

A Phenomenology of Childbirth: Northland Area Birth

Stories



My memories

of my mom sharing her birth story with me are heavy. Her experience was intensely traumatic, and both of us almost lost our lives in the process. As a child and young adult, I grew to be concerned by my parents' lack of access to comprehensive care and information.

In fall, 2012, I approached Dr. Mitra Emad, a professor of Anthropology and Cultural Studies at the University of Minnesota Duluth. I shared my interests with her, and she agreed to be my advisor to an undergraduate research project funded by the university.

My intent

was to examine the phenomenological experience of childbirth in the region popularly referred to as the "Northland" (Duluth/Superior and surrounding areas of Northeastern MN and Northwestern WI) with the goal of producing a digital story.

My research questions are inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the phenomenology of perception, and are intended to investigate the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile and emotional feel of giving birth.

The quintessence of my project is to inspire an appreciative comprehension of the current phenomenological experience of childbirth within the Northland culture, through the form of a public ethnography.

I attended the Duluth Birth and Baby Fairs

and video recorded twelve birth stories—six in the spring and six in the fall of 2013. My interview question was open-ended and simple:

“Would you please share with me your birth story?”

I created

a video (34:11) encompassing my mom's birth story, along with six others (from the Duluth Birth and Baby Fair spring 2013). My video was presented at the Duluth Birth and Baby Fair in the spring of 2014.

I learned

in this process that sharing your story has a profound affect. The listener is taken on a journey of one of the most memorable moments of your life. And for the person sharing, forgotten memories are regained; lost sensations are again experienced; new understandings are realized.

Sharing your story has many implications

for research—Dr. Sarah LaChance Adams is a professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Superior. She specializes in 19th and 20th century continental philosophy, ethics, feminism, and philosophical psychology. She is co-editor of an anthology titled *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Mothering* and is currently awaiting the release of her new book, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers, and What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence*.

for education—my video is currently being circulated at the following organizations for educational purposes:

Duluth Doula Collective
Essentia Health
Morning Star Birth Center
St. Luke's Hospital
Women Circling Women



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Helpful Resources

Adams, Sarah LaChance, and Caroline R. Lundquist. *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering*. New York: Fordham UP, 2013. Print.

Birth and Baby Fair Duluth. Women Circling Women and Magic Box Photography, n.d. Web. <<http://www.birthandbabyfairduluth.com/>>.

Northland Birth Network. Northland Birth Network, n.d. Web. <<http://www.northlandbirthnetwork.org/>>.

Women Circling Women. Women Circling Women, Inc., n.d. Web. <<http://www.womencirclingwomen.com/>>.

