UWE Bristol

What is spiritual care in relation to women, babies and families

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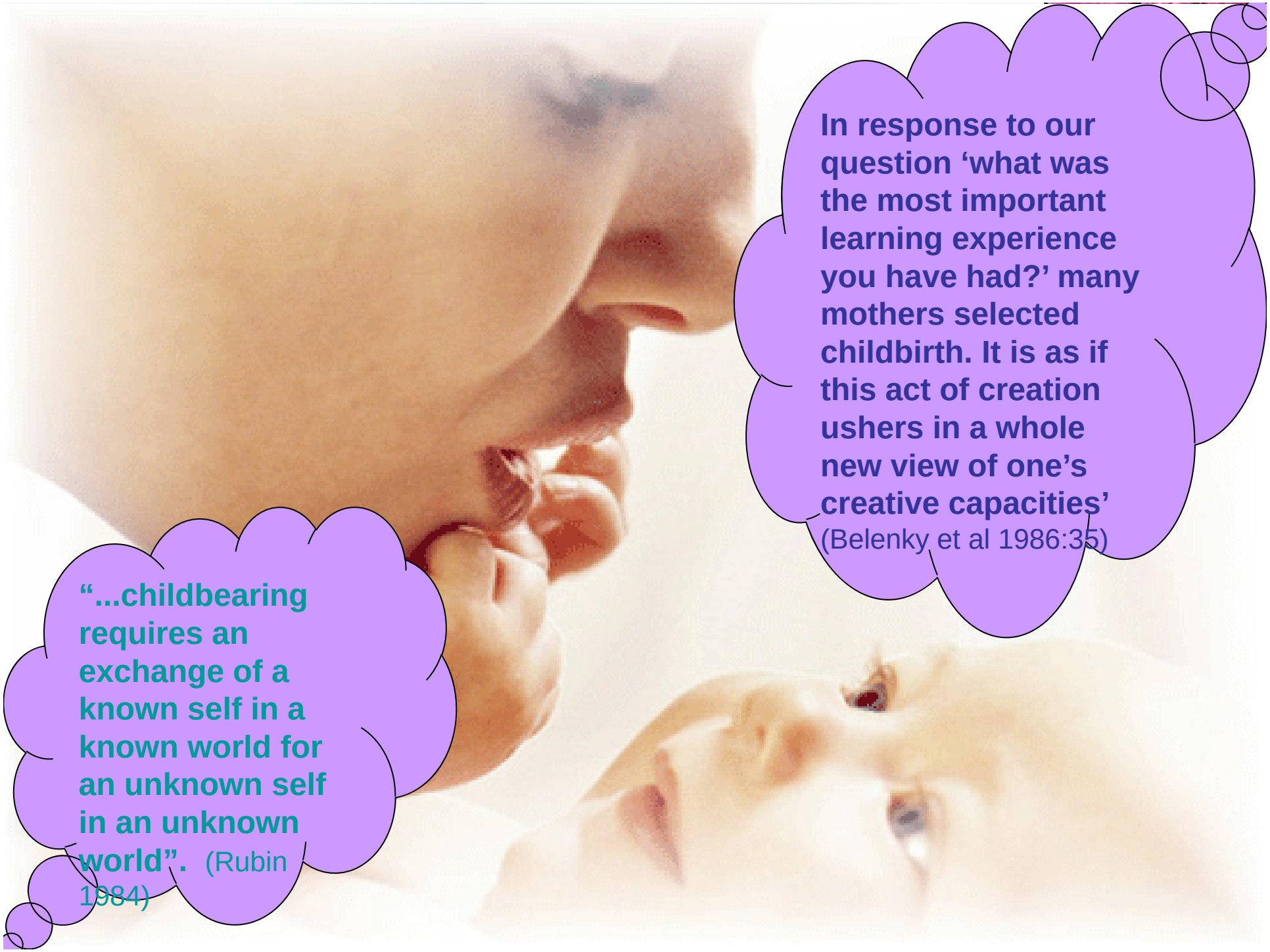
bettertogether


In response to our question 'what was the most important learning experience you have had?' many mothers selected childbirth. It is as if this act of creation ushers in a whole new view of one's creative capacities' (Belenky et al 1986:35)
"...childbearing requires an exchange of a known self in a known world for an unknown self in an unknown world". (Rubin 1984)

The Effect of Faith or Spirituality in Pregnancy: A Content Analysis

Jesse D.E, Schoneboom C.& Blanchard A.*J Holist Nurs* 2007; 25; 151

130 women

- **47% said spirituality affected pregnancy positively**
- **45% said spirituality did not affect them**
- **5.4% were unsure**

The Effect of Faith or Spirituality in Pregnancy: A Content Analysis

- guidance and support;
- protection, blessing, or reward;
- communication with God;
- strength and confidence;
- help with difficult moral choices;
- a generalized positive effect.

Women's voices

'The experience itself is so different from anything you ever experience except when you're having birth, so in that respect, I think it's a spiritual experience, just as any other rites of passage...it's an experience that you never forget...[It's] spiritual and significant …because of the feelings that you have, the lessons that you learn, the insights in relation to the experience'

(Klassen 2001:94)

'Six of my babies have died from a faulty gene'

One in five women has caesarean

IVF babies 'face birth problems'

Doctor plans UK 'designer baby' clinic

How embryo screening may be the new way to beat cancer

Curate challenges late abortion

Woman has dead husband's IVF baby

Baby created to save older sister

Steep rise in Down's pregnancies

Second bid made to clone humans

Is it wrong to select a deaf embryo?

How scientists made three person embryo

Remember
the baby

I can remember
Dirix etal (2009)
Hepper PG (1996)
Hultman et al (1999)
Mhyrman et al 1996
Renggli F (2005)
Verny T & Kelly J (1982)

Standards for pre-registration midwifery education (NMC 2009)

‘The emphasis must be on the provision of holistic care for women and their families, which respects their individual needs, contexts, cultures and choices.’

Holistic care

Giving her complete or whole care

Aiming to promote wholeness or completeness

Standards for pre-registration midwifery education (NMC 2009)

Students must be competent in:

‘a knowledge of psychological, social, emotional and spiritual factors that may positively or adversely influence normal physiology, and be competent in applying this in practice’

Questions for educators

- What is spiritual care in midwifery?
- What are the ‘spiritual factors that may positively or adversely influence normal physiology’?
- It is not known the best way how to educate students in this
- Spiritual assessment is not formally addressed in clinical areas

What do midwives think?

Spirituality is:

- **not ‘religious’**
- **part of being a midwife**
- **equated with caring**

Birth is a spiritual event

Spirituality is not ‘religious’

Kerry (C)*: I am not a religious person at all and I don’t’ foresee spiritual as being particularly being religious. I see it as understanding yourself and almost like a meditation of knowing yourself within and that’s how I perceive spirituality and again with being deep it’s really looking within yourself and bringing that out.*

Spirituality is part of being a midwife

Sally-Ann (C): *By spiritual I mean…what makes the woman what she is and who she is, what drives her, and as a midwife what makes me the midwife that I am and how I can actually use my feelings and spirituality to bring out the best in the woman and to build a relationship with that woman…*

Pamela (H)*: Would you think that you have to be spiritual to be a midwife? I think there's something, it's very linked, it's intrinsically linked that I think it's not just a job.*

Spirituality is equated with caring

- Jennifer-A (H) *:I know plenty of midwives who aren't spiritual; no I wouldn't say plenty but I do know some midwives who don't care. So spirituality is equated with kindness, ability to love, ability to verbalise that…*

Birth is a spiritual event

Archie (H): *I still do cry every delivery, I think it's fabulous the whole process is just so emotional and humbling, it is lovely… Basically [spiritual] is what divides it as a job from other jobs including nursing. It's something inside you. As a midwife its not a religious feeling but a magical feeling, it is more feeling from within and an atmosphere, more than a religious spiritual process, more a miracle, the magic of a new life; the same as sitting with someone who's dying as well, because I have done that as well…but I think the bright lights and the noise and the chat and too many people in the room takes away that spiritual feeling of the baby and the mum welcoming a new life. ..The magic of birth is lost in the theatre or more medical setting.*

What do midwives think?

Spiritual care:

- **is equated to the ‘art’ of midwifery**
- **Recognises individual religious belief**
- **Recognises women’s individual resources**
- **Is intuitive**

Spiritual care equated to the art of midwifery

Sally-Ann (C)*:I think it is very important to maintain the art and science of midwifery. If we lose sight of what a midwife is we lose the soul of the profession. I think the meaning of the art of midwifery, it's the essence of the job, more than the physical side of the work we actually do. I would say it's more the spiritual side we bring into it, our feelings about the type of work that we do, much more…much more of…the essence of midwifery*

Recognising individual religious belief

Lucy (C)*: I don't…feel that its my place to question their spiritual beliefs but it is to support them through whatever their actual belief is…and if its something that you don't have an awful lot of experience of then you ask them in a non-threatening, non-judgemental way in order to help you understand how you can help them. In some respects possibly recognised religion is easier than personal spiritual beliefs…but I think its wrong to pretend you know all and then find you've put yourself in their eyes in the wrong through lack of knowledge…you also have the extremes within each particular religion, so again it's always worth establishing peoples spiritual beliefs as to exactly how they practise…even in a recognised religion you can't tar everybody with the same brush and that's their spiritual beliefs and I think its important to try and establish where that individuals coming from.*

Recognising women's inner resources

Jennifer-A (H): I think…back to the woman who has got the IUD because she's got that greater need, she's got that spiritual need, she's got almost that from somewhere, somebody from somewhere helping me and has she moved onto a different level because she has that desperate, maybe even a religious need then? It's got to be something out there to help me…

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Intuitive care

Kerry (C): *I don't know where this intuition comes from- I really, really don't know. Other occasions happen and you think, right I'll just go and see that person today, coz I know, something's telling you to go and see that person; somebody non-attends for a couple of weeks and you think I'm not going to follow the procedures with this, I'm going to go and knock on their door coz something just isn't right. I don't know if everybody has that- I think it's very spiritual and I think its very much knowing your women. However the home birth I was at last week I've never met that woman before in my life- so that contradicts that doesn't it?*

Questions

- Do you agree with these elements of spiritual care?
- Are there any other elements of spiritual midwifery care that are important?
- In your situation is spiritual care being carried out?

What can we do to make pregnancy and birth better for the mother and the baby?

•‘..creating a birth of love and trust could influence an entire lifetime. Every birth contains the potential to make a difference. As midwives , this can be our highest offering…’

Sunni Karll Midwifery Today 2001

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Thank you….
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