Oxytocin is the hormone responsible for birth, sex, and love. It's often referred to as the “love hormone” and plays an important role in these pivotal social interactions. During birth, oxytocin causes the uterine muscles to contract and it also acts as a sort of natural pain relief, helping women to cope during contractions.

Environment is key to oxytocin production. A stressful environment can restrict the production of oxytocin. To encourage oxytocin production during labor, it is important that women feel safe, calm, and supported. This means being surrounded by trusted people, as well as having privacy and the ability to relax.

Sadly, many women don’t give birth in an environment that encourages the production of oxytocin. The environment of a typical hospital birth is unlikely to allow for maximum oxytocin production. Under the bright glare of the hospital lights, with nurses, midwives, and other healthcare professionals wandering in and out of the room, it's easy to see why some women find it difficult to relax during labor.

The Importance of Birth Environment

Of course, some healthcare professionals are becoming more aware of the importance of the birth environment. Birth centers are cropping up around the world to allow women to give birth in homey, cozy environments. However, not all women have access to a birth center, and,
sadly, many women are still giving birth in settings that may prevent relaxation and inhibit the production of oxytocin.

To show just how detrimental the birthing environment can be, the birth activist group Freedom For Birth–Rome Action Group came up with the perfect way to highlight the intrusive way health professionals handle birth. Many would argue that birth is more often controlled by healthcare professionals than by laboring mamas, but what if the same was true for the moment of conception?

Conception Stage Fright?

Imagine yourself lying on your back, legs in stirrups, attached to a heart monitor...aroused? Thought not. Relaxed? Didn’t think so. Could you do the deed with healthcare professionals freely wandering in and out of the room? What if they stopped to comment on your position or technique? Perhaps unsurprisingly, you might find yourself struggling with stage fright in such an environment.

In the tongue-in-cheek video, “Performance,” actors simulate what might happen if sex was treated as a performance in the way that birth is. The couple in the video are encouraged to pretend the healthcare professionals aren’t there as they attempt to achieve “natural conception.” At one point, the doctor walks in and turns the light on, disturbing the couple and immediately tells them to change position.

The video informs us, “The WHO recommend that women are free to choose their position during labor and birth. Unfortunately, most women are required to lie down on a hospital bed. Episiotomies are only carried out in this position. 70 percent of women end up with their vaginas cut.”

Throughout the video, the male protagonist can be seen growing more and more uncomfortable. He doesn’t look like someone enjoying sex; instead he has the facial expressions of someone taking a test he didn’t study for. As the couple have sex, the doctor counts down for them and quickly scolds the man for pushing wrong. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the couple are struggling to get the job done. After asking for a glass of water, the guy is told that he can’t have a drink. Moments later an IV drip is set up to hydrate the guy though he is never given the opportunity to consent to this procedure.
The video later tells us, “Eating and drinking are not allowed for the full duration of labor and birth. There is no medical reason for this…. Unfortunately, in most hospitals these interventions are performed without informing and asking for consent.”

Toward the end of the day, the couple are told that they can try for a few more minutes, but if it doesn’t work, medical staff will have to intervene and inseminate the woman. That pressure doesn’t seem to help much, and by the end of the video the doctor is congratulating the couple on trying their best and telling them it’s time for the medical team to take over now.

Watch the video Here

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