



Birth Ambassadors: Doulas and the Re-Emergence of Woman-Supported Birth in America

Christine H. Morton, Elayne Clift

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Birth Ambassadors documents the social history of the emergence of doula care in the United States. What are doulas and where did they come from? Why do women become doulas? What does it mean to be a doula? Birth Ambassadors is the only book to fully answer these questions by connecting narrative accounts with critical sociological analysis of the dilemmas and issues embodied in doula history and practice. Based on historical research and interviews with currently practicing doulas and leaders in the field, Birth Ambassadors argues that the doula role is underpinned by ideological commitments to several overlapping and, at times, conflicting ideas around childbirth. These include an understanding of pregnancy and birth from the midwifery model, a belief in women's right to make informed choices regarding their health care, the need for patient/consumer advocacy and unconditional emotional support for women's choices about their births. Birth Ambassadors explores how this constellation of beliefs within doula practice represents an innovative yet problematic response within the maternity reform movement to empower women during and after childbirth. Doulas are ambassadors to the world of birth, highlighting women's emotional experience of birth in settings where beliefs and practices of the participants (the woman, her family, the nurses, midwives and obstetricians) are sometimes in conflict. For doulas to fulfill their goal of entering mainstream maternity care, they and their organizations face critical challenges.

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