parents for child problems is dramatically oversimplified and begins an infinite regress back to the earliest human couple" (p. 18). Sroufe takes every opportunity to point out the ways in which a parent's own upbringing and other factors undermine her ability to form a secure attachment with her own child and, conversely, how parental support can dramatically improve the quality of one's parenting. When attachment researchers belatedly examined the father's as well as the mother's attachment style, they observed that boys tend to reproduce their fathers' attachment style and girls their mothers'. Most attachment proponents now agree that children can form secure attachments to a small, stable core of caregivers, none of whom must necessarily be the mother. When it comes to daycare, the concern is no longer with the reality of it for most families but with the quality of care, measured first and foremost by the extent to which the children form close and lasting attachments to the daycare providers. Recent advances in the fields of neurobiology and neurochemistry have afforded psychiatrists an understanding of the physiological architecture of human emotion. What is stunning about their discoveries is how precisely they corroborate what attachment theorists have been saying all along, that nurturing early childhood

interactions are the building blocks of healthy psychological development. In the terms of neuro-psychiatry, repeated experiences literally carve out the neural pathways and forge the neural connections that determine our capacity for compassion, self-worth, abstract thought, impulse control, emotional regulation, and a sense of connection to other people and the natural world. As we age, the nervous system loses its plasticity, making personality change harder though not impossible to achieve (Siegel, 1999). Early affective transactions trigger or suppress the growth of neurotransmitters and hormones that profoundly affect the individual's emotional regulation, which takes place in the limbic and orbitofrontal regions of the brain. The limbic system is what enables us to sense our feelings at the most basic, visceral level. Neurotransmitters relay these feelings to the orbitofrontal cortex which interprets and regulates them, generating conscious awareness of emotional states such as joy or anger. The autonomic nervous system of a baby who experiences "frequent intense attachment disruptions" actually shifts into a dysfunctional state in which abnormally high or low levels of stress and pleasure hormones are produced. Over time, the abnormal neurochemical composition of the infant's brain becomes chronic and causes damage to the limbic and orbitofrontal connectors and to the limbic region itself, damage that can be seen in a "functional MRI" scan of the brain. (A functional MRI is a sophisticated neuro-imaging tool developed in 1993 that allows scientists to observe and record dynamic physiological processes as they occur inside the brain). What the researchers mean by "intense attachment disruptions" is chronic misattunement and non-responsiveness or inappropriate responsiveness to the baby's emotional cues or, of course, outright abuse or neglect. When a caregiver promptly responds with empathy to an infant's distress, she is actually modulating the infant's neurological stress response so as to help the infant return to homeostasis. Recent research has made the unhappy discovery that, when caregiver attunement is not consistent, the alteration of neurochemical levels and resultant limbic and connective impairment is permanent. It is no coincidence that the limbic circuits affected by attachment deprivation are the very same ones targeted by modern psychiatric medications that artificially alter the brain's neurochemistry in such a way as to repair or override damaged circuitry (Shore, 1997). Normal brain development and mental health begin with an attuned caregiver's sensitive response to smiles, coos and cries of distress. As psychiatrist Daniel Siegel (1999) explains, "The attunement of emotional states provides the joining that is essential for the developing brain to acquire the capacity to organize itself more autonomously as the child matures."(p. 278) And, the closer the baby's body is to the caregiver's, the more appropriately responsive the caregiver can be. Acts of reciprocal affection like touch and eye contact generate what neuro-psychiatrists call "limbic resonance," a profoundly satisfying state of emotional correspondence, the experience of which is what distinguishes mammals from reptiles.

Feminist Misinterpretation and Critique of Attachment Parenting While there are many feminist-identified mothers who believe in the soundness of attachment theory and try to practice as many attachment-promoting techniques as they can, feminist theorists by and large inveigh mightily against attachment parenting (AP). Anti-AP feminists condemn it as a fundamentally oppressive mandate that women relinquish their autonomy in order to devote themselves incessantly to their babies. They decry AP for imposing an unrealistic and unfair set of requirements on mothers and for making any mother who does not follow its precepts to the letter suffer intense feelings of guilt and inadequacy. AP, they believe, is a fad, the latest incarnation of the age-old myth of the perfect mother who subordinates all of her own needs and desires to the expert-defined needs of her baby. The feminist critique of AP is a subset of a more general concern that undue emphasis on the quality of early childhood relationships perpetuates the relegation of women to the second-class status they have suffered throughout history. As Diane Eyer (1996) put it, "Clearly the precepts of attachment...are more than anything a rationalization that manipulates mothers into feeling solely responsible for the early care of their children." (p.204). Some feminists question the validity not only of attachment theory but of the broader child development paradigm in which it is located. They contend that, contrary to what the vast majority of child development experts have been telling us for the past hundred or so years, parents do not in fact have an enormous influence on the development of a child's character. They cite genes, environmental conditions (such

as malnutrition, lead paint, unsafe neighborhoods, poor health care), socioeconomic and cultural factors (including racism, sexism, materialism, corporatization) and peer influence as having equal or greater impact on a child's psychological well-being than anything parents do or don't do. Any expert, from Dr. Spock to Dr. Sears, who dares to suggest otherwise, is greeted with more than a modicum of suspicion and pilloried for espousing the absurdly sentimental notion that a child's early familial experiences are formative. The tendency to go overboard in ascribing all aspects of child development to parental omnipotence is a point well taken, and certainly all of the external factors listed above have profound impacts on a child's development. But feminists stray too far into wishful thinking when they insist that parental influence is minimal. The longstanding nature versus nurture debate has in fact been more or less resolved by an emerging consensus that one's genetic inheritance affords the individual a range of potential personality traits, the development of which are a function of the interaction between inborn temperament and social interactions and other experiences. As Dr. Siegel (1999) explains, "Genes contain the information for the general organization of the brain's structure, but experience determines which genes become expressed, how, and when...Early in life, interpersonal relationships are a primary source of the experience that shapes how genes express themselves in the brain." (p. 14). The import of these interpersonal experiences have their own hierarchy; early experiences have more impact than later ones, and interactions with parents and primary caregivers are more formative than interactions with siblings, peers, and others. How well-tailored a parent's care is to the young child's unique temperament determines in large measure the child's capacity for emotional security and resilience, qualities that in turn flavor the nature of the child's interactions with others and afford the child more or less of an ability to cope with adversity and peer pressure. A follow-up study of adults raised in the 1950s found that parental warmth (or lack thereof), more so than poverty or divorce, was the strongest factor affecting the adult's satisfaction with his marriage, friendships, and work (Goleman, 1991). This is not to deny that family poverty causes enormous suffering and ill health and that its eradication is a moral imperative, but rather to add that part of the tragedy of poverty is the way in which it sabotages parents' ability to nurture their children. There is no need to force people concerned about the well-being of children and women to choose among parental, genetic, or social/environmental determinants of healthy child development, unless of course one is attempting to rewrite the equation in a way that obscures maternal accountability. The feminist critique of AP is a defensive measure in reaction to conservative attacks against women's rights. Second wave feminism has focused primarily on reproductive and workplace rights. The quarter-century old conservative backlash against abortion, working mothers, and the scourge of "broken" or non-traditional (i.e. nonpatriarchal) families has kept feminists in a defensive posture. To be sure, if the retired Reaganites and the active-duty Bush entourage were to fully realize their dream, women would be even more vulnerable to coercive, full-time motherhood and less able to walk away from unsafe or unfulfilling marriages, though optimism can be found in recent polls showing strong public support for women's equality. Social conservatives have on their side the long tradition of the sacralization of motherhood-since the time of the Virgin Mary herself, an ever-evolving set of cultural myths have prescribed the proper nature, role and behavior of mothers, all of which share a paradoxical idealization and devaluation of motherhood. In other words, mothers have always been held responsible for their children's development, especially when it goes awry, but given little to no support in the child-rearing endeavor. The current version of the myth is that good mothers are self-sacrificing, child-centered and pure of feeling in their love for their children and should single-handedly perform their heroic mission without compensation, recognition, or support. Expressions of maternal ambivalence and the desire to engage in pursuits other than parenting contradict the motherhood ideal and expose the woman to a certain amount of cultural disdain. Although the concerns underlying feminist criticism of AP are valid, the critique itself is defective in several respects. First, there is a tendency to overlook or downplay the accepted role of multiple caregivers in modern attachment theory, which has for decades recognized that a child's attachment needs can be provided by a small, stable corps of attachment figures, none of whom must necessarily be the mother. Modern attachment

theorists emphasize the importance of attachment-promoting care by fathers and other non-maternal caregivers whose involvement not only guards against maternal burnout but also prevents the infant from becoming so preoccupied with his relationship with his mother that he has difficulty bonding with others in later childhood and adulthood. For example, a recent study of Swedish children in high-quality day care found that attachment security and non-parental care helped children develop social competence (Bohlin, 2005). What feminists often refer to as the "discrediting" of attachment theory is in fact a refinement that does far more to corroborate than to challenge it. Alongside Freud's discovery of the unconscious mind, attachment theory provides the very foundation for the practice of modern psychology, not only because of its strong scientific basis but because it resonates with what therapists and patients know to be true. Still, attachment theory, like psychoanalysis, has a hard time shaking itself free from its original set of sexist conclusions—that maternal deprivation and only maternal deprivation causes insecure attachment and that mothers are morally obligated to stay home for at least the first year. Though this is no more the belief of most modern attachment theorists than it is the belief of modern psychoanalysts that little girls suffer from penis envy, feminists with a long memory for insult persist in their dismissal of attachment theory as "psychobabble pseudoscience" (Eyer, 1996, p. 102). The only element of AP that men cannot perform is breastfeeding. Although the nutritional superiority of breastfeeding is beyond dispute, it need not be treated as the sine qua non of good enough parenting. There are many other attachment-promoting techniques mothers and fathers can use if breastfeeding is not a realistic or desirable option for their families. As a fervent believer in the benefits of breastfeeding and one who looks back on the thousands of breastfeeding sessions with my son with great fondness, this concession does not come easily. But, when I weigh it against the potential for greater paternal involvement, I am compelled to relax my stance. For the legions of mothers and fathers who would like to stay home and breast or bottle-feed their babies for a period of time but cannot afford to do so, a feminist agenda that included financial support for stay-at-home parents would serve them well. Still, it is difficult to disentangle breastfeeding from the controversy over which parent (if any) stays home, for a desire to feed their baby breast milk is one of the principal reasons why a couple would adopt the traditional division of labor. Lactation aside, the potential for fathers to practice AP is, in the feminist view, still only theoretical. Because institutional daycare with up to six infants per caregiver (a ratio of four to one is the norm) cannot by definition practice AP, parents who embrace AP usually designate a stay-home parent for the child's first year. Given wage inequality and the remnants of the age-old cultural taboo against male nurturing (as well, let us not forget, the immutability of mammalian anatomy), most couples will still choose to have mom stay home while dad goes out and maximizes the family's income. Thus do AP proponents take on the starring role in the reincarnated cult of domesticity that keeps women tied to the home. Douglas's and Michaels' book (2004) even includes a chapter entitled "Dr. Laura's Neighborhood: Babywearing, Nanny Cams, and the Triumph of the New Momism"), as though Dr. Laura's shrill call for cold-blooded "nurturing" bears any resemblance to the kind of authentic bonding and affection promoted by AP. In truth, fundamentalists like Dr. Laura are much more inclined to endorse "tough love" approaches to parenting. I called in to Dr. Laura's radio show and was informed by the call screener that Dr. Laura could not take my call because she had not heard of AP. Dr. Laura's Christian brethren got themselves into trouble with the American Academy of Pediatrics when they published *Babywise*, a popular baby care manual that gave parents dangerous advice to enforce strict feeding schedules with their infants. The popular conservative parenting "expert," John Rosemond, who urges parents to focus more on control than nurturance and endorsed Newt Gingrich's proposal to place the children of teenage welfare mothers in orphanages, believes attachment theory is "psychobabble" (Rankin, 2005). Meanwhile, Reverend James Dobson's "Focus on the Family" media empire urges parents to spank children over fifteen months old hard enough to hurt. For such conservatives, "family values" is shorthand for authoritarian child-rearing and a package of regressive and hateful ideologies about the composition and structure of marriage and family. The neotraditionalist family movement is as unlikely to endorse AP as it is gay marriage. Most AP advocates believe that, ideally, one parent should stay home or that

the parents should try to work out a schedule that enables them both to engage in part-time work and part-time child care and minimize the amount of time the baby spends in daycare. In recent years, more pragmatic AP proponents have turned their attention to the quality of daycare and, dismayed by what they see, are calling for a panoply of regulatory reforms and subsidies that would enhance the quality and consistency of care. For now, working parents can still take advantage of AP techniques to reestablish intimacy with their babies by carrying and co-sleeping with them during non-work hours. Still, babies who spend most of their days in institutional daycare do not receive the constancy of attuned care-giving that babies of stay-at-home attachment parents can bestow. It is this reality, more than anything, that makes feminists balk at AP. Expostulating backwards from a woman's right to work, even while her children are still young, feminists go on the offensive against child-rearing advice that is infeasible for dual earner or single parent working families. Fair enough...until the argument is carried another step backward to arrive at the foregone conclusion that the advice in question is based on a fabricated set of needs. Instead of asserting, "We are concerned that working parents cannot meet their babies' attachment needs and demand that employers, day care centers, hospitals, and government agencies do x, y and z to facilitate attachment and bonding," a position that would push social policy in a progressive direction for all concerned, they short-circuit the debate by denying that babies have needs that are difficult for working parents to meet. Parent-child Conflicts in a Capitalist Patriarchy Wading through the tide of recent feminist diatribes against modern motherhood, I am reminded of a stunning observation made by a feminist man in his analysis of why men resist women's demand for equality. He notes that men have historically viewed their financial contribution to the family as a gift borne of their hard work and personal sacrifice but that feminist claims have disabused them from such a privileged perspective. "[I]f people think they are giving or sacrificing much to make gifts to someone over a period of time, and then they learn he or she feels the gifts were completely deserved, since the counter-gifts are asserted to have been as great and no special debt was incurred, they are likely to be hurt or angry" (Goode, 1992, p. 298). Like men who resist the reality check presented by feminism, women are reeling from the continuously evolving conception of young children as entitled to a standard of care that exceeds what most parents have heretofore provided. Like men who are now expected to assume domestic responsibilities in addition to their work outside the home, mothers (and fathers) are being told to revise and redouble their nurturing activities. The fact that parents don't want to hear such advice does not render it unsound. In the political quest to free women from the bondage of gender roles, what often gets overlooked is that every child is entitled to the best possible care by the hands of one or more men or women. During the first year, the care is intensive-there is simply no way around this fact for feminists of any stripe. Gender socialization, wage inequality, the biology of breastfeeding, and the structure and psychodynamics of the modern family mean that this demanding job usually falls on a sole woman, but this reality does not erase the biologically-programmed needs of infants which cannot evolve at the cataclysmic pace of social change in a high-technology, capitalist society. Unable to do more than ankle bite at the solid body of evidence behind attachment theory, feminists sometimes resort to contemptuous or pitiful portrayals of the neurotic women who subscribe to it. In this vein, AP is often treated (inaccurately) as the initial stage of a broader parenting philosophy known as "child-centered" or "intensive" parenting. These terms have no fixed meaning and are used with both positive and negative connotations to refer to highly nurturing as well as over-indulgent or "hyper" styles of parenting. Generally speaking, feminists use the terms negatively by way of suggesting that child-rearing, under the influence of Dr. Spock and his ilk, has shifted to a child-centered extreme in which parents, primarily mothers, must ensure that their children are afforded every opportunity for full intellectual, creative, physical, and psychosocial development. In *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, Judith Warner (2005) paints an unattractive portrait of neurotically over-involved, unhappy, upper middle-class mothers who drive themselves and their kids crazy. Even before their babies are born, these mothers are piping Mozart into the womb and, after birth, waving word recognition flash cards in front of the babies' barely focused eyes. As their children grow older, the mothers pack their schedules full of

developmentally optimal playdates, classes, and activities and spare no effort to ensure their admission to the best schools, from Piagetan pre-school to Princeton. Because most of the mothers in her study also practiced AP when their children were little, Warner concludes that AP is yet another manifestation of yuppie designer parenting. Douglas and Meredith (2004) not only lump AP in with hyper-parenting but distort AP itself, summarizing it as follows: "Reattach your baby to your body the moment she is born and keep her there pretty much until she goes to college." Funny, but wrong. ATTACHMENT PARENTING CLARIFIED AP may be labor-intensive, but it need not be over-indulgent nor is it part of a package deal that includes hyper-parenting. Jean Liedloff (1975/1985) herself cautions that what passes for enlightened parenting in middle-class western families is actually a narcissistic, intrusive, anxious preoccupation with young children that does them more harm than good. She urges parents to keep their pre-crawling babies attached to their bodies, but not to overwhelm them with constant interaction. Babies, she believes, simply want to observe the goings-on of the world around them from the safety and comfort of their caregiver's loving arms. Whether or not one agrees with Liedloff or believes babies need more focused attention, the point is that AP can stand alone as a practice distinct from other child-centered, intensive parenting styles. The conflation of AP and hyper-parenting is emblematic of a general propensity for feminist treatments of motherhood to exaggerate the burdens of motherhood and to display thinly veiled contempt for women who derive satisfaction from stay-at-home motherhood and AP. Understandably, a thousand years of patriarchy and seven years of George Bush have made women a bit defensive about the strides toward equality they have made in recent decades. Moreover, a long history of blaming mothers for being too cold or too smothering, too strict or too permissive, too preoccupied or too interfering, too neglectful or too overprotective has, for good reason, set mothers on edge. Unfortunately, feminist protectiveness of women's autonomy has engendered a tacit competition between mothers and their children regarding whose needs will be prioritized and whose subordinated. In order to increase the mother's odds of prevailing in such a competition, the needs of children are downplayed and child care experts lambasted for exaggerating or concocting needs that, according to feminists, do not exist or do not cause the child to suffer when they go unfulfilled. This trend dates back to Betty Friedan's tacit denunciation of natural childbirth and breastfeeding as manifestations of the pernicious feminine mystique. To Friedan and her intellectual heirs, it is almost as though men invented breastfeeding to keep women down. In the view of disgruntled feminists (and their right-wing adversaries), children are little tyrants who oppress their mothers with their constant demands for physical and emotional sustenance. To read the accounts of some, caring for one's own child is tantamount to living in an active war zone in which hardly a moment of harmony, tranquility or enjoyment transpires. The children are aided and abetted by an army of so-called experts who demand that parents (i.e. mothers) devote themselves to meeting each and every one of their children's needs and pay scant attention to conflicting needs of their own. As Janna Malamud Smith (2003) argues, "The most deeply immoral idea we continually impose on mothers is the notion that they should be so singularly and asymmetrically accountable...We believe mothers should produce copious empathy without experiencing it from the larger culture..." (p.188)-or, Smith should add, without having experienced it from their own parents. This critique is fair insofar as child-rearing experts have tended to overlook the practical realities that undermine parents and have until recently ignored or condemned mother's feelings of ambivalence and paid little more than lip service to women's desire to pursue personal goals that do not revolve around their children. But from there on the critique is, ironically, predicated on the very kind of dualistic thinking that patriarchy has so successfully normalized-the dividing of the world into the powerful and the obedient, victor and vanquished, detached and connected, male and female, self and other-the dividing of ourselves against ourselves. Viewed dualistically, the parent-child relationship is a zero-sum game in which the child flourishes at the expense of the parent's personal fulfillment. In this paradigm, the parent's power over the child is threatened by the imposed expectation that the parent meet the child's need for deep connection. AP, then, is seen as an unacceptable inversion of the hierarchy of power, making parent slave to child. As Adrienne Rich (1976) observed, the powerful do not have to "enter

intuitively into the souls of the powerless, or to hear what they are saying in their many languages...Colonialism exists by virtue of this short-cut-how else could so few live among so many and understand so little" (p.65). Mothers and fathers have total power over their infants, but when they listen and respond to their babies when they tell them what they need, the parents may feel they surrender some of this power. By stepping outside of the patriarchal mindset, parents are free to be as responsive as they want to be without fear of servitude. Attachment parents are not deluded slaves who have been duped into feeling fulfilled by having a baby attached to their bodies 24/7. They are parents who have transcended the dualistic paradigm and see their family as a web of intersecting needs and desires that is constantly rewoven to accommodate evolving interests. Attachment parents see their attuned care-giving style not as a form of over-gratification that will create a spoiled tyrant but as a reflection of their loving recognition of the special dependency needs of their children during the first precious year of life. To the extent that these parents are able to organize their lives in such a way as to facilitate attachment-promoting practices (and I'm not saying this is easy), they derive a great deal of emotional and sensual satisfaction from being in close contact with their warm, cooing, baby-smelling little bundles. Limbic resonance is bi-directionally restorative-a parent can enjoy close contact with his baby as much as the baby needs it. As Rachel Cusk (2001) admits in her otherwise depressing indictment of motherhood, "I remain surprised by how proximate the mythology of motherhood is to its reality" (p. 205). No matter how disillusioned and exhausted new mothers may be, there is still some aspect of childbirth and infant care that corresponds to the expectation of awe, fusion, and bliss. Contrary to the feminist portrayal of AP as oppressively labor-intensive, it may in fact represent an easier and more fulfilling approach, particularly for parents of high-needs babies whose fussiness can be reduced by consistent baby-wearing. Attachment parents avoid some of the pitched battles around weaning, pacifier dependency, and sleep resistance that mainstream parents often contend with. I know for myself that breastfeeding was as much a personal convenience as it was a nutritional gift to my baby-as I write this article in anticipation of adopting a newborn baby, I am filled with more than a little dread at the prospect of going down to the kitchen to heat up bottles of formula several times a night instead of rolling over in bed and letting the baby nurse back to sleep. I am grateful not to be parenting during the behaviorist era, and take comfort in the belief that, by practicing AP, I add my voice to the chorus that will eventually drown out the last vestiges of one of the most destructive child-rearing philosophies in recorded history. For many parents, AP is merely a label for a style they intuitively believe will foster intimacy and joy in their relationships with their children. Though carrying a baby in arms is more labor intensive than leaving a baby alone in her crib most of the time, the satisfaction is, for many parents, well worth the effort. It is strikingly coincidental that the proportion of women (roughly a third) who do not derive a strong sense of meaning from motherhood is equivalent to the proportion of insecurely attached parents and children; is it the same third? (consult Boulton, 1983, and Louis & Margolies, 1987 for discussions of maternal discontent). Perhaps this third is imprisoned in a child-rearing time warp in which parents are so determined not to spoil their babies that they wind up spoiling the entire experience of parenthood. If they knew that there was an alternative way to care for their babies that would in all likelihood yield better mental health outcomes for themselves and their babies, how many more would choose it? What if women and men were given the choice? Whereas Warner's (2005) mothers are trapped in a neurotic bind that compels them to parent in a way that increases their anxiety and discontent, many parents' choice of attachment-promoting techniques is a reflection of their psychological freedom to do things differently from their parents and from mainstream society and to appreciate the uniqueness of their child's first year of life-uniquely demanding and exhausting yes, but also uniquely formative and flush with opportunities to experience a kind of love and joy that many adults have never before known. Warner's mothers are missing out on the joy of parenthood, not because of attachment parenting, but in spite of it. When the going gets rough, when sleep deprivation, mastitis, backaches, and one missed shower too many overwhelm their sense of well-being, they do not look to AP as the evil culprit that robbed them of their autonomy but, rather, to their co-parents, communities and society for support. Agitating for this kind of support,

then, rather than scuttling the needs of children, should be the aim of feminists. **BEYOND THE ZERO SUM GAME: SOCIETY'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION** Children do not ask to be born, and when they are it is the responsibility of their parents and of society to meet their nurturance needs. Child development experts and indeed many feminists have promulgated a wide variety of family-support proposals that would help parents care for their young children in the way they deserve. Such proposals include paid parental leave, flex-time, on-site daycare, daycare quality reforms and subsidies, neighborhood family drop-in centers, mental health care, parent education classes, expanded dependent child tax credits, tax credits for stay-home parents, compassionate welfare reform, and many more. Amazingly, not one of these is on the active agenda of the mainstream feminist movement (though, as I write this, a new committee of the National Organization for Women is beginning to take up some of these issues). The scorn of many feminists toward stay-at-home mothers and the failure of the women's movement to speak to the desire of stay-at-home and working mothers and fathers to provide optimal care for their children illustrates the capitalist orientation of mainstream liberal feminism. At its core rests the assumption that personal fulfillment is a function of the equal right to work, despite the fact that the majority of women have demeaning or tedious service sector or pink collar jobs that barely fulfill a woman's financial let alone aspirational needs. Is working the cash register at Wal-Mart more liberating than caring for one's own child? Perhaps some women would find this to be the case, but most, I have to assume, would not. Until feminists start challenging capitalist and patriarchal values such as hyperindividualism, hierarchy, competition, and materialism, the women's movement will never achieve for women more than the equal right to be exploited and for girls and boys the right to repeat with their own children what was done to them. As Barbara Katz Rothman (1989) urges, "A feminist agenda must go beyond calls for inclusion into the world that is" (p. 253). Perhaps Janna Smith (2003) put it best when she wrote, The best mother is a free mother. Simply stated, a mother who feels valued and supported by her family, neighborhood, workplace, and society will have an easier time communicating to her children a sense that they are loved and valued. Conversely, a society cannot care adequately for children without respecting and caring for mothers (p. 187). Unfortunately, Smith also believes that a "free mother" is one who dismisses the advice of child development experts as mother-blaming psychobabble. "A child needs a mother who is not constantly abraded by philosophies that inflate her accountability while obscuring her effort" (p. 168). Smith's point rings true for the most part, but hits a shrill note when carried too far. No one's interests are served when children's needs are exaggerated, nor when they are denied. To the extent that child development experts have hit upon needs that most modern parents cannot reasonably be expected to fulfill, the resolution lies not in parent-child needs fulfillment competition but in the formulation of a pro-family political agenda that aims to enhance the nurturing capacities of families and communities. **CONCLUSION** For many new parents, especially those who are single, poor, and/or have twins or several young children, AP may be an unattainable ideal. As a friend who provided child care for extremely poor families reminded me, parents who rely on welfare benefits spend much of their time pushing their strollers around from one government office to the next and can hardly be expected to have the stamina to carry their babies while walking the long city blocks and standing in endless lines. On the other hand, I've seen plenty of parents shleping around babies in cumbersome car seats when they could more easily have carried the baby in a sling-alas, slings cost twice as much as strollers. And for babies at high risk for SIDS, there is evidence that breastfeeding and co-sleeping may have life-saving value. The existence of real-life impediments to practicing AP does not mean that attachment theory is wrong and that babies in fact are perfectly well-served when they spend their days in strollers and car seats. Rather, it means that it is the responsibility of adults who care about the well-being of our youngest and most vulnerable to give support and encouragement to parents so that they can give their babies as much tender, loving care as they possibly can. Not every contradiction that AP and motherhood present can be reconciled, whether within or outside of the dualistic paradigm. It would be disingenuous to pretend that, so long as the mother practices AP, hers and the baby's interests are always aligned. Until fathers play an equal role in child-rearing and society values and

supports parents, the notion that mother-child conflicts of interest must be resolved in favor of the child goes down with feminists as easily as an uncoated pre-natal vitamin. Writing about parenthood more generally, Cornel West and Sylvia Ann Hewlett (1998) had this to say: As recent beneficiaries of liberation movements (feminist and black), we find it particularly hard to face the bare, bald truth: children deserve prime time and attention and need to sit in the center of life. This is bound to curtail some of our hard-won freedoms. So be it. At least for the sweet, short years of childhood, everything else in a parents' life should be negotiable, (p. 22-23). Their moral exhortation serves as a reminder not only of the responsibility of adults toward the young but of the ephemerality of infancy-short and, hopefully, sweet. References

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Publication title: Journal of Prenatal&Perinatal Psychology&Health

Volume: 21

Issue: 4

Pages: 363-385

Number of pages: 23

Publication year: 2007

Publication date: Summer 2007

Year: 2007

Publisher: Association for Pre&Perinatal Psychology and Health

Place of publication: Forestville

Country of publication: United States

Journal subject: Medical Sciences--Obstetrics And Gynecology, Psychology, Birth Control

ISSN: 10978003

Source type: Scholarly Journals

Language of publication: English

Document type: General Information

ProQuest document ID: 198699747

Document URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/198699747?accountid=36557>

Copyright: Copyright Association for Pre&Perinatal Psychology and Health Summer 2007

Last updated: 2010-06-06

Database: ProQuest Public Health

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