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Perspectives On Violence:

Ashley Montagu, Ph.D., D.Sc., D.Litt.

Ashley Montagu, although born in England, has become a "national treasure" to his adopted country, the United States. His life virtually spans the 20th century. Educated at University of London, University of Florence, and Columbia University, he founded the anthropology department of Rutgers University, taught at University of California, Santa Barbara, Harvard, New York University, the New School for Social Research, and at Princeton. He has authored or edited over fifty books on scientific subjects, among them: *Race and IQ*, *On Being Human*, *The Natural Superiority of Women*, *Life Before Birth*, *Man: His First Two Million Years*, *Prenatal Influences*, *The Elephant Man*, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, and *Growing Young*. Dr. Montagu died in 1999 at 94 years of age.

From *The Natural Superiority of Women* (1952/1974, rev. ed.)

Woman knows what true love is; let her not be tempted from her knowledge by the false idols that man has created for her to worship.

Woman must stand firm and be true to her own inner nature. To yield to the prevailing false conception of love, of unloving love, is to abdicate her great evolutionary mission to keep human beings true to themselves, to keep them from doing violence to their inner nature, to help them to realize their potentialities for being loving and cooperative.

Were woman to fail in this task, all hope for the future of humanity would depart from the world.

Excerpts from an Interview conducted by Michael Mendizza, published in *Touch the Future*, Spring Issue, 1994.

The basic pattern of social behavior in the human species lies in the relation between mother and child. She has carried that child in a womb for 266 and a half days, which is actually the average from conception to birth (not delivery: doctors "deliver" babies but shouldn't). Babies get themselves naturally born, in most cases, and that child is looking forward to a continuation of the life that it had in the womb, which was sort of ideal. The temperature and pressure are constant, no work is required, and he or she is looking forward to a continuation of this. What they are looking forward to is a "womb with a view."

But they are expelled rather roughly and usually taken away from their mother, which is wrong. It's physiologically and psychologically wrong. Both baby and mother need each other more at that time than they ever will again. The baby should be put to nurse at the mother's breast, whereat it induces an enormous number of wonderful changes in the mother which she needs, such as the arresting of postpartum hemorrhage, which no obstetrician can do as well as the suckling baby, for there is more intelligence in the upper and lower lip of the newborn than in the brains of the obstetricians put together.

There is love between those two. All of this is communicated through touch, which would be lost if the baby were taken away from the mother. If you want to know what love is, interrupt what is going on between them and you will perceive the negative effects, the frustration of love. That baby is wanting to love. Striving to love. By not separating them, you not only enable them to live longer but you enable them to grow and develop rapidly in the ability to love themselves.

Q. Love and cooperation often seem distant in our world of increasing violence.

AM: We can't solve any problem without first solving the problem of human nature. We won't be able to solve the problems of homeless, impoverished, illiterate people, of murderers who would never have become murderers had they been adequately loved. You show me a murderer, and I'll show you a person who's been failed in the supreme need for love, who never learned how to love, and will hate, as I heard one saying, "I hate the whole world's guts, and the whole world hates mine." These are the victims of society, just as the doctor is a victim of society, as most of us are victims of our society.

Q. How have we most failed our children?

AM: We don't love children adequately, we don't even know what love is. It's a great help to know exactly what the criteria of love are, because these murderers, these violent people, these terribly undisciplined characters are exhibiting the frustration of love. [Love, Montagu says earlier, is the ability to communicate to others your profound involvement in their welfare, is that you will never commit the supreme treason of letting them down whenever they most stand in need of you, and that you will minister to and encourage the growth and development of their potentialities. That's love.]

What is frustration? It is the thwarting of an expected satisfaction. What every baby expects is to be loved. When you thwart that expectation, you make the person sink lower and lower into despair and frustration, and to react in hostility, aggressiveness: "I don't care a damn about you anymore. You haven't cared a damn about me; why should I worry about you? Why should I become involved in all this?" This is the massive alienation, the disengagement, the detachment which we are suffering from in our culture, for hatred is love frustrated.

Q. One of your most influential books is *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*. Why is touch so misunderstood in our culture?

AM: The first article on touch, so far as I know, was my own published in 1950. It is strange that we should have waited till the middle of the 20th century to pick up on the importance of this tremendously complex organ, the largest organ in the body, which most of us thought was just a covering to prevent us from falling apart! The skin is the external brain and nervous system of the body. It is derived from exactly the same embryological layer as is the internal brain and spinal cord. And both are very closely interrelated.

All the messages that this skin receives must go to the internal brain, and the reactions go back to the skin and every other organ of the body. These are not theories, these are

observable facts. We don't understand that the touch of a hand can make all the difference to another human being--sometimes literally a difference of life or death. Doctors don't touch patients as they should...And the idea of taking babies away from a mother's touch is wrong from a hundred points of view.

Q. What are the consequences of not being touched?

AM: Rene Spitz, an Austrian-American psychoanalyst of great genius, made a classic study of small children in orphanages. He found that children who received a great deal of tactile stimulation had a much lower mortality and morbidity rate than those who were neglected. This observation was confirmed by Harry Harlow, Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin. In a series of experiments, infant monkeys were isolated from their mothers and then compared with their brothers and sisters who had not been isolated. The infant monkeys who had been deprived of maternal contact were unable to establish any kind of social relations, were in a chronic state of anxiety, were fearful, and did not know how to behave sexually. They did not know how to behave toward their young. The same thing is true for great apes and human mothers and probably most other animals.

Q. Can you say a little more about touch and how the failure to be touched may lead to violence?

AM: One of the outstanding examples may be rape. Who commits rape? If you would discuss this with rapists you would find that they invariably reject the idea that it is a sex crime. It is a crime of violence. And what is the violence about? Rejection by the mother. And they hate women for it.

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