

**FEELING LIKE A GENIUS:
ENHANCING WOMEN'S CHANGING EMBODIED
SELF DURING FIRST CHILDBEARING**

Submitted by

Jennifer Anne Parratt RN RM BHlthSci MMid FACM

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Doctor of Philosophy (Midwifery)**

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School of Nursing and Midwifery
Faculty of Health
The University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS RECEIVED DURING THIS RESEARCH

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Parratt, J., & Fahy, K. (2008). Including the *nonrational* is sensible midwifery. *Women and Birth*, 21(1), 37-42.

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DEDICATION

Housewife Poet

*There is a force
a power in me
compulsed to move expressively
in language
from my inner being*

*the senses tremble furiously
as mind unleashes catalysts
of enquiry and desire
to know itself.*

*And I,
this body dominated
by worldly commitments
must crush this spark
and shudder as I quench
the flame of my identity*

*And I,
this mind
modified to mediocrity
scream my cowardice
with shame*

Anne Parratt

Wimmera-Mallee Country Bulletin, W-C October 2, 1978, page 7

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother the Housewife Poet.

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APPENDIX B: Participant stories published as ‘Parratt, J. (2009). Feelings of change: Stories of having a baby. Raleigh: Lulu.com’ and available from:

<http://www.lulu.com/content/paperback-book/feelings-of-change-stories-of-having-a-baby/7846284>

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ABSTRACT

Background

The traditional way of considering childbearing change has been to conceptualise the role of the woman as ‘becoming a mother’ and the role of the midwife in that view is to help the woman become a mother. Contemporary midwifery efforts aimed at empowering women toward positive birth experiences are based on incorrect or incomplete assumptions that limit the theory and practice of midwifery.

Question and aim

‘How does a woman’s embodied sense of self change during the childbearing period and what factors in the childbirth experience seem to be positively related to her improved sense of self’. The aim is to create theory about how to enhance women’s embodied self during childbearing.

Methodology

The research is explicitly feminist and post-structural. The fourteen primigravid participants planned normal birth in diverse settings. Personal narratives, survey research and grounded theorising guided data collection, analysis and theorising. Data was gathered via questionnaires and in-depth interviews at three time points, one antenatal and two postnatal.

Key findings

During childbearing, a woman’s sense of self is improved when she has an enhanced capacity to feel herself as an embodied whole and intrinsically powerful person. The concept ‘genius change’ represents a woman’s active and effortful use of intrinsic power. It also refers to a woman’s developing trust in her intrinsic power.

Midwifery factors that are unsupportive of a woman’s improved sense of self are termed ‘habitual practices’. These habitually undertaken practices undermine a woman’s sense of her own power and encourage reliance on her usual responses to change.

‘Empowering practices’ are positively related to a woman’s improved sense of self. These practices guide a woman to connect with and actualise her intrinsic power in new and previously unanticipated ways.

Significance

This research is significant for childbearing women because an enhanced sense of embodied self during first childbearing provides a strengthened foundation from which a woman can approach future changes in childbearing and throughout life.

The resultant theory is significant for midwifery practice and education because it makes explicit how a midwife can optimise a woman’s psychophysiological wellbeing in ways that uniquely suit the diverse requirements of each woman.