



Creativity Begins in the Womb



MARY DANIEL HOBSON

UNTIL RECENTLY, scientists' beliefs about the limitations of infant awareness and intelligence seemed well grounded. After all, the fetal and newborn nervous system is only partially complete: At birth, the infant brain is only one quarter of its eventual weight, with whole neural systems still yet to develop. Moreover, the myelin sheathing of the neurons, which moderates the speed of nerve signal transmissions, is only partially formed. Since the brain is so crucially involved in suffering, pleasure, learning, memory, and thinking, neurologists naturally assumed that these primary functions of consciousness were as undeveloped as the physical structures that supported them. This apparently logical assumption led scientists to refer to the newborn infant as "a brainstem preparation," and to regard obvious signs of pain or pleasure in infants as "mere reflexes."

Over the past two decades, experimental advances in embryology and fetal studies—using intrauterine photography, ultrasound imaging, the scanning electron microscope,

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and other new technologies—have given us a more direct view into the world of the unborn. In dozens of crucial experiments with newborns, researchers have begun to pay attention not just to what infants should be able to do, according to theory, but to what they are actually doing. In case after case the new information flies in the face of established theories. We are learning that babies come into the world with well-developed senses of touch, taste, and hearing; they move in response to pleasant or unpleasant stimuli and both express and respond to emotions; they smile and cry even in the womb; they are already social beings, capable of interacting with others, imitating, and showing affection; and they are already learning about themselves and their environments.

Obstetrician and gynecologist Rene Van de Carr of Hayward, California, notes that while brain growth in the

fetus is patterned genetically, the development of specific neural pathways related to motor and mental abilities is controlled by sensory input. He points to a study of premature infants at Stanford University in which those who received sensory stimulation before birth showed an average increase of 13 points in IQ scores over those in a control group. *[Editor's Note: A similar ongoing research study of pre- and postnatal stimulation conducted in Venezuela by child development psychologist Dr Beatriz Manrique over the last sixteen years has found that stimulated babies tend to exhibit accelerated visual, linguistic, and motor development skills as well as higher intelligence and creativity over the first six years of their life (see www.2bparent.com/research.htm for details).]*

David Cheek, MD, an obstetrician and pioneering hypnotherapist, praises efforts to stimulate intelligence and creativity in the unborn and newborn. But he also believes that it is important to avoid forcing too much extraneous input on the child—as by constantly beaming loud classical music and Shakespeare directly at it in a deliberate effort to produce another Einstein or Mozart. The fetus, after all, sleeps up to twenty-two hours a day and, says Cheek, “probably prefers a quiet environment most of the time.” Occasional soft music

including some of the most “primitive” ones known—have beliefs that agree closely with what we are learning from age-regression studies. Moreover, these same cultures often have childbirth practices that seem in some respects more humane and enlightened than those frequently still followed in modern hospitals.

Anne Maiden, a psychotherapist and social psychologist, has spent ten years in a cross-cultural study of birth. “I was interested in finding alternatives to our present Western system of childbirth, and felt that an anthropological point of view could be useful.” Maiden has studied 80 cultures and visited 24; three of those that have received particular emphasis in her work are the Tibetan, the Balinese, and the Aboriginal Australian. She cites an illustrated, recently translated medical text from the eleventh century, *Tibetan Medical Paintings*, which deals in some detail with each week of life in the womb. “In the twenty-sixth week,” according to the text, “the child’s awareness becomes very clear, and it can see its former lives. It can see if it was a pure being or an ordinary being, and what type of birth it had before it took this birth.” In Bali, one woman told Maiden that as soon as she became pregnant the first thing she did was to talk to the *dukun*, the village healer.

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and speaking may be helpful, according to Cheek, but it is the child’s psychic and emotional environment that is of utmost importance. *[Emphasizing that point is a recent study reported on in the July/August 2004 issue of Child Development. It found that a mother’s stress level during pregnancy could have significant impacts on the unborn. Dr Bea Bergh, author of the study, noted that mothers-to-be who experienced prolonged stress between the twelfth and twenty-second weeks of their pregnancies were more likely to have children who exhibited anxiety and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders.]*



THE UNBORN BEING IN TRADITIONAL CULTURES

The idea that fetuses and newborns are capable of interacting with and being deeply imprinted by their social environments may be revolutionary from the standpoint of conventional Western science, but it is far from new. Indeed, many ancient and traditional cultures—

His role was to help her enter into a dialogue with the child in the womb in order to discover the child’s identity and its purpose in life. Those two questions—of identity and purpose—follow through all of Balinese education and spiritual training, which aim to assist the incarnating soul to fulfill its destiny.

In Aboriginal Australian society the spirit of the child is believed already to exist prior to conception, and is associated in the spiritual realm—the Dreamtime—with a particular place in the sacred landscape. Robert Lawlor, author of *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*, writes: “To the Aboriginal mind, the modern explanation of conception as the collision of a tiny sperm and egg is absurd. In their view, sperm may prepare the way for the entry of the child into the womb, but the spirit of the child appears in the father’s dreams or inner awareness before conception.” Aboriginal women consider their role in childbirth as that of providing a temporary haven for a being with its own pre-existing spiritual identity, and believe that the spirit does not fully enter into the fetus until it has reached a certain stage of development—roughly ten weeks after conception. ➔

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According to anthropologist Colin Turnbull, the Mbuti pygmies of central Africa “see their true beginnings, the first assemblage of those forces that ultimately lead to their being what they are, as predating the act of conception by eons and reaching back into antiquity.” Psychotherapist Jean Liedloff discussed her observations of birth and childhood among the Yequana Indians of the jungles of Venezuela in her influential book *The Continuum Concept*. Visiting the Yequana in the early 1970s as a writer, she was impressed by the psychological health and resilience of the people she met, and tried to discover the reason for their constant good humor and equanimity. She eventually decided that Yequana birthing and childrearing practices were responsible: From the moment of conception, the child is made to feel that it is a valued part of its social and natural environment.

Similar attitudes infuse native North American societies’ practices surrounding childbirth. Cherokee spiritual teacher Dhyani Ywahoo notes in her book *Voices of Our Ancestors: Cherokee Teachings from the Wisdom Fire* that “We choose a family wherein our gifts may flourish, through which we can complete a cycle of learning. Even when we are within our mothers we begin to hear and feel our family around us. Within the womb the young person is sensing the qualities of its parents’ minds and responding to the thoughts directed by other people toward the mother. For this reason it is very important that mothers-to-be have a loving support system and an environment as free from anger as possible.”

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MARY DANIEL HOBSON

Nurturing the Possible:



Supporting the Integrated Self from the Beginning of Life

WENDY ANNE McCARTY

PRENATAL AND PERINATAL psychology (PPN) has grown into a multidisciplinary field “dedicated to the in-depth exploration of the psychological dimension of human reproduction and pregnancy and the mental and emotional development of the unborn and newborn child,” as stated in *The Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health*. The heart of the field’s unique contribution is the exploration and understanding of prenatal life, birth and bonding, and infancy from the baby’s point of view.

The field coalesced in the 1980s with clinicians who found their adult clients describing prenatal and perinatal experiences to be associated with the origin of a life pattern or belief, often debilitating or life-diminishing ones. Finding little in the psychological literature, the clinicians began to share their findings with one another and a field was born. During the past thirty years, a wealth of clinical experience with adults, children, and babies has been reported, and a much deeper understanding of our earliest experiences is now available. PPN research demonstrates that these early experiences involve consciousness beyond (before) the biological human self.

woven relationship between these two distinct perspectives. Together they form the “Integrated Self.”

3. From the moment of conception we perceive, function, communicate, and learn at nonlocal consciousness, energetic, and physical levels. Our ability to transmit and receive communication during the prenatal and perinatal period is much greater than traditionally thought.

4. During our gestation, birth, and early infant stages, we learn intensely and are exquisitely sensitive to our environment and relationships. Through our transcendent perspective, we have omni-awareness of our parents and others’ thoughts, feelings, and intentions that arise from their conscious and subconscious mind. Through our human self, our experience is intricately related to our mother’s experience, the health of our womb, and our physical/emotional journey at birth. Based on these early conditions we form a foundational holographic blueprint for life.

5. This blueprint becomes the infrastructure from which we grow and experience life at every level of our being—physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual.

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In 1999, Dr Marti Glenn and I co-founded the Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology Program at Santa Barbara Graduate Institute to help further the field and train professionals. I continued to grapple with the disparity between our current Western biologically-based models of early development and the findings from prenatal and perinatal psychology and PPN clinical work with babies and children. With the help of a grant from the New Earth Foundation, I wrote *Welcoming Consciousness* in 2004, a developmental psychology book that introduces an integrated model of development encompassing the newly evolving PPN research and perspective. The following are selected key principles of this model:

1. We are sentient beings—conscious and aware—from the beginning of life. We have a sense of self as we enter physical form that is present prior to, during, and after our human life.

2. From conception on, we have dual perspectives of awareness: a transcendent perspective and a human perspective. Our earliest experiences involve an intricately

Our early experiences become part of our implicit memory reflected in our subconscious and in our autonomic functioning. These affect us below the level of our conscious awareness and directly shape our very perceptions and conceptions of “reality.”

6. We already are making choices and forming adaptive strategies in the womb and at birth that appear to establish potentially lifelong patterns.

7. Young babies show us their established life patterns developed in utero and during their birth. The majority of babies born in the US show signs of stress or traumatic imprinting.¹

8. Many of the needs we have considered essential for healthy development during infancy and childhood are needs we have from the beginning of life: to be wanted, welcomed, safe, nourished, seen, heard, included, and communicated with as the sentient beings we are. From the beginning of life, stress and trauma inhibit or interfere with the natural relationship between a baby’s transcendent self and its human self. 

Resources

BOOKS

Life in the Womb:

The Origin of Health and Disease

by Peter W. Nathanielsz
(Promethean Press, 1999)

The Mind of Your Newborn Baby

by David B. Chamberlain
(North Atlantic Books, 1998)

Pre-Parenting: Nurturing Your Child from Conception

by Thomas R. Verny and Pamela Weintraub
(Simon & Schuster, 2003)

Prenatal Parenting: The Complete Psychological and Spiritual Guide to Loving Your Unborn Baby

by Frederick Wirth
(Regan Books, 2001)

Remembering Our Home: Healing Hurts and Receiving Gifts from Conception to Birth

by Sheila Linn, William Emerson, Dennis Linn, and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press, 1999)

While You're Expecting: Creating Your Own Prenatal Classroom

by Rene Van De Carr and Marc Lehrer
(Humanics, 1996)

WEBSITES

Association for Pre- & Perinatal Psychology and Health (APPPAH)
www.birthpsychology.com

A forum and resource center for individuals from diverse backgrounds and disciplines interested in the psychological dimensions of prenatal and perinatal experiences

What Babies Want: An Exploration of the Consciousness of Infants
www.whatbabieswant.com

A new video documentary on prenatal and perinatal psychology that includes both cutting-edge science and the customs of traditional cultures

Santa Barbara Graduate Institute
www.sbg.i.edu

Offering the country's first graduate degree programs in Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology

ARTICLE FOOTNOTES

¹ McCarty, W.A. (2002). The power of beliefs: What babies are teaching us. *Journal of Prenatal & Perinatal Psychology & Health*, 16(4), 341-360.

² McCarty, W.A. (2004). The CALL to reawaken and deepen our communication with babies: what babies are teaching us. *International Doula*, 12(2), Summer 2004.

9. As indigenous cultures have done for centuries, communicating with babies during the preconception, prenatal, birth and infancy period on is one of the most powerful ways to support babies and can mitigate the impact of potentially traumatizing events.²

10. PPN-oriented therapies and ways of being demonstrate new possibilities of wholeness and connection with the Integrated Self, starting at the beginning of life.

Prenatal and perinatal psychology's clinical findings bring a tremendous renewal

to the exploration of our understanding of human experience from an integrated lens that honors our multi-dimensional nature and echoes the ancient wisdoms held in many indigenous cultures. The new "western frontier" is clearing old beliefs that stand in the way of the fuller vision of who we are. Nurturing the possible, supporting

the Integrated Self from the beginning of life, opens the door to help each new being to create a foundational life holographic blueprint that supports their fullest creative life force and wholeness. 



WENDY ANNE McCARTY, RN, is a psychology consultant, educator, researcher, and author. She founded the Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology Program at Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. Her new e-book *Welcoming Consciousness: Supporting Wholeness from the Beginning of Life* and her other publications are available through www.wondrousbeginnings.com.