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Why It Was Important for Me To Reimagine the Birth Experience as a Black and Indigenous Woman

By

Evelyn Escobar

In 2022 it should not be extraordinary for a Black and Indigenous woman to have been supported by an all-Black women-led team pre and postnatal, yet it is. As clichè as it sounds, the day I found out I was pregnant my entire life changed.

We live in a time where illusions and outdated ways of thinking are collapsing around us. A time in which generations that once accepted truths because of tradition are no longer taking what's been fed to us. This sentiment rang true to my experience.





Image Source: Evelyn Escobar

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Pregnancy set off a catalyst for intrapersonal healing on a level that I could have never anticipated. Even before carrying my baby in my womb, I was adamant about being in therapy to not pass down my generational trauma to my then theoretical offspring. When the time came I hunkered down and went into the depths of my inner-child healing to ensure just that. This set off a wave that tested my courage and commitment to live in my truth. In doing so, I had to sever complicated family ties and lean into the support of my chosen family. This experience was the first of many in which I was acting no longer for just myself but as a mother.

Growing up in a Black and brown household I didn't have many unique pregnancy examples to help chart my path. There were the traditional baby shower parties, maternity clothes, and hospital birth scenarios. But as traditional as these birthing journeys felt, there was always a focus and talk about a postnatal tradition called a *cuarentena* within my own family. I'll come back to this.

There is something to be said about the intuition and creativity Black women must have to be the F.O.D. — First. Only. Different. — as coined by Shonda Rhimes, in their respective communities. I had to

imagine my ideal scenario of care and seek that for myself, intuitively. My prenatal care included regular acupuncture, therapy, prenatal massages, and sessions with a prenatal chiropractor that I didn't even know existed at the beginning of my pregnancy.

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A far cry from the experience my mom had as a teenager carrying me, her first child, surrounded by shame and secrecy due to societal pressures and family dynamics. I envisioned a scenario in which I was empowered to birth my baby the way I chose surrounded by the intentional care of an all-Black team. In this case, having an at-home water birth that was supported by an all-Black women-led

The last woman in my family to give birth at home was my grandmother, Ilda, who was assisted by midwives in Guatemala for all three of her births. Her strength and experience inspired me to return to tradition in this way. My imagination for this experience did not stop there. I was prepared to be taken care of postpartum, enlisting the help of a Black and Mexican midwife who would help me reconnect

We live in a world of accessibility where information and so much more are at our fingertips, yet going down this path, I was surprised by how few options there were for Black birth workers in general; from doulas to midwives to prenatal chiropractors, lactation consultants, etcetera. Despite the long history of Black women serving as midwives in our community, they represent

team comprised of a midwife, midwife's assistant, and doula.

with my roots by performing ancestral rituals of care on me such as belly binding, a closing of the bones ceremony, and a uterine massage shortly after giving birth.

around six percent of the nation's 15,000 midwives, according to the American Midwifery Certification Board's 2020 demographic report.



Image Source: Evelyn Escobar



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“The reality is that birth is a bodily function like any other. So why is there so much fear surrounding it?”



Image Source: Evelyn Escobar

As I was preparing to birth two new humans, myself and my baby girl Isla (whose sex was still a mystery to my husband and me), it was the love and support of my doula, Shakora Sykes, and midwife, Debbie Allen, that reassured me I was capable of a safe and beautiful birth. I felt confident that I was in trusted hands should any complications arise and that my team had my back, and when complications did arise, they supported and guided me through them.

I was able to transition from prenatal care to postpartum care seamlessly due to the preparation that I did before Isla joined us earthside. I observed a 40-day lying-in period known as a *cuarentena*, which literally translates to quarantine in Spanish. This is a time when the women in the family come together to take care of the birthing person in every way they may need so that they can focus on their recovery and the new baby. With the assistance of my doula, aunts, husband, friends, and family, my job during those 40 days was to breastfeed and heal the plate-sized wound that I was left with after safely delivering my baby.

I wish for this level of care for every birthing person but especially those who are Black and brown. Can you imagine what a world would like if we put the emphasis on caring for the person whose body was performing alchemy instead of just its inhabitant?

Our foremothers have quite literally birthed and raised nations. From midwifery to wet nursing to childcare and beyond, Black women have always been paramount in raising families beyond their own. We deserve to put our care and our futures first. To chart our paths with the love and support from our communities. Caring for ourselves as mothers and for the mothers in our lives is preventative care, self-care, and community care in its purest form. These implications are felt long after our bodies have left this earth. It is our birthright and that of the generations to come.

◀ Why We Shouldn't Fear Birth, and Why Birth Shouldn't Be Treated as a Medical Event

Intersectionality Explains the Discrimination Black Birthers Experience in the Healthcare System ▶

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