The cover of the May 21st, 2012 issue of Time magazine sparked a powder keg of controversy and debate over the merits of attachment parenting with its provocative headline, “Are You Mom Enough?” Critics railed against breastfeeding an almost-4-yearold and the seeming overindulgence of children through babywearing and bedsharing. To American culture, AP appears primitive, child-centered and anti-feminist, yet attachment parenting practices have deep historical, cultural and scientific roots that have been examined by experts all over the world.

It was recently noted that mothers who consider themselves feminists are more likely to practice attachment parenting, because these mothers are educated and appreciate AP’s sound principles. It raises the question, “Have we become too civilized for our own good?” Has technology and all the conveniences of modern life detached us from necessary intimate connections with our children and our fellow human beings? In their book, Attached at the Heart, Barbara Nicholson and Lysa Parker, cofounders of Attachment Parenting International, agree that there is a chasm between what children need from their parents and the dictates of our adult-centered culture. Nicholson and Parker investigated this dilemma, driven by their own struggles as mothers and their passion to advocate for children. The following excerpt from Attached at the Heart sheds some light on the long road of cultural change.

Two historical figures are largely responsible for our current understanding of children and what drives human relationships. John Bowlby is considered the founder or father of attachment theory, as it was his study of young delinquent boys that led him to understand the links between prolonged early separation from the mother (or primary caregiver) and later “affectionless character.” His work was so radical that he was ostracized by fellow psychiatrists, who refused to believe that the environment had anything to do with how children turned out. Rather, they believed it was their genetic makeup.
The Origins of Attachment Parenting

Written by Barbara Nicholson and Lysa Parker
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Attachment parenting is a term that was created by pediatrician William Sears and his wife, Mary. It is an approach to parenting that emphasizes a close and continuous bond between parent and child, believing that physical closeness and mutual empathy are essential for a child's healthy development. The eight principles of attachment parenting have been created through research and developed for infants and young children. These principles incorporate what we believe to be the best of most parenting practices from around the world.

The good news is that a growing number of parents and professionals have become involved with attachment parenting until API was founded in 1994. Our culture is at last incorporating some of these principles.

As Dr. Moloney started investigating why the Okinawan people had survived so amazingly well, he found that before the war they had no psychological wards in their hospitals, and there had never been any mental institutions. As a child, Dr. Moloney had been brought up in a household where there were 8 children, and the parents noticed that the child who received the most attention was the most well-adjusted, while the child who received the least was the most rebellious. This observation led him to believe that attention is crucial in the development of children.

The eight principles of attachment parenting have been created through research and developed for infants through babyhood. Attachment parenting incorporates what we believe to be the best of most parenting practices from around the world, the word “parenting” doesn’t exist. They don’t try to define it—it’s just a way of living together with mutual empathy and respect. We like to think of AP as practicing “conscious parenting,” “natural parenting,” “compassionate parenting” or “empathic parenting”—some Native Americans refer to it as “original parenting.” In many languages, the word “parenting” is not even used.

Fully recognizing that there are no perfect cultures, through the years we have collected stories between child-rearing practices and later personality development. The child who received a great deal of attention, whose every need was promptly met, as among the New Guinea Mundugomor, became a selfish, uncooperative, aggressive adult. Others nonaggressive. In his book Learning Non-Aggression, anthropologist Ashley Montagu observed that children who were so “permissive” compared to standards in the United States. They talked to their nurses, not to their mothers, they would let them nurse whenever they needed—not on a strict schedule. Most babies were nursed until they were a year old, in Okinawan style of parenting and conducted their own research.

Ironically, during the time Bowlby and Ainsworth were researching attachment theory, similar observations were being made in other parts of the world by psychologists. Studying the dominant parenting practices of cultures around the world has given researchers deeper insights into why some societies are aggressive and others nonaggressive.

Attachment: An Idea Whose Time Had Come

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many researchers from around the world began to explore and examine the parent-child bond. In her book For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Schools and the Making of a Perfect Child, D.L. Hart, Barbara Nicholson, and Lysa Parker, attachment parenting practices have been described as deep emotional, cultural, and scientific bonds that have been examined by experts all over the world.

In view of the way our society understands itself, it’s no surprise that attachment parenting was created by parents who were concerned about their children’s development. Children are the future of society, and it’s important to ensure that they grow up to be healthy and happy.

The great news is that a growing number of parents and professionals have become involved in attachment parenting. Our culture is at last incorporating some of these principles. One of these stories takes place at the end of World War II, when a navy psychiatrist was stationed in Okinawa. He and another doctor were told to be on constant lookout for children who were suspected of being “insane.” They noticed how the mothers would carry their babies on their backs in beautiful fabric carriers and let them nurse whenever they needed—not on a strict schedule. Most babies were nursed until they were a year old, in Okinawan style of parenting and conducted their own research.

The origins of attachment parenting are largely the result of long-term studies of children and what drives their relationships. John Bowlby is credited with being the father of attachment theory, and he wrote a great deal about the bond between mother and child. His work was so influential that it was used as the basis for the field of psychiatry, which showed that the mother-child relationship was a crucial factor in the development of the child. Throughout it all, Bowlby never wavered in his convictions and maintained his position with confidence and dignity. Still, he had no way of actually proving his theory until Mary Ainsworth was able to do so.

Ainsworth used this knowledge to develop a procedure to assess the quality of the child’s attachment to the mother called the “Strange Situation.” Thousands of research studies later, this instrument is still being used today and continues to validate Bowlby’s early conclusions.

Mary Ainsworth, who was originally from Ohio and educated at the University of Toronto, translated to pediatrician William Sears and his wife, Mary. The Origins of Attachment Parenting is an article that appeared in Pathways to Family Wellness magazine, Issue #35.