

In the beginning

Psychological support for the
journey into parenthood

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When a baby is born so is a mother, each
unsteady in their own way”

Alexandra Sacks

Motherhood is a unique human relationship which is
often idealized ...and this isolates women and fails to
support them in the actual work of mothering”

Azevedo - Hanks

Sharing Space

**The Birth of a Mother:
A Psychological Transformation**

Kate Babetin

Abstract: There is no experience in a woman's life that is more impactful, all-encompassing, and life-altering than becoming a mother. The transformation from woman to mother is a psychologically-profound experience that both overlaps and separates from the physical experience of becoming a mother. This article aims to explore the process of the psychological birth of a mother by discussing: the shift in identity that takes place; why understanding the psychological experience of motherhood matters; the various stages of transformation; the factors that influence the transformation; and the ways in which becoming a mother affects a woman's identity, relationships, and career.

Keywords: motherhood, identity, transformation, motherhood adjustment



Key stages in life cycle

Menarche- in adolescence – a time when an individual can actually reproduce

Matrescence

Menopause



'Matrescence is an all encompassing developmental transition women goes through when she becomes a mother' Jen Hacker Pearson



PHYSICAL
CHANGES



HORMONAL
CHANGES



PSYCHOLOGICAL
& EMOTIONAL
CHANGES



SOCIAL
CHANGES



SPIRITUAL
CHANGES



A transition that has complexity and intergenerational elements

- Ghosts and angels in the nursery
- Stories through the generations – threads that weave and those that clash with expectation and personal meaning
- Pre- verbal trauma/experiences & other trauma
- Unspoken fears/shame
- Previous losses, loss of not being mothered, loss of own parents at this time in life
- Values and beliefs
- AND also the stories of strength (give example if time)



Identity & role changes

Can include issues around responsibility, growing up and irreversible changes



Need for & loss of control

Within self, within systems (family, NHS, social systems & society)



Common psychological struggles



Uncertainty across long periods

Many moving parts- unsure what will happen next during pregnancy, birth & beyond. Many unknowns.



Themes of loss

Loss of sense of self, previous freedom, bodily autonomy, certain possibilities



Trauma

Activation of old trauma, relational trauma, attachment wounds, previous birth trauma, harm in systems that are unavoidable in pregnancy (healthcare)



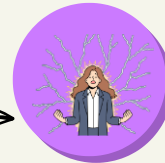
Grief

Grief for own self as baby/child, loss of own parents can feel marked, loss in previous pregnancies/ death of babies/ children



Anger

About own unmet needs as a child, constraints imposed by others or self, expectations, directed at self and/or others



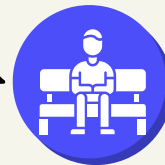
Fear & anxiety

Worries about wellbeing of baby, things going wrong, fear of rejection, of not being a good enough parent or repeating harmful parenting experienced as a child



Loneliness and connection with others

Isolation, disconnection, lack of intimacy, lack of meaningful connection with others



Balancing the needs of self and baby

Mixed messages, fear of not being good enough, needing care & being cared for



A journey that has changed with society?



Article

Mums Alone: Exploring the Role of Isolation and Loneliness in the Narratives of Women Diagnosed with Perinatal Depression

Billie Lever Taylor ^{1,*}, Louise M. Howard ², Katherine Jackson ³, Sonia Johnson ¹, Nadia Mantovani ⁴, Selina Nath ^{2,5}, Antoaneta Y. Sokolova ⁶ and Angela Sweeney ^{2,*}

- Expectations /family scripts
- Changing family set ups
- Cultural norms and differences
- Impact of COVID
- Financial and social pressures
- Fear in the system around giving birth with reduced resources & many enquiries
- Neonatal admissions (1 in 7)



How do we meet needs?

- In our society
- In our workplaces
- In the way we set up services
- Do we meet parents where they are and what they want- or even how do we talk about this so they can recognise what they need
- Planning around the whole of matrescence not the birth plan
- Planning around **processes** & Viewing issues on a continuum
- Nurturing the quality of connection between parents & child
- Understanding there are many things that can be different (such as neonatal care- which means a baby can be born as so much of this is incomplete)
- Building on strengths, values and what matters most to parents & normalize mixed feelings

Building a compassionate approach to this period of change

- Moving towards difficulty and 'messiness'
- Knowing the complex reality the changing biology and shifting relational landscape can de-shame common feelings
- Foster compassionate understanding to the huge changes – from self and others
- Who do I want to become, as a person, as parent? How can I hold all the roles?
- How do we want people to enter parenthood- and what do they need to do that? E.g. courage, compassion, strength, curiosity, connection

