

Multiple Mothers  
Lots of Pops  
Multiple Meters  
Stylin' Tots

Intrinsic to survival and continuation is felicity, pleasure. Pleasure has been much maligned, diminished by philosophers and conquerors as a value for the timid, the small-minded, the self-indulgent. "Virtue" involves the renunciation of pleasure in the name of some higher purpose, a purpose that involves power (for men) or sacrifice (for women). Pleasure is described as shallow and frivolous in a world of high-minded, serious purpose. But pleasure does not exclude serious pursuits or intentions, indeed, it is found in them, and it is the only real reason for staying alive.

*Beyond Power*  
Marilyn French

Certainly in all the centuries before this one and in all corners of the world, it has taken an extended family and a stable neighborhood, if not a whole village<sup>1</sup> to raise happy children, that is, multiple mothers and fathers, men as well as women, older children helping younger, a variety of elders and younger pitching in.

In The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein subtly elaborates a very simple proposition, "that certain present abuses are inevitable as long as early child care is female-dominated."<sup>3</sup> That's putting the proposition mildly. If all or most of the warmth, love, nurturance, hugs, friendly flesh is coming from Mom during the first year or two of life, then children so raised, both boys and girls, will look to women as the source of everything good in the world, hence, logically, also the source of all denial, absence of love, evil; women will be blamed for just about everything that goes wrong, scapegoated this way by women as well as men.

Dinnerstein doesn't amplify her argument with the full story of social and cultural devolution (see Section 2). Much research has shown that hunting and gathering societies are "the first affluent society"<sup>4</sup> in which men and women share the work in complete equality, less than two hours of work per day on the average. With so much leisure time, child rearing can be shared more equitably as well; men spend a lot of time dandling babies, cuddling them, singing to them and telling stories. Among most classless, egalitarian, hunting and gathering peoples, whether deep in the rain forests, high in the mountains or pushed into the deserts by hierarchical aggressors, nurturance is quite evenly divided between men and women and many men may be called "father," many women may be called "mother" as the infant learns to speak.

The agricultural or neolithic revolution puts men in the fields, more hours per day away

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Rodham Clinton book

<sup>2</sup> 1977, New York City: Harper and Row

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* pg.xiii

<sup>4</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 1972

from children. The industrial revolution takes them away for 10 or 12 hours a day as it is occurring and then settles men into 8 hour days away from children, or more hours away with overtime. The information age seems to require of the "salarymen" in Japan that they spend 10 or 12 hours a day at work and more hours in male-bonding leisure after work. All these contemporary "good husbands and fathers" are almost entirely absent from the home. Men and women working at home in Europe and the Americas are often staring into computer screens or talking on the phone all day. The professional and middle classes everywhere are under constant pressure to take time away from family life and infant nurturance in order to serve corporations better. For the working class, the latest burst of "progress" requires that both parents work, and still more hours, so that the question arises, "Will any children have any quality nurturance at all?" Are the battling 'gangstas' of the underclasses doing any better by the mothers and infants? With about 2 million people in prison, mostly minority men, a lot of fathers are permanently absent in the USA. If Dinnerstein's thesis is correct, it is no wonder that woman-hating, 'bitch-baiting,' battering, rape, harassment etc. have been getting worse over the past century or so despite recent decades of concerted feminist theory and practice.

So, as far as the first few years of life are concerned, there are two principles involved in reproducing a society that is freeing itself of class differences and patriarchy: gender equality and multiple parenting. I put "multiple mothers" at the top of this chapter title because that is how, in our totally unbalanced society, we can most easily apprehend what we need to do: spread the 'mothering' processes around now so that women won't be blamed later. But how can we get more men involved in nurturing infants? How can we get a variety of women caring for each child? How can we restore extended family, neighborhood, community, the "whole village" when the economic system is going in the other direction, splitting families and neighborhoods apart?

Because child abuse is on everyone's mind, most 'increased male nurturance' or 'increased multiple parenting' strategies, will have to be based on public space such as day care centers and open play areas with plenty of adult supervision, including reciprocal supervision of each other! The other obvious need is for co-housing communities, communes, kibbutzim, apartment complexes, ecostaries, any living arrangements that restore something like the "extended families" that once brought up 99% of the children in this world

Not only 'lots of stimulation' but stylized stimulation is what these kids are craving. Multiple meters. Different ways of being in time. Each adult with a different skill to teach. "This is the 'Uncle Mark' that taught me clave." "This is the cousin who taught me 3 against 2." "This is the 'Aunt' who taught me my local butterflies." "Meet the 'Gramps' who gave me my first string games and cats craddles." "Where would I be without the lots of pops who taught me their dances and the many mothers who taught me to drum and sing?" Testimonials from the children of the 21st century.

Pat Campbell:

A vintage buzz-phrase from the 90s, "it takes a village," is an ideal for all time. Jorge feels the stability of that village when his *familia* comes together for Christmas, Easter, Cinco de

Mayo, Mexican Independence Day, anniversaries, birthdays, *quinceanera* celebrations, and communion parties, when his parents and grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins partake in the traditional food, drink, songs and dances of their heritage. He learns as a child in this community the trimmings that surround the *fiesta* feeling, too, including the stories of those family members who “made good” for themselves, and he grasps the meanings and the morals behind those stories that may apply to him and his future development. Jessica sees how, all grown up now and a mommy to boot, the many influences of her grandmother, mother and aunts have rubbed off on her. The ways she makes her bed and butters her bread are strikingly similar to their ways, and when she hears the Slovenska Radio Hour they listened to every Saturday night, she feels the connection to her family heritage in the deeper ways of everyday life. Sarah, aka Soojin, has happy memories of her grandparents in residence with her, her parents, brothers and sisters in their high-rise apartment in Seoul. She remembers well the *nuinjong*, or specially designed community center for the elderly at the end of the apartment hall, where she could go as a girl after school to visit with all the grandmothers and grandfathers, playing games with them, snacking with them, reading to them, singing with them. Jorge, Jessica, and Soojin are privileged to know their own extended family village, where there is genuine interest in them by moms and pops of all ages, sizes, and shapes. They are who they are because of all those who have given them skills, knowledge, and understanding. Music, wrapped with stories, dances, and good times, is but one of the gifts from the village, where the elders continue to offer their young both the broader view and multiple details, the wisdom and specifics, of life as they know it.

- An easy read is Hillary Rodham Clinton’s *It Takes a Village* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Based upon a proverb somewhere out of Africa, the book was a wake-up call whose message was meant for all Americans—parents and adults at large—to make time for children, to teach them through good modeling and to listen to what they have to teach us about life at large.
- What was your “village” like? Who helped you along? How did they do it? What can you do now to pass on the good news of the riches of your heritage? How can you facilitate the passing of heritage by others to their young?