

On Sun, Feb 1, 2026 at 6:59 PM Suzanne Arms <suzannebirthing@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear New Yorker Letters Editor,

First, a deep bow of thanks to Ms. Reed for her article (and for focusing attention on a little-known child psychiatrist, Donald Winnicott, who reached out to mothers to let them know that it was OK to be just “good enough” parents.)

Mothering in the modern western world is indeed very complicated and challenging, most importantly because children are not meant to be raised primarily by just one or two people. They need a group, at least 4 caring adults, and ideally a community that cares about, watches over, nurtures and protects them.

And so do mothers! The nuclear family is by its very nature an artificial and unsustainable unit. And babies and toddlers today in America, most often are raised by two overstressed and exhausted parents, and often just one parent, struggling to earn a living and provide food and housing for them and their children.

I feel I need to point out that the dramatic lowering of maternal mortality and morbidity in current times has been due as much to indoor plumbing, safe water and paved roads, as it has to medical advancements. And the hospital is neither of the safest nor the best place to give birth for more than 80% of American women. Only now are we beginning to recognize that the midwifery model of care is far superior to the medical model and that obstetricians need only be used for a very small fraction of women. Furthermore, our model for prenatal care has done nothing to reduce the epidemic of prematurity and low birth weight, whereas the midwifery model does both.

But what I want to focus on here, as someone who has been writing and speaking about childbearing and mothering and child development since 1975. When my book *Immaculate Deception* was first published it earned a cover review in the New York Times book review section. I was soundly denounced by many doctors for daring to write about this issue as someone who had no medical or scientific background. I wasn't criticizing individual physicians, but challenging the entire system. And in that book I took on some of the complex and paradoxical issues around the needs of women as mothers and the needs of babies.

While we often hear about the challenges that we mothers face - so frequently parenting solo, and often working more than one job outside the home - don't

often hear about the inalienable biological needs of babies, starting at conception and continuing through the first year after birth. And the recent field of Epigenetics has proven that women's eggs and male sperm can be altered as a result of external forces, Resulting in babies who are either less or more resilient

There is a great deal of difference between survival, coping, and thriving. And there's a wealth of recent science supporting ancient wisdom and intuition regarding what babies actually need to thrive. Strong attachment to a mother or maternal figure is critical. So is breast-feeding, which has unfortunately been mischaracterized as a "choice", when it is in fact, a crucial part of birth and needed for full brain, gut and immune system development.

Our modern approach to childbirth, which places the hospital and obstetrician at the center, is rife with Medical, surgical, and pharmaceutical interventions, the vast majority of which are not only unnecessary, but place both the mother and the baby at immediate and long-term risk of harm. Epidural anesthesia, induced labor, cesarean, surgery, and separation of a mother and baby right after birth, have proven to be not just harmful, but disastrous. Each one of these interventions has been shown to result in mothers being frequently anxious and depressed less responsive to the infants, less likely to breast-feed, more likely to wean early if they do, and more likely to put their babies in early daycare.

Unfortunately, the entrance of women into the field of obstetrics has not done anything to change the largely unregulated and profit-making paradigm for birth. And women who go into obstetrics are socialized right from the start of their medical education to accept a wrongheaded paradigm.

Of course, our national policies, still based in Misogyny, as shown by our complete lack of financial support for new parents, make that most mothers experience that much more difficult.

But what I really want to point out and end with is the now proven fact that full brain development, as well as gut and immune health, require normal, physiological birth, strong attachment to a mother or mother figure, and full breast-feeding - nothing but breastmilk for at least six months and delaying weaning the child til at least the age of two. Yet by six weeks of age only 20% of American babies are breastfed.

For mothers who are not able to experience a normal, physiologically, natural - unmedicated vaginal birth, followed by immediate skin to skin contact plus breast-feeding, the now proven remedy is giving the baby 3 to 6 hours a day of skin to skin contact (it doesn't have to be from the mother) for at least 3 to 6 months. These are incontrovertible facts, if we are interested in promoting and

protecting full development in babies and good postpartum health and mothers. And this early and prolonged skin-to-skin contact with a mother dramatically, reduce his postpartum, depression and anxiety, and promotes full, healthy, maternal infant attachment.

And I am not even addressing here the issue of fathering. Women continue to be greatly influenced by what a male partner wants for them in terms of birth and how they feed their babies.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this letter to the editor. I hope you will publish it. And I would very much like to talk with Ms. Mead, but I don't know how to reach her directly.

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