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

Submitted by
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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

An Australian Postgraduate Award: Approximately $21,000 per annum was awarded in January 2002; following an extension it terminated in June 2005.

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PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS RESEARCH

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Book chapters


Refereed journals


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**Invited presentations**

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DEDICATION

Housewife Poet

There is a force
   a power in me
      compelled 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

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother the Housewife Poet.
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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.