

CHAPTER VII

RESULTS: MODEL OF FATHER'S BIRTH EXPERIENCE WITH A DOULA

Introduction

There was robust support for several of the concepts that influence how doula support was delivered to fathers. Independent practice doulas, hospital-based doulas, independent practice doula client mothers and hospital-based doula patient mothers and fathers were in agreement that the doula's role appeared to have four components: building a relationship with the father, complementing his involvement, serving as a labor guide, and embracing a caretaking role. In addition, all four groups of participants validated three possible labor support roles of fathers. Some men were seen or saw themselves as taking on one or more roles of partner or protector. Others were viewed or described themselves as constrained by their gender role and conditioning. The third main concept that had broad based support was the father's four possible levels of engagement in labor support: full engagement, less than full engagement, partial engagement, and disengagement. Lastly, mothers, fathers, and doulas provided multiple examples of doulaing the father, where doulas provided support that was primarily directed at the father for his emotional wellbeing.

Explanation of Model

The concepts in the model are seen as interrelated. Fathers who were viewed as partners were also seen as fully engaged. When men were constrained by their gender role, they were also portrayed by doulas or described by the fathers in ways that fit partial engagement or disengagement with labor support. There were also relationships between

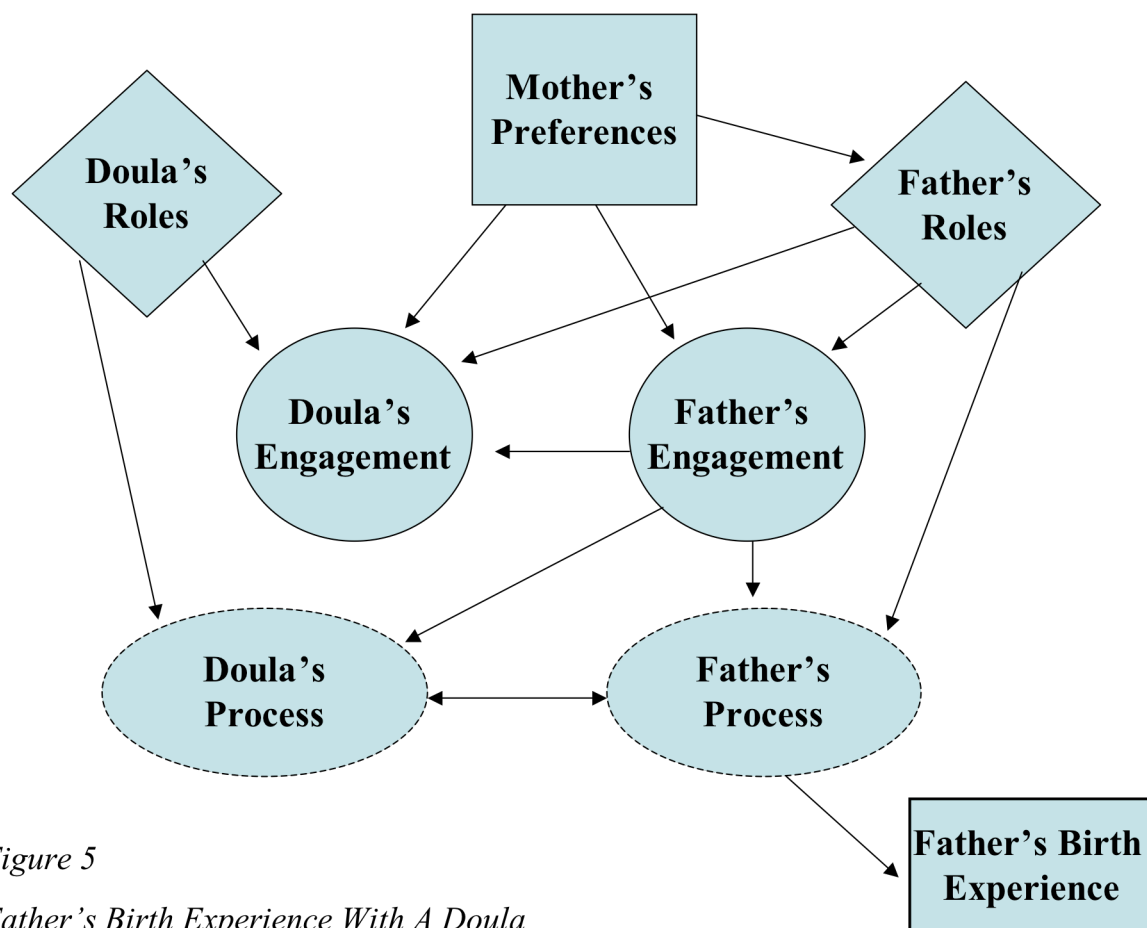


Figure 5

Father's Birth Experience With A Doula

Function	Structure	Process
Doula's Role	Doula's Level of Engagement	Doula: Doulaing Father
Building a relationship with the father Complementing his involvement Serving as a labor guide Embracing a caretaking role	Full engagement Less than full engagement Partial engagement	Emotional reassurance Accepting his responses without judgment Facilitating his involvement Offering breaks at opportune times
Father's Role	Father's Level of Engagement	Father's Process:
Partner Protector Constrained by his gender role and conditioning	Full engagement Less than full engagement Partial engagement Disengagement	Accepts doula in her role(s) Accepts her suggestions and facilitation Is or is not emotionally reassured Supporting mother Father's emotional responses Father's activities Father's thoughts

the functions of the doula's role and the processes of carrying out that role. The figure, "A Model of Father's Birth Experience With A Doula" shows these relationships (See Figure Five).

At the top of the model are the mother's preferences. These preferences include the mother's preferred level of involvement from the doula and the father in labor support. Her preferences affect the father's role and the father and doula's level of engagement in labor support. For example, if the mother was not interested in emotionally connecting with the doula or involving her in labor support, that would decrease the doula's level of engagement to partially engaged. Mothers who wanted the doula as their primary support person would increase the doula's level to fully engaged, which would in turn, impact the father's level of engagement and his role.

In this study, if the father was fulfilling the partner role, he was also fully physically and emotionally engaged in labor support. Fathers and doulas might both be fully engaged in labor support with the mother being the focus of their emotional and physical involvement. Fathers whose involvement was constrained by their gender role and conditioning were not fully engaged in labor support. Instead, their labor support engagement was expressed at one of the other three levels. The father's engagement affected the doula's engagement, but the opposite was not true. The doula's role was to complement the father's involvement. Her level of engagement was dependent on his engagement level, the mother's preferences, and the father's role. She responded to these factors. Doulas were described as consistently emotionally engaged, which fits the fully and less than fully conditions, unless the mother excluded her. This is the only time doulas expressed that they had lower levels of engagement in the mother's birth process

and satisfaction about their involvement. Hospital-based doulas commented, “Why was I there? She didn’t want me to do anything.”

In this model, the doula’s role influenced her level of engagement but also her process of supporting the father. It was possible for any of the four processes of doulaing the father to be employed in service of any of the four roles the doula is seen as taking during the birth. For example, when the doula functioned in a caretaking role, she provided emotional reassurance and ascertained the best time for a father to take a break. When the doula functioned in the role of complementing the father’s involvement, she doulaed the father by facilitating his involvement in labor support. Additionally, the doula’s process was dependent on his level of engagement with labor support and his process.

With this in mind, the father’s process in this study is seen as encompassing his dynamic experience of his partner’s labor. It incorporated his response to the doula’s actions directed towards him, and his own thoughts, emotions and activities. In his process of experiencing the labor, the father accepted or rejected the doula’s suggestions, facilitation, and doulaing activities that were directed at his emotional wellbeing. Participants recalled that father’s activities included supporting the mother, taking breaks, and communicating with friends and family members. It is important to note that the doula’s process was described as being directed towards the father. His process gave the doula feedback and affected and refined the doula’s process of caring for him. The doula’s process provided for this feedback loop, in the concept of “accepting his responses without judgment”. The end result is the father’s experience of his partner’s labor and his child’s birth with the doula’s care.

Father's experiences could be conceptualized as simply positive or negative. However that would minimize the complexity of the experience that was described by fathers. As fathers in this study alluded, their birth experience had many dimensions. What is important is that the doula-related factors that contributed to that experience are outlined in this model. In this study, fathers summed up their birth experience with a doula positively. No one had a negative summation, not even John or Justin who provided the negative case analysis.

John: "She didn't support me, but she was alongside of me, I guess. I mean it wasn't a bad experience, it was a good experience."

Justin: "She was a cool person, she was very outgoing, very easy to communicate, just felt comfortable. She made me feel very comfortable."

Rafe: "I don't know how they do it, the two that we had were awesome. They were just, I don't know, just real good people. That's the only way you could put it."

Peyton: "We needed a doula to help me get through it."

Ryan: "She was as nice as apple pie. I can't say, she was just awesome...I mean, she made all the difference in the world."