

The therapeutic benefits of birth photography

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The therapeutic benefits of birth photography are increasingly being recognized in the birth community as a valuable tool for promoting mental and emotional well-being for new parents and birthing individuals. This form of photography captures the beauty and strength of the birthing person during labor and delivery, providing them with a visual record of one of the most transformative events of their lives.

One of the primary therapeutic benefits of birth photography is increased self-esteem and body positivity. According to a study published in the *Journal of Childbirth and Women's Health*, birth photography allows individuals to see themselves in a new and empowering light, helping them to appreciate the strength and beauty of their bodies during birth (2017). This increased sense of pride and confidence can have a lasting impact on the individual's relationship with their body and their overall wellness, which can have a great impact on general mental health.

Another key benefit of birth photography is improved bonding with the baby. New parents can use birth photographs to reflect on and remember the first moments of their child's life, which they may have missed due to the intensity of labor and delivery. This can help to foster a stronger emotional connection with the baby and provide a deeper sense of attachment and understanding of the birth experience (American Pregnancy Association, 2015). Birth photography can also help document the changes in family dynamics that occur with the arrival of a new baby, which can be especially important when sleep deprivation or "baby clash" can cloud the parents' memory buffer. It is a great tool used for bonding when parents feel distanced in the post-partum period.

Birth photography provides individuals with a visual record of their birth experience, which can be especially helpful for people who may have difficulty remembering the details of their birth due to exhaustion, medication, or other factors. This record can serve as a powerful source of comfort and support, helping parents remember and celebrate the transformative event of their lives (Healthline, 2018).

Reduced trauma and stress are also important therapeutic benefits of birth photography. A study published in *Psychology Today* found that birth photography can be an effective tool for reducing the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for individuals who have experienced traumatic births. By revisiting the birth experience through photographs, individuals can process and make sense of their experiences, reducing the impact of traumatic memories and improving their overall well-being (2019). Birth photography can help individuals to build a positive birth story, which can serve as a source of comfort and support, helping individuals to reframe their birth experience in a more positive light.

Furthermore, in dramatic cases such as perinatal loss, birth photography serves as a powerful form of legacy work, preserving memories, validating existence, honoring the journey, facilitating sharing and remembrance, and aiding in the healing process for parents facing unimaginable loss.

These photographs become treasured mementos of a child deeply loved and profoundly missed, ensuring that their brief time on earth is remembered and celebrated with reverence and love.

Finally, at a much wider level, birth photography can help improve the common perception of birth: it can help shift negative attitudes and beliefs about birth by showing the beauty and strength of the birthing person. This can have a powerful impact on the individual's perception of birth and their overall confidence in their own ability to birth. Celebrating the transformative event of birth can be helpful in the process of changing the modern paradigm of birth and normalizing it. This can serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement, helping individuals see beauty and resilience in birth, and discover the many ways it can be done (home, birth center, hospital, vaginal, breech, c-section etc.).

It is important to approach birth photography with sensitivity and respect for the birthing person's privacy and comfort. A trained and experienced birth photographer can work with the birthing person and their support team to capture images that are meaningful and empowering, while still respecting the individual's boundaries.

The use of birth photography is not without its controversies and challenges, however. Some critics argue that the use of cameras and flash during the birth process can be disruptive and distracting, potentially leading to increased stress and anxiety for the birthing person. It is important for birth photographers to take these concerns into consideration and to approach their work with sensitivity and professionalism.

While it is important to value the many therapeutic benefits that birth photography can offer, it is extremely important to understand that it is not a replacement for professional counseling or therapy. Individuals who have experienced a traumatic or difficult birth should seek the support of a qualified mental health professional to help them process their experiences and promote their healing.

In conclusion, the therapeutic benefits of birth photography are numerous and far-reaching, providing new parents and birthing individuals with a powerful tool for processing their birth experiences and improving their overall well-being. It is important for birth photographers to be mindful and offer a conscious-driven approach of their work. As for birthing individuals, and anything birth-related, they should carefully consider the potential benefits and challenges of birth photography, to make informed decisions about whether it is right for them.

As for medical professionals, all evidence tends to show that birth photography is in itself Good Medicine. Furthermore, the Quebec law underlines that the patient must be encouraged by the medical staff, through the provision of adequate information, to use services in a judicious manner. Therefore, law and evidence in hand, we should hope for an evolution in the welcoming of birth photography within birthing spaces, by the medical community, to increase positive birth experiences for parents.

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