

Abstract:**Mothering Denied:****The sources of love, and how our culture harms infants, women, and society**

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Although the word 'mothering' has become politically incorrect, the facts of life remain unchanged. Five different lines of evidence now converge to show that there is a natural, biologically-based, best-fit pattern of human mothering, and it includes breastfeeding, carrying, secure attachment, mutual rewards, enjoyment, and empathy—meaning a mother's sensitivity to her baby's feelings and an ability to respond accordingly. Mutual playfulness and joy help to sustain healthy development if the environment is supportive and meets basic human needs. Five lines of evidence, coming from different directions and disciplines, with each supporting the same conclusion, give it greater validity.

Part One: Five lines of evidence for natural, 'best-fit' mothering

Firstly, by considering the direct maternal pedigrees of each person alive today, we can deduce some important facts about human beings and human nature, and the characteristics that must have been essential for the survival of all our maternal ancestors, as they lived in tribes of hunter-gatherers, and each baby girl successfully passed her genes on to the next generation. Through this process we received our genetic inheritance, and we cannot change it.

Secondly, there is much evidence that only human breast milk perfectly matches the needs of human infants. This has far-reaching implications for healthy development, including helping to achieve full intellectual potential.

Thirdly, secure and unfailing bonds of attachment between a mother and her baby have been essential for the breastfeeding and survival of all mammals. Disruption of these attachment bonds—being life-threatening—normally causes acute distress, and if prolonged, it can be damaging. For most of the time that humans have lived on earth, the support of other females in the group, and preferably that of the father also, has been necessary for survival.

Fourthly, the hormones and brain activities involved in human mothering are now known to be much the same as in other mammals. The patterns of normal mothering behavior that are common to all mammals depend on the same parts of the basic mammalian 'maternal brain,' but they require the right conditions to function well.

Fifthly, there is increasing evidence that disrupting natural mothering behaviors and relationships can cause harm in a variety of ways, leading to disturbed development, especially in the capacities for healthy and empathic emotional relationships.

Part Two: When the environment does not match early needs

Disturbed development can arise when departures from natural patterns of mothering create environments that fail to match the biologically-based needs of mothers, babies, and very young children, in ways that disrupt important biological mechanisms that are based in the human genome. Such 'eco-genetic mismatch' can be especially harmful during pregnancy, childbirth, and early childhood. This mismatch often stems from teachings and practices that neglect human needs and arise from ignorance and misconceived ideas about the nature of the human infant. However well-meaning, these can lead to disturbed development and a variety of emotional and physical disorders.

Part Three: Conclusions and what can be done

To put into practice some steps towards more healthy families and to improve their physical and emotional mental health, it is important to distinguish the needs of children nearer school age from those of infants. An infant's primary need is for nurturing and early mothering within a supportive social environment that preferably includes a loving father.

To achieve this, we should seek to create societies that are in better harmony with the human biological 'givens.' We cannot change these 'givens,' and we would therefore do well to accept them. This involves supporting healthy mothering, breastfeeding, and attachment, with generous maternity leave. Natural patterns of mothering work best with the support of a father and an extended family and/or social group, within a suitable environment. Models exist that offer many benefits—even for 'the economy.' To promote health and wellbeing in young children, their mothers, and society, we must work with Nature, not against her. Prevention is better than cure. A healthy mother-child relationship is a love affair that needs the right conditions to flourish. Infancy cannot be re-run later.