

The Three Minute Interview – Ginger Garner, MPT, ATC, ERYT

This Mother, Educator, Author, Blogger, Physical Therapist and Yoga Practitioner Talks About Childbirth in America, and Why It Needs to Change

How do you view the connection between the birth experience and the empowerment of women?

Birth is valuable. It gives rise to our entire future. There is power in our ability to give birth to the future of our planet. We need to reclaim that power. As women, we have given up that power and allowed ourselves to be pushed into a corner. That corner is an operating room where birth is a procedure. Birth is a beautiful life enriching rite for the women who do choose the road less traveled.

What do you think is disempowering about the current American way of birth?

Birth is not a pathologic event. It is a natural rite of passage. Birth is not a sterile, capitalistic business owned by hospitals and medical professions from which to generate profit. Birth is the private, nurturing business of women and belongs in the hands of women.

Do you think the economics of childbirth play a role in limiting women's control over their birth experience? Prenatal care and hospital births are an astoundingly profitable business for ob/gyns and hospitals. For the mother, hospital births are very expensive, between \$5000 - \$10,000 for a simple vaginal delivery. The cost of a midwife, in contrast, is a fraction of that. (When my baby was born, my midwife stayed with me for the entire 36 hours I labored.) In addition, I knew that when using an ob/gyn, my chances for a c-section would increase to 33%, roughly, or 1 in 3. Most of my friends with c-section labored only 1/3 of the time I did before their ob/gyns emphatically stated they must have a c-section because of “failure to progress.” Finally, obstetricians are trained as surgeons and should attend high risk, not low risk, births. Midwives have all privileges and training that a physician has, except to perform major surgery. We are taxing an already burdened health care system by using health care providers who are not needed. Obstetricians are stretched extremely thin and are responsible for more work and more liability (and higher malpractice costs) than any other physician subspecialty.

What do you believe can be gained by making birth a more empowering experience for women? We could ensure a future generation of women who will be strong, empowered mothers who trust their own bodies. Our views on birth are being shaped by an overly technocratic maternity system, when what we really need is a humanistic return to holistic birth. If we do not act, the next generation may completely lose the experience of birth. I am currently writing a book which I hope will stand as the original guide for mothers to remain as whole and fit as possible during their prenatal, labor, delivery, and postpartum periods. I also write a blog that helps women and mothers be their strongest. It encourages women to get fit and be fearless at every stage of life. It's also a reference for activists across the globe. I am dedicated to teaching other health care professionals how to advocate for “wholistic” women's health. (Robbie Davis-Floyd, *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*).

In your view, what are the cultural implications on women's social status if the birth process could be transformed? Women gave up their rights to birth in the early 20th century. Instead, they fought for medical intervention as a way to liberate themselves from the biology of giving birth. However, what happened was far from liberation. The medical establishment now owns birth. Hospitals require CFM (continuous fetal monitoring) and other medical interventions and insurance companies refuse to allow women to try for a VBAC (vaginal birth after cesarean) or to cover costs associated with VBAC's. We have only an illusion of control and choice when we birth in a hospital. I had a hospital birth, and had to drive 2 hours to get to a hospital which would even "allow" me to use a birthing ball or midwife!

When we give up our rights to birth the way we choose, we devalue birth, which is the ultimate feminine act. We thus simultaneously devalue ourselves. Millions of women through all of history have been strong and confident enough to trust their bodies. We can return to that place of trust. Modern medicine saves lives during truly high risk births, but the fact remains that the majority of births are low risk. If we can reestablish ownership of our own bodies, then we can foster improved social status for women in every way - physically, financially, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and intellectually.

Learn more about Ginger's passion at her blog: <http://www.gingergarner.com/pages/blog.html>