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Prenatal & Neonatal Psychology

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(Chapter 1) #1: Prenates and infants have been seen as psychologically inert because of misleading studies that constantly ignore the overwhelming evidence which proves the exact opposite. A much-cited study by Langeworthy disregarded fetuses as even being able to feel pain at all. There is also a political factor that constantly minimizes the ability of a fetus to be “competent”. Legal abortion and acceptability create the resistance necessary so that studies like these aren’t propelled forward. The idea of attributing personhood to a fetus would mean that governments have authorized millions of deaths. I’m sure Genocide doesn’t sound good next to the names of hospitals and politicians.

(Chapter 1) #2: Early ancient philosophers like Democritus and Epicurus knew enough to recognize that a fetus needs to eat somewhat “absorbs” the food ingested by the mother like a “sponge”. Aristotle -who is considered the early advancer of embryological science, also knew and recognized the importance of nutrition for a fetus. Prenates and infants were perceived as part of a series of processes of life called “Genesis”. Galen (2nd century AD) talked about 4 stages that describe this process. To paraphrase: The “unformed” stage, The “most dangerous” stage, The “body parts can be mapped out” stage, and the “Body parts are clearly visible” stage.

(Chapter 1) #3: From a non-western thought, Sursuta (Indian thinker) notes that the “intellect” of a fetus is developed by the 6th month of pregnancy, while the mind is awakened by

the 5th. Caraka assumed the fetus could die if the mother was mentally unwell. Observations on the importance of nourishment during pregnancy were observed by both thinkers. They regarded it so crucial to the point of cataloging everything a certain woman had during pregnancy to then see the effects it could have on the baby to be born. The main assumptions made during this time were the predetermination of phenotypes and personality (Sursuta); The “longing” that a child may have will be shown in the desire that the mother presents, and the advocacy for a good diet based on observations on the umbilical cord.

(Chapter 2) #6: Lake describes 4 phases relating to the intra-uterine period as well as birth. The first one, called “Being”- describes how the spiritual closeness of an infant can be determined by how the mother's spirit was during pregnancy. The sense of identity and the self could be greatly impaired if the mother had issues with identity during the first trimester. The second phase, “Well Being”- describes how the personality of the mother (especially in traits such as joyfulness and a sense of fulfillment) sustains the baby just as the physical milk does. Happy momma, happy baby. The same applies to the opposite side of the coin. Roots of personality disorders in babies have been observed to stem from the (bad) experiences of the mom during the first trimester. The third phase is “Birth”. Issues during pregnancy have far worse outcomes for the baby's mental life than any trauma post-birth. Biological stress is the main factor for psychopathologies later in life since the baby is receiving a share of every kind of hormone that the mother produces during that period. Eating right is necessary, but so is maintaining stable mental health even prior to pregnancy if possible. The last phase, “The First Trimester”. The phenomenon is observed when the fetus will take after their mother's own

emotions or aggressively fights them back. When a baby is loved and wanted by their mother during pregnancy, there is a confidence imprinted in that baby which is oftentimes life-lasting.

#9: Prenatal psychology aims to study how experiences before birth may affect an individual (psychopathologically) during intra-uterine life and into adulthood. I have learned from this subject that there is a psychological aspect to prenatal development and birth. Individuals may be greatly influenced by their mother's mental lifestyle during pregnancy- something which is often overlooked because of the focus on physical nutrition.

(Chapter 2) #8: The aspects of maternal "umbilical affect" and fetal response are truly astounding. The general concept that what a mother eats goes through the umbilical chord and feeds the baby is a very well known one. The concept that anxiety and stress is bad for a baby is also mostly known. But the idea that a mother's spiritual state during pregnancy (specially the first trimester) may affect how a child reacts, learns, and develops psychopathologically (along with their sense of confidence and identity) is groundbreaking. Even if only a theory, I believe that this could help more mothers understand the importance of maintaining a balanced mental state (to the best they can) even prior to planning for pregnancy.

(Video Summary) Epigenetics: A study using twins observed that although genetically similar, their epigenome was wildly different- meaning the way that their genes express is different due to factors such as diet and daily habits. Based on studies with mice having identical DNA, it was observed that certain healthy and unhealthy genes can be "activated" in one mice and not in the other, also based on their epigenome. If the genome was a computer the

epigenome would be the software that tells the genome what to do. This is a groundbreaking discovery for many reasons. This means that based on one's diet, their epigenome can change what would previously be considered unchangeable genetic predispositions! One can control how their genes express. Treatments for cancer are using epigenetics with good rates of remission on patients.