

BOOK REVIEW

An Interview With Gale Pryor

Gale Pryor, the coauthor of *Nursing Your Baby*, has just written another book, *Nursing Mother, Working Mother: The Essential Guide for Breastfeeding and Staying Close to Your Baby After You Return to Work* (Harvard Common Press, 1997). A few months ago I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Gale Pryor for lunch-- as we were each pregnant with our third baby, the topic of combining work with breastfeeding seemed especially relevant!

Q-- What inspired you to write *Nursing Mother, Working Mother*?

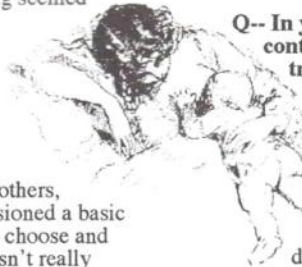
I had been asked to write a breastfeeding book for working mothers, and I think that the publisher envisioned a basic manual explaining which pump to choose and how long to store breastmilk. I wasn't really interested in turning out a basic how-to book, and while I was pondering this I attended a La Leche League convention. While there, I went to seminars, went to keynote luncheons, networked with people, took notes... and I realized that all these women had just spent the day doing exactly what I would do at a professional publishers convention, or what lawyers do at their conventions, which was to attend seminars, speeches, network, etc.! But the difference was that there were 300 babies and small children there. And I wondered why this was such an inconceivable idea for the rest of the world when the LLL does this all the time.

Q-- Why do you think that the workplace is so reluctant to acknowledge women's role as mothers?

This is a complicated issue. I think it's a devastating issue for mothers and babies and that is really what is at the bottom of my book-- the forces that conspire to divide a woman in two. She has to be one person at work and another person at home. I think this is where the feminist issue comes in, because as women increasingly broke into traditionally male fields they did so by camouflaging ourselves as men. I'm not blaming feminists, this was a necessary first step to move into traditionally male fields. But, I think it would be a bizarre success story for feminism if we became, for all intents and purposes, men. I think feminism's success should be about being in the work place and acting like women, which includes being open about being a mother and meeting

your child's needs. I think it should be as acceptable to chat about babies as it is to talk about last night's baseball game, for instance. It's considered unprofessional to talk about babies, but what is the definition of professional? Somebody who acts like a man? There needs to be an attitudinal change. I don't see things changing, for women and children, until this happens.

Q-- In your book you discuss the historical context in which women have traditionally combined working with mothering-- can you provide an overview of this?



Historically, women have always worked hard. Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, an ethologist whom I quote frequently in the book, documented that women in the Kung tribe in the Kalahari put in forty hour work week! The difference is that their work is integratable with childrearing-- they're not separated from their children while they work. And that is the only new thing about women's work, that it is separated from childrearing. This seems to be an overlooked fact! This goes back to the forces that have us living two different lives-- that's what's new, not working. We have always worked. The problem now is that we have to be separated from our children while we work, in more ways than one-- not just physically, but we also have to be separated mentally. This separation is what prompted me to think about attachment parenting.

Q-- Many people feel that a woman's employment away from the home renders attachment parenting impossible. You demonstrate in your book that this is not the case...

Attachment parenting is the way that mother have always taken care of babies. When you look at mothers through time and across cultures who do practice attachment parenting, they do so in large part to make it easier to get their work done! It's easier to carry a baby on your back when you have a lot of work to do. It's easier to breastfeed; it's easier to have the baby sleep with you. It's easier when you have a forty-hour work week in front of you to raise the baby this way than any other way. When you look at the number of ways that nature has give a baby to attach to his mother during the first hour after birth, you realize that nature has provided a number of ways to ensure

that this mother and this baby bond so that the baby will survive. In fact, nature over insures because, chances are, one or two methods of bonding aren't going to happen-- for example, a mother may be too tired to look in to the baby's eyes and make that initial eye contact. Attachment parenting is like that-- when you look at cultures that practice this method because that is simply the way that you take care of babies, they aren't saying that you absolutely have to practice all attachment techniques: sleeping with baby, breastfeeding, baby wearing, responsiveness. These are things that come naturally, and if one of these doesn't happen, that is ok because there are a number of other practices that will encourage mother-baby bonding. To be dogmatic, to say that you have to do all or nothing, this is not what nature has intended.

Q-- So why do you believe that attachment parenting is especially beneficial to the working mother and her baby?

Because it can compensate for the separation that takes place-- there are a zillion ways you can work with your baby nearby, and I talk about these in the book. I think that it would be ideal if we could all combine work with mothering, but if you can't, what better way to compensate for separations than by practicing attachment techniques when you are together. Especially sharing sleep, because that's eight full hours that you have together, sharing bodily contact.

Q-- What is the importance of breastfeeding for working mothers?

Breastfeeding is important for so many reasons, and we all know most of those reasons. I think that in terms of the working mother, one of the risks of working outside of the home is that your baby will grow and develop but you, as a mother, may not. I think that a mother needs to develop alongside and in synch with her baby. You learn to be a mother and you grow as a mother. One of the powerful things about breastfeeding is that it provides a blueprint for mothering-- Niles Newton said that breastfeeding nudges other aspects of maternal care. Breastfeeding involves give and take, as well as the ability to read a baby's signals. It works as a blueprint on many levels and in many ways-- mothering a sixteen year old has many of the same elements as mothering a baby in terms of being partners, being empathetic, and working together. Also, breastfeeding shows you that you are the center of your baby's world-- you would be even if you weren't breastfeeding, but breastfeeding tells you in a way that you really need to know that this is true. This is a confidence builder.

Q-- What lessons can a woman learn from her mothering role that are beneficial in her

professional life?

I have found that things I know as a mother are very useful at work-- there is always a place for empathy, cooperativeness, and even holding a firm line! For example, a hard, cold, advertising principle is to sell the benefit to the buyer, and mothers do this constantly-- "If you get your shoes on, we'll get to the ice cream store faster." Being empathetic and sensitive to other people's cues will serve you well, and doesn't make you less competitive in the workplace. This actually makes you far more effective.

Q-- Many women worry that calling attention to their needs as mothers will stigmatize them in the workplace, or lessen their chances of advancement. How can individual women realistically effect change in the workplace?

This depends on the corporate culture in which the individual finds herself-- in some places you can be very open and forthright, and in others you have to be more subtle. You should keep in mind that there are forces that try to get you to hide the part of you that is a mother-- you need to resist this in your own way that is effective for you, whether this means framing your child's artwork and hanging it next to your business school diploma or wearing jewelry that your toddler made for you as part of your business attire. The best way is to build rapport between yourself and other parents at work. This comes again from being empathetic, listening well, and finding places where you can help. The solution is not to turn people off by going on and on about your baby! But the first step to a solution is resisting the feeling that you have to hide your motherhood.

Gale Pryor was interviewed by Amy Condra-Peters

Heavy-duty Nylon Mesh Toy Bags

Beautiful Colors!
Velcro Closures!
Send for a sample
(11" X 14") Send \$3



RAINBOW TOY KATCHERS
P.O. Box 54-MM
Vandalla, Ohio 45377

Phone
AC 937-898-8055