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## **Hypnobirth: Theories and Practices for Healthcare Professionals by Yulia Watters (review)**

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# Hypnobirth: Theories and Practices for Healthcare Professionals

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*Hypnobirth: Theories and Practices for Healthcare Professionals* is a book written for mental health and medical professionals, and caregivers intimately involved in the birthing process of the expectant mother. It is intended to inform professionals and individuals about the relevance and role of hypnobirthing during the pregnancy and birthing process and to help them understand the connection between medical and alternative health practices. Because of this, professionals are provided with the opportunity to learn and understand that one approach (i.e., medical versus alternative practices) does not have to necessarily exclude the other and there is a place for both throughout the birthing process.

Hypnosis, by itself, is often viewed with skepticism or caution by those who do not fully understand what it is and the value it holds. It is not something necessarily done to a person, as is often thought, but rather a “way of being” that helps the person connect the experiences of their mind and body while approaching specific problems and situations and achieving a solution to the event experienced (p. xvii). Hypnosis is described as a means to assist women in preparing for childbirth and the expected or unexpected events that accompany it so that they can better accept and address what takes place throughout rather than be ‘locked’ into the idea of what the perfect birth must be for it to be meaningful. It is also a set of individualized and meaningful hypnobirthing techniques chosen by the expectant mother that best meets her personal, emotional, and mental needs and sense of support to help her reduce anxieties and/or problems (rather than eliminate them) and connect with the infant throughout the birthing process.

In Chapter 1, the author explains the history of hypnosis, myths associated with hypnosis, and frequently asked questions. Such information lays the foundation of how hypnosis came to be and provides information about the ways it has evolved over time. Of particular interest is the discussion of myths people hold about hypnosis as these if not recognized, explored, and addressed may inhibit a person’s or professional’s accurate understanding and use of hypnosis as a part of the birthing process. For instance, some may perceive hypnosis is the same for all people and looks the same or involves the same needs and/or techniques. Yet, in reality, as the reader proceeds, she soon learns that hypnosis and hypnobirthing is very individualized and can be specifically tailored to each woman’s needs, concerns, values, and set of circumstances. Thus, a key component of a successful hypnobirthing process is for professionals to learn about the expectant mother and her needs and to have an open dialogue about the approaches and skills which can be utilized and incorporated as a part of the birthing process.

Another important concept for professionals to understand is that hypnobirthing can be incorporated into births other than those considered “natural” births. Women vary in the type of birth they hope to have and the setting they prefer to be in and a part of during the birthing process (i.e., hospital, home, birthing centers). Hypnobirthing can prepare women for giving birth in the

way they hope it will occur, but it can also be useful for those who find that changes must be made on the spot and quite unexpectedly. An example of this is the woman who plans on having a vaginal birth and throughout the birthing process learns a “C-section” is necessary. Unexpected alterations such as this can be disappointing and stressful for the expectant mother, but when supports and ‘trained’ professionals are in place to remind her of the ability to use her preferred hypnobirthing skills previously learned and practiced, restoration of one’s ability to connect her mind and body to the experience can be achieved.

A number of important and relevant points are discussed throughout that may be of interest to professionals involved in the hypnobirthing process. First is the fact that professionals can work with the expectant mother in conceptualizing and practicing hypnotic techniques prior to the actual birth. Professionals are afforded an opportunity learn about the expectant mothers’ hopes and desires by exploring questions such as: What does being pregnant mean to you? What does the ideal or desired pregnancy look like? What supports are needed for you to have the best experience possible (pp. 35-36)? Exploration of the mother’s desires is an important component of assisting her in becoming an involved part of childbirth and in “making a strong connection to her child” (p. 36).

Second is the process of learning about and identifying techniques women can use as a part of the hypnobirthing process. Some of those discussed throughout include the use of visualization, breathing, and relaxation exercises as well as yoga and music. Also of relevance is to provide expectant mothers with the opportunity to reflect on their individual, cultural, and personal values and needs as they relate to the birthing process. Such an act gives women the opportunity to create a vision and a plan to help a successful birth come about. It also empowers them to become active participants throughout the birthing process and to be aware of their own bodies, feelings, and experiences (pp. 42-43).

Third is the importance of remembering that the skills and approaches used by women are likely to vary. While some such as those mentioned may work well for some women, others will need different ones. Thus, some women may require smells, memories, specific words (i.e., language), touch, specific places or environments to help them make establish a meaningful connection and to have a peaceful and comfortable experience. As a result, a part of the helping professional’s role is to aid the expectant mother in identifying and accessing these and to support her in the use of them during the birthing process.

One point mentioned that is essential for professionals to consider is the value and role of language used during the pregnancy and birthing process. The author points out the fact that the language professionals use to describe what is taking place can help or hinder the mother’s feelings and experiences while giving birth. Professionals can assist expectant mothers by learning about words and preferences they find supportive and helpful to use and hear during the birthing process versus those they do not.

While much of the book’s focus is on the preparation and utilization of hypnobirthing techniques during the birthing process, the author reminds the reader that mothers and partners may continue to use and build on the skills previously learned long after giving birth. Incorporation of these techniques can be used to assist with the parent’s “emotional, social, and personal” formation and development of a close and meaningful relationship with the newborn infant. Additionally, the expectant mother may find such approaches previously learned helpful in addressing new and present concerns associated with being a supportive and loving parent. For example, the mother may have concerns related to being a mother, the baby’s needs, the interconnectedness between her own and her baby’s needs, and so forth (p. 93).

Professionals interested in learning more about hypnobirthing and its application to expectant mothers are reminded that much of the process is about “being open” to the information and skills presented. The author reminds the reader that exploration and incorporation of hypnobirthing techniques is achievable and does not require a professional to be an “expert” before considering its value, especially since this is a process that utilizes the skills and support of a team of professionals typically selected by the expectant mother. Also of help may the fact that the author provides readers with appendices and a glossary of terms to help explain “unfamiliar” ones. Professionals wanting to explore hypnobirthing are encouraged to learn more about it and the ways in which they can use the information provided to assist expectant mothers in having the most meaningful and pleasant birth possible.

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