

## Parenting for a peaceful world

So much of our past needs to be re-evaluated in terms of collective adaptations to early trauma. Megalomania, sociopathy, and credulous adoration of charismatic leaders, are but some of the results of childhood neglect and abuse. Humanity has been split into delinquent leaders, and those who were mesmerised or submissive to their power. This perilous social combination has ensured that war, abuse of power, and environmental devastation followed humankind wherever we set foot. But this kind of society is inevitable when a significant portion of individuals are living out symptoms of untreated post-traumatic shock; the product of collective early life trauma. Violent and autocratic societies suffer a kind of social retardation, borne of tortured and loveless childhoods. When we contemplate the horrors of dysfunctional human relations, past and present, we should not say 'this is humanity', but instead 'this is traumatised humanity', or 'humanity in shock'. Human madness is the howl of a child with a shattered heart.

Children hurt in exactly the same way, and for exactly the same reasons, in any era, and in every culture. As members of the *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* species, we all share the same basic biological and psychological structures. The horrors suffered by history's children caused them to hurt in the same way as our own children would today, if they suffered a similar fate. The fact that most other children were in the same boat at the time, did not make their plight any easier. The long-term psychological effect of culturally normal abuse would be the same, if not worse, for they were told this was 'normal' life, and thus they never had recourse to protest their torment. To a large extent, our societies and our histories are founded on childhood pain.

We now know enough about human psychology to realise that an individual cannot kill or abandon his or her own child, and subsequently carry on as normal. A substantial emotional dissociation is inevitable, which would leave deep life-long psychological scars. More likely, severe emotional dissociation would predate the murderous act. Generally speaking, individuals belonging to earlier child-rearing modes are of poorer emotional development, irrespective of how well developed their intellects may be. Humanity is a long way from collectively achieving its full potential of emotional intelligence, but in earlier days we were emotionally retarded, distorted or deeply detached — en masse. How can it be otherwise, considering the constancy of war and brutality, the ubiquitousness of dictatorships, and the careless attitude to our natural environment? Can this be surprising, since

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before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there may have been few who escaped some form of abuse or neglect?

Since abuse and neglect has occurred on such an all-encompassing scale, it still tinges our way of relating to each other — and to our natural environment. Much of what we take for granted as ‘normal’ social behaviours are in fact defensive vestiges, remnants from inter-generational mistreatment spanning thousands of years. Humanity has not completed its recovery from its traumatic past, and is still acting out this collective trauma in a thousand ways.

Even today, we cannot pretend to have escaped from the legacy of our historically horrible childhoods by convincing ourselves that it all took place in a distant past, somewhere far away. My own grandmother was, at 19 years of age, forced to marry a man for his status. He was a stranger to her, and she did not like him initially. Being in love with another man, she protested her fate vigorously. Her protests fell on deaf ears. Having given birth to her first child — my mother — and probably suffering post-natal depression, she escaped back to her home town in Romania. Her older brothers, incapable of empathy, ‘disciplined’ her by beating her. They despatched her back to her husband, with whom she resigned herself to remain for life. The practice euphemistically referred to as ‘arranged’ marriage is prohibited today under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>1</sup> and other human rights instruments.<sup>2</sup> Sexual relations within a forced marriage are now viewed as a form of rape. The beating suffered by my grandmother at the hands of her brothers is now recognised as domestic violence, punishable by law in modern societies. Yet her treatment was all perfectly sanctioned by her society. If world affairs are as they are, it is because everywhere human beings are recovering from childhood trauma that has been transmitted and restaged through countless generations.

Parenting modes have long been evolving and, as they do, the lot of children keeps improving. Some parents have somehow managed to provide for their children a better emotional climate in which to grow, than they were themselves given. Their numbers must be sufficient to cause entire societies to edge forward and make social advances. Societies have been known to stagnate or regress, but mostly they slowly advance, as parenting modes evolve. Lloyd De Mause sums up our social evolution in this way:

“The fundamental evolutionary direction of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* is toward better interpersonal relationships, not just the satisfaction of instincts. While adaptation to the natural environment is the key to genetic evolution, relationship to the

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*human* environment is the key to psychological evolution, to the evolution of human nature.”<sup>3</sup>

There are encouraging signs of improvement in human relations and positive social changes — driven by improvements in childcare practices — in many parts of the world. Thanks to the progress made in child rearing, the western world — and increasingly, much of the developing world — have accomplished unprecedented levels of democracy, welfare, gender equality, fairness in labour laws, and awareness of ecological issues. This bears exciting implications for future societies. What is even more exciting is that improvements in child rearing are accelerating, propelled by our current information revolution. So, although we remain a long way from a just, equitable and sustainable global society, the continuing evolution of child rearing may give us reason for hope.

Psychohistorians have managed to trace a large number of significant world events — whose repercussions profoundly affect all our lives to this day — to their origins in prevailing child-rearing customs. The link is clear, as we shall see in Part III, between major social changes — both calamitous and positive — and how societies treated their children. Once the extent to which childhood drives history has truly dawned on us, we cannot avoid making children’s emotional wellbeing our top social priority. Our commitment to meeting each and every child’s emotional needs, for his or her own sake, brings benefits for all of humanity — in ways we could not have imagined.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Article 16(2) “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.”
- <sup>2</sup> See for example the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages <http://www.hri.ca/uninfo/treaties/64.shtml> (last accessed 1 December 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> De Mause (1999) p 649.