What Motivates People to Attend Birth Doula Trainings?

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ABSTRACT

Eighteen identified motivations for attending a birth doula training workshop were ranked by 467 participants (466 females, 1 male) in 2010 and 2013. Participants selected a variety of reasons but only 30% chose to “become a professional doula” as their main reason. Another 20% wanted to “become a midwife.” Remaining participants selected 16 other professional and personal motivations, such as “increase birth knowledge,” “understand my own births,” “make future births better,” and “help women have better births (not as a professional).” One quarter had not attended a birth or had a child. Besides career training, these workshops are filling a cultural gap in childbirth education for people who are not expectant parents, and who intend to use this knowledge in unanticipated ways.

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Little is known about people who attend birth doula trainings in the United States and Canada. Studies of successful independently practicing birth doulas reveal that almost all are women, many are White, have college degrees, and are supported by another income outside of professional birth doula work (Basile, 2012; Lantz, Low, Varkey, & Watson, 2005; Morton & Clift, 2014). However, communications with doula trainers acknowledge that few

participants actually attend births as professional doulas (E. Bild, personal communication, October 20, 2010; F. Roche, personal communication, July 18, 2011). Trainers also stated that participants express a great deal of satisfaction with the workshop. This leads to the question of whether motivations for taking the workshop are actually more diverse than career preparation. What other needs are people trying to meet by taking a birth doula training?

Concurrently, the number of doula training workshops is growing. In 2000, there were six national or international organizations and a few local or regional ones offering birth doula training workshops. In 2010, an Internet inventory identified eight major organizations plus several smaller ones. In 2015, the inventory revealed 9 major organizations

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and 20 smaller groups, but there are possibly more. A half dozen correspondence and online courses are also available. In addition, the number of trainers within large organizations is also rising.

Doula training workshops vary in their curriculum. Even within Doula of North America (DONA) International, a major organization that provides doula training, approved trainers are allowed to add to the required curriculum as long as their additional content is approved by the organization. Required sessions cover the research on labor support and birth doula care; emotional support strategies; positioning and comfort measures; informational support and communication strategies; challenging births; cesarean birth and VBAC; hormones of physiologic birth; initial breastfeeding; postpartum care; doula ethics, standards of practice, and confidentiality; beginning business strategies; record keeping; and professional behavior with medical care providers, nursing staff, and other childbirth professionals.

As a professional doula trainer since 1997, my colleagues and I noticed a shift after the first 10 years in the interests of our workshop participants. In the first decade, most participants were already perinatal professionals or were eager to become birth doulas. By 2008, we were attracting more participants who seemed to have less interest in becoming professional doulas, and others had no interest in doing birth work at all. In seeking answers to these puzzling trends, it became clear that there are few other routes to become knowledgeable about birth. Other options include reading books and watching videos, childbirth education courses for expectant parents, or formal postsecondary midwifery or nursing education programs. However, birth doula trainings often offer an immersive experience with few prerequisites, a knowledgeable instructor, and others who have similar interests. Doula workshops allow participants to become familiar with the needs of expectant families and laboring women in a personalized learning environment. Could this be why people attend? In addition, Basile (2012) describes doulas as activists and states that doulas see themselves as agents of social change. Do training participants have these motivations? It's also possible that the doula training is becoming viewed as preparation for other perinatal careers, such as midwifery and nursing.

The growth in the number of doula trainings available and the number of people taking the workshops indicate a rising interest in a different kind of

perinatal education. Exploring this trend can provide us with a richer understanding of the role of birth education for people who are not expectant parents. This study was designed to discover the reasons why people may attend these workshops.

METHOD

In a preliminary pilot study, 30 women enrolled in three of the author's doula trainings in 2008 and 2009 and were asked to list all of their reasons for attending. Polling stopped when saturation was reached with 18 unique reasons. An online survey was then created from this list. Data were collected in two separate time periods—during October 2010–January 2011 and in October 2013–December 2013. DONA International trainers were chosen because they were the largest organization offering most trainings across North America. All DONA International approved birth doula trainers were asked if their participants could fill out a brief survey. Each trainer was e-mailed a unique link which closed the night before their workshop was scheduled to begin. The trainers forwarded the solicitation e-mail directly to participants.

In the 2010–2011 collection period, 24 offered by 21 different trainers in 18 states and 3 Canadian provinces participated in the survey. The number of responses per workshop varied from 0 to 18. According to trainer's reports of attendance, workshops had from 6 to 18 participants, and in three quarters of the workshops, 75%–100% of participants filled out the survey. Overall, 235 participants completed the survey out of a potential 282 responses for a participant response rate of 83%. In the 2013 collection wave, 22 trainings taught by 17 different trainers were included. These workshops were held in 15 states and 2 Canadian provinces. As before, workshops had from 6 to 18 participants, and in three quarters of the time, more than 80%–100% of participants filled out the survey. Overall, 232 participants completed the survey out of a potential 271 responses for a participant response rate of 86%.

The survey included two questions about motivations for taking their training and six background questions. The first question listed 18 reasons and asked participants to check all of the reasons that applied to them. The second question asked them to rank their five most important reasons. An open-ended question asked, "Are there any other reasons that we did not list that are important to you?"

The top motivation for training to become a doula (74%) was to “increase my birth knowledge,” followed by those (69%) who “wanted to be around women who believe in women’s bodies and ability to birth.”

Where would you rank this among your top five?” Participants were then asked their gender, age, number of biological and adopted children, childbirth background, and number of births attended. The 2013 cohort was also asked about their ethnicity and household income.

RESULTS
Participants

There were 235 participants in the 2010 period and 232 in the 2013 period for a total of 467. One participant identified as male and 472 as females. The male was from the 2013 cohort. (Four trainers reported six men in the 2013 workshops and zero in the 2010 study period.) The male participant had attended 5–10 births in a labor support capacity and had aspirations to become a birth professional. Participant characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Participant Characteristics

		N = 467	%
Age	18–22	47	10.0
	23–28	166	36.0
	29–32	84	18.0
	33–39	82	17.3
	40–50	48	10.2
	50–60	31	6.5
	60+	9	2.0
Maternal status	Never given birth	198	42.0
	One child	104	22.0
	Two children	90	19.0
	Three or more children	75	17.0
Adoptive mother status	Adopted a child and given birth	12	5.0 ^a
	Adopted and not given birth	11	2.5 ^b
Number of births attended (not self)	None	255	55.0
	1 birth	74	16.0
	2–4 births	77	16.0
	5–10 births	31	7.0
	11–25 births	12	2.0
	26–50 births	18	4.0

^aTwice U.S. average (Jones, 2009).
^bSame as U.S. average (Jones, 2009).

Perinatal Professionals. Data were collected to gauge the number of professionals who may be taking a birth doula training. Nurses with no perinatal experience made up 4% (*n* = 19) of participants; independent practice doulas 3.5% (*n* = 16), childbirth educators 3% (*n* = 14), labor and delivery nurses 2% (*n* = 10), postpartum doulas 2% (*n* = 10), volunteer doulas 2% (*n* = 9), physicians 1% (*n* = 4), midwives >1% (*n* = 3), and no hospital-based doulas. It should be noted that 8 of the 14 childbirth educators chose multiple categories.

Nursing Students. Nursing students were 9% of attendees (*n* = 42). They tended to be younger, with 71% (*n* = 30) ranging in age from 18 to 28 years old, and another 24% (*n* = 10) between 29 and 39 years of age. Seventy-four percent had not had a child.

Ethnicity. Participants in the 2013 cohort who answered this question (*n* = 229) were more likely to be non-Hispanic White (79%; *n* = 181) than Latina or Hispanic (11%; *n* = 25), Black or African American (5%; *n* = 12), Asian American (2%; *n* = 4), Multiracial (2%; *n* = 4), Native American (<1%; *n* = 2), or Middle Eastern or Arab American (<1%; *n* = 1).

Household Income. Of participants in the 2013 cohort who answered this question (*n* = 229), 23% (*n* = 52) had an annual income less than \$25,000; 30% (*n* = 70) had an income between \$25,000 and \$49,999; 18% (*n* = 40) had an income between \$50,000 and \$74,999; 16% (*n* = 36) had an income between \$75,000 and \$99,999; and 13% (*n* = 31) had a yearly income at or more than \$100,000.

QUESTION 1: MOTIVATIONS FOR TAKING A DOULA TRAINING
Answers to this question enabled the researcher to gauge all the answers that were important to participants. The top motivation for training to become a doula (74%) was to “increase my birth knowledge,” followed by those (69%) who “wanted to be around women who believe in women’s bodies and ability to birth.” The third ranked reason at 66% was a tie between “becoming a birth doula with my own practice” and “knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women.” Almost half (49%) of those attending were “considering or had decided on a midwifery” career and a slightly larger group (56%)

“wanted to attend the births of friends or family members,” whereas 59% wanted to “make money in a profession I enjoy.” The doula workshop was also seen as supporting other careers: 29% wanted to “enrich their childbirth education practice”; 28% were motivated to take the workshop “to add to my resume”; and 9% wanted to “round out my education as a nursing student.” “Make my future labor and births better” was important to 36%, whereas 30% wanted to “understand my own labor and births more deeply.” Table 2 ranks the motivations in descending order.

TABLE 2
Rank of All Motivations to Attend Birth Doula Training Workshops

Rank	Motivation	%	<i>n</i>
1	Increase my birth knowledge	74	347
2	Want to be around women who believe in women's bodies and ability to birth	69	327
3	Knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women	66	310
4	Become a professional doula with my own practice	66	309
5	Make money in a profession I enjoy	59	280
6	Attend the births of friends and family members	56	266
7	Want to become a midwife (or am considering it)	49	229
8	Volunteer on my own or for a doula program (unpaid)	46	218
9	Make my future labor and births better	36	172
10	Help women have better births (not as a doula or birth professional)	31	145
11	Work for a hospital program as a doula	30	143
12	Understand my own labor(s) and births(s) more deeply	30	140
13	Enrich my childbirth education practice	29	136
14	Add to my resume	28	130
15	Want to spend the weekend with women focusing on women's issues	18	87
16	Round out my education as a nursing student	9	27
17	Improve my postpartum doula practice	8	20
18	Utilize labor support strategies as a labor and delivery nurse (currently employed)	2	11

Note. *N* = 473.

SECOND QUESTION: RANK YOUR TOP FIVE REASONS

Table 3 shows the ranking of top five, two, and primary reasons. In examining the top five reasons for attending, none of the reasons were left blank. “Increase my birth knowledge,” which was the most popular reason in the first question (74%), still ranked as one of the top five for 65% of participants, and was in the top two for 37%, and was the number one reason for 17%. “Knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women” tied as the number three reason in the first question (66%); 38% selected it as one of their top five, whereas 6% selected it as their number one or two reason. “Help women have better births (not as a doula or birth professional)” had been ranked number 10 overall (31%), 19% ranked it in their top five, and 5% as their primary reason.

Doula Aspirations

“Become a professional birth doula with my own practice” ranked as the number four reason in the first question. Here, it ranked as one of the top five answers for 60%, with 30% choosing it as their number one reason. Participants could also choose “volunteer as a doula” or “work for a hospital program.” Looking at their top five choices, 20% hoped to work for a hospital program, and it was chosen by 4% as their primary reason. Participants chose “becoming a professional doula with their own practice” in their top five motivations and 24% selected “work for a paid hospital program” (data not shown). Volunteering their services was selected by 32% of all participants as one of their top five reasons, and for 10% it was one of their top two. Of those who chose “professional birth doula” and “make money” (*n* = 169) anywhere in their top five, 23% (*n* = 39) also selected “volunteering” as another top five item.

Midwifery Preparation

“Want to become a midwife (or am considering it)” was selected by 43% as one of their top five reasons. It was one of the top two reasons for 29% of attendees. When participants chose “become a birth doula” as one of their top five reasons (*n* = 279), 32% also chose “want to become a midwife” as one of their other top five reasons (*n* = 98). They also tended to be younger, $\chi^2(5) = 15.571, p < .01$, and were more likely to not have children of their own, $\chi^2(3) = 8.614, p < .05$. This group was likely to select more motivations in the first question, especially reasons related to professional aspirations, $t(274) = -5.240, p < .001$.

TABLE 3
Top Motivations by Percentage and Rank

	Top 1 Ranking	Top 1 Percentage (n)	Top 2 Ranking	Top 2 Percentage	Top 5 Ranking	Top 5 Percentage
Become a professional doula—own practice	1	30.0 (142)	1	43.0	2	60.0
Want to become a midwife (or considering it)	2	20.0 (95)	3	29.0	5	43.0
Increase my birth knowledge	3	17.0 (79)	2	37.0	1	65.0
Attend births of friends and family members	4	6.0 (26)	5	11.0	7	38.0
Help women have better births (not as a doula or birth professional)	5	5.0 (23)	8	8.0	11	19.0
Make money in a profession I enjoy	6	4.5 (21)	4	15.0	3	47.0
Work for a hospital program as a doula	7	4.0 (17)	7	9.0	10	20.0
Want to be around women who believe in women's bodies and ability to birth naturally	8	3.0 (14)	9	8.0	4	45.0
Volunteer on my own or for a doula program (unpaid)	9	2.5 (12)	6	10.0	8	32.0
Understand my labor(s) and birth(s)	10	1.5 (8)	13	4.0	13	15.0
Make my future labor and births better	11	1.5 (7)	12	5.0	9	22.0
Enrich my childbirth education practice	12	1.5 (7)	11	5.0	14	15.0
Utilize labor support strategies as a labor and delivery nurse (currently employed)	13	1.5 (7)	15	2.0	16	3.0
Knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women	14	1.0 (6)	10	6.0	6	38.0
Round out my education as a nursing student	15	>1.0 (2)	14	3.0	15	7.7
Want to spend the weekend with women focusing on women's issues	16	>1.0 (1)	16	>1.0	12	16.0
Improve my postpartum doula practice	17	0	17	0	17	3.0

In addition, 64% of all nursing students ($n = 42$) chose “midwifery” as one of their top five reasons, and nursing students tended to be younger and childless.

Make Money

“Making money in a profession I enjoy” was one of the top five reasons for 47% of participants. There was a significant overlap between “making money” and “becoming a professional doula,” 60% of those wanting to “make money” also chose “become a professional doula” as one of their top five. Narrowing this down, 7.5% of all participants ($n = 35$) chose both “make money” and “becoming a professional birth doula” as both of their top two reasons.

Perinatal and Nursing Professionals

“Enrich their childbirth education practice” was ranked by 15% ($n = 63$) as one of their top 5 reasons for attending a workshop, and 5% ($n = 21$) chose

this as their number one or number two answer. This was confusing as only 3% ($n = 14$) participants stated they were childbirth educators. A similar finding occurred with “improve my postpartum doula practice.” Ten women identified themselves as postpartum doulas, and all of them ranked it as one of their bottom 3 reasons for attending. However, 3% ($n = 14$) of participants who did not identify themselves as postpartum doulas gave this as one of their top two reasons for taking the birth doula workshop. It may be that participants were exploring becoming childbirth educators or postpartum doulas, and their answer to these questions reflected this. Of the postpartum doulas ($n = 10$), their number one reasons for attending were three wanted to “increase their birth knowledge,” two others wanted to become midwives, one wished to become an independent birth doula, another wished to work for a hospital program, one wanted to enrich her

childbirth education practice, and one wanted to “make money in a profession I enjoy” (data not shown). Of the nurses who were not in labor and delivery ($n = 19$), 37% ($n = 7$) chose “become a midwife” as their number one answer.

Nursing Students

Nine percent of attendees ($n = 42$) identified themselves as nursing students. In examining their top five reasons, nursing students were more likely to attend to increase their birth knowledge (72%) and to explore midwifery (71%). One quarter wanted to be in an atmosphere that “believed in women’s bodies.” Very few (7%) were interested in a doula career, but 36% intended to volunteer their doula services.

Attending Births of Friends and Family Members

Thirty-eight percent ($n = 177$) of attendees ranked “serve as doulas for their friends and family members” as one of their top five reasons for attending. It was in the top two for 29% ($n = 52$), and the main reason for 14% ($n = 25$). Of the 25 participants who chose attending births of friends and family members as their top reason, only eight were interested in “becoming professional doulas” and that was one of their lower ranking reasons. One third of this group showed interest in “midwifery” and in “volunteering” as a doula indicated by their top five selection.

Be With Others

“Want to be around women who believe in women’s bodies and ability to birth” was the number two reason in the first question (69%; $n = 327$). It remained important to rank as one of the top five reasons for 45% ($n = 207$) of participants. However, it was only one of the top two reasons for 8% ($n = 37$) of the group. Of the nurses who were not in labor and delivery ($n = 19$), 47% ($n = 9$) selected this reason as one of their top five.

Similarly, “want to spend the weekend with women focusing on women’s issues” was chosen by 18% ($n = 87$) in response to the first question (select all that apply). Only 6% ($n = 27$) ranked it in their top five, and >1% ($n = 2$) included it in their top two. Of those who ranked these reasons of lower importance, wanting to become a doula or midwife was ranked higher.

My Own Births

“Make my future labor and births better” was ranked in their top five by 22% ($n = 103$), and 6% ($n = 28$)

chose this as one of their top two answers. Women with one or two children were twice as likely to list it as one of their top two reasons, and women who had not given birth were more likely to list it as a third to fifth ranked reason (data not shown). For 15% ($n = 70$), “want to understand my own labor(s) and birth(s) more deeply” was one of their top five, and 4% ($n = 20$) ranked it in their top two. Only five people in this group indicated a desire to become a doula or midwife as one of their lower ranked top five motivations.

Personal Versus Professional Reasons

Further analysis was conducted comparing a group that chose reasons related to professional development or aspirations as their number one and number two selections, and those who ranked them lower in their top five or not at all. Professional motivations included “become a professional doula,” “midwife,” “make money,” “hospital program doula,” “enrich my childbirth education practice,” “labor and delivery nurse,” “nursing student,” and “postpartum doula.” These two groups did not differ in age, children, births attended, or whether they were already childbirth professionals. However, in evaluating their responses to the first question (choose all responses that apply to you), the “nonprofessional” group chose a wider variety of responses and significantly fewer professional reasons (Fisher’s Exact Test, $p < .05$).

In a similar analysis, participants who selected “make my future labor and births better” or “understand my own labor(s) and birth(s) more deeply” as one of the top one or two ranked answers were grouped ($n = 38$). This “personal” group was much less likely to include current birth professionals, and they selected significantly fewer nonprofessional reasons in both the first and second questions, $t(442) = -2.927, p < .005$.

Influence of Attending a Birth

Of the 45% of participants ($n = 212$) who “had attended a birth that was not their own,” 56% ($n = 119$) chose “become a professional doula,” and 45% ($n = 96$) chose “want to become a midwife (or am considering it)” as one of their top five reasons. For 40% ($n = 89$), their first or second motivation was “becoming a professional doula with my own practice.” “Become a midwife” was the first or second reason for 32% ($n = 68$). Both choices were selected by 10% ($n = 22$) in their top five.

No Personal Experience

Participants who had not attended a birth or had a child of their own ($n = 117$) made up 25% of the sample. The same proportion, 55% ($n = 65$) chose “professional doula” or “midwifery” as one of their top five reasons for attending. For 49%, “doula” or “midwife” ranked equally as their number one reason for taking the workshop, which was the highest ranking reasons for this group.

Age

The only motivation that was consistently represented across all age groups was “attending the births of friends and family members.” Participants aged 18–22 years ($n = 25$) were midwifery focused with 64% wanting to become midwives. Only 31% were interested in “professional with own practice” or “hospital” doula work. The highest proportion of “volunteer” intentions, 64%, were in this age group. Half of the volunteer-motivated group intended to become midwives. None of this age group was interested in “adding to their resume” as one of their motivations.

For those aged 23–28 years ($n = 166$), 28% put “becoming a professional doula” as their first choice, and 22% as their second choice. Midwifery was the first choice for 21% and second choice for 9%. Slightly less than half (45%) chose both paths. Only 43% of 23–28 year olds hoped to “make money in a profession I enjoy.”

In both the 29–32 years ($n = 84$) and 33–39 ($n = 82$) age groups, 73% hoped to “become a professional doula,” 40% were interested in midwifery, and 57% wished to “make money in a profession I enjoy.”

In the 40–50 age group ($n = 48$), half indicated “wanting to become a professional doula” as their first or second choice, whereas 16% were interested in “midwifery”; 4% chose “rounding out their nursing education.” Only three people were primarily motivated to take the training to “make money.” Seven wanted to “attend births of family members.” This group had a higher percentage of altruistic motives: “wanting to volunteer as a doula (unpaid),” “make women’s births better not as a birth professional,” and “attend the births of friends and family members” (data not shown). This group also ranked “want to be around women who believe in women’s bodies and abilities to birth” highly. This motive was just under “becoming a doula” and tied with “attend births of friends and family members” in their top five reasons.

Less than half (49%) of the women aged 50–60 years ($n = 31$) wanted to “become professional doulas,” but eight were already childbirth educators. Participants in this group hoped to “make money,” but only three expected to “attend births of friends and family members” or “become midwives.” The other half of the group had various personal enrichment reasons for attending. This age group had the largest percentage that wanted to “be around women who believe in women’s bodies” and “knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women.” Women aged 60 years and older ($n = 9$) made up 2% of the total; however, six intended to “become professional doulas” or “work for a hospital program” and “make money.”

Racial Identity

There were few differences between participants based on racial identity in the 2013 cohort. Participants of color ($n = 48$) were more likely to attend for career aspirations and to already be birth professionals or nurses with a nonperinatal specialty.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

The open-ended question asked, “Are there any other reasons that we did not list that are important to you? Where would you rank this among your top five?” Seventy-nine participants gave an additional answer. However, upon analysis, 45 of these answers were easily grouped into existing categories. When the remaining 34 responses were analyzed, 10 listed reasons related to individual fulfillment (“seeing new life come into the world”); 9 listed an asset to another career (3 physician, 3 yoga instructor, 3 social work); 6 saw it as an asset to birth activism, political, or system change; 4 took the workshop to discover whether they were interested in birth; 3 felt a religious commitment to birth work; and 2 wanted DONA certification.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that the motivations to attend a doula training are more broad based than might be assumed. Even the title “doula training workshop” implies that the seminar exists to train people to do doula work, that is, to support women in labor. However, this study shows that the knowledge participants are seeking to gain may be more broad based and personal. The significant growth in the popularity of doula trainings, as exemplified by the increasing number of trainers and training

organizations, means that there is demand for these workshops and the knowledge they impart.

Role of the Doula Training in Contemporary Society

When participants were asked to list all their motivations for attending the workshop, the top three reasons were not career aspirations. The top reason given by 74% of attendees was “increasing my birth knowledge,” followed by 69% who “wanted to be around women who believe in women’s bodies and ability to birth.” A slightly smaller group (66%) was motivated “to knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women.” These data show what most training participants have in common with one another. They are hungry for knowledge about the processes and experience of birth from a holistic perspective. The training may provide a respite from the prevailing medical belief that women’s bodies need interventions to birth babies. Participants wanted to be inspired and share what they learned.

For most of the last century, women were separated from loved ones during labor and birth. They routinely gave birth alone, and only in the last 35 years has there been widespread cultural acceptance in North America to have male partners present. However, this still omits the connection to other women and the central experiences of pregnancy and birth in women’s lives. One interpretation is that by taking doula trainings, women are seeking to reestablish this connection between the symbolic meanings of birth and womanhood. They want to make sense of their own experience—not just of giving birth but of being women. Attending a doula training may be seen as a modern doorway into the community that surrounds mothering and birthing. In examining the landscape surrounding childbirth, there are no similar learning experiences that combine the use of learning skills as well as an immersion into the reality of the birth experience. There are few other classes or workshops available that offer the opportunity to make this knowledge their own, regardless of gender. The doula training may be functioning as a societal mechanism for women to establish a connection with their bodies, with women’s bodies, or with women who know about this aspect of life.

Career Preparation

Only 30% listed “become a professional doula with my own practice” as their top reason for taking the

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workshop, and 60% had it as a top five reason. This is surprising as most people, including the trainers themselves, think of the training as career preparation to become a doula. More than 20% stated their primary reason for attending a doula training was “want to become a midwife (or am considering it).” Overall, 49% of participants ranked this as one of their top five reasons. Nurses who are not in labor and delivery most commonly took the training to become a midwife. The midwife aspiring group tended to be younger and not have children, indicating a more professional mindset. The workshop can offer more detailed knowledge and experiential learning about the midwife and doula roles. Some participants may plan to offer doula care before or during midwifery training. On their websites, several midwifery schools require that their students obtain doula training before starting their programs. So doula training is no longer seen solely as an end in itself but as an initial part of midwifery education. Nursing students wanted to gain birth knowledge and to explore midwifery as a career.

One quarter wanted to be in a setting that “believed in women’s bodies and ability to birth.” Similar to midwifery students, nursing students want to supplement their standard curriculum with detailed exposure to emotional and physical support skills and an empowerment style of advocacy (Jordan, Van Zandt, & Wright, 2008). Several nursing programs have doula education and opportunities as part of their clinical training, most notably, Johns Hopkins Birth Companions program (Jordan et al., 2008). These patient care skills may apply to other specialties besides labor and delivery.

Personal Motivations

Some participants had personal motivations for attending a birth doula training. For 20%, “want to make their future labor and births better” was one of their top five reasons for attending, and for 5%, it was one of their top two reasons for attending. For 15%, “understand my own labor(s) and birth(s) more deeply” was one of their top five reasons, and for 3.5%, it was one of their top two reasons. Rather than being focused on offering doula services to

someone else, these participants were there to focus on themselves. Their main motivations were to make sense of or heal from their birth experiences. This is an important objective because there are few other venues where birth and labor support knowledge can be gently imparted in a supportive atmosphere. The workshop may also meet the needs of the 5% of participants whose main motivation is “to make my future births better.” Although this subset of attendees is small, they stand apart because their primary focus is on their personal needs.

They were more likely to be motivated to “attend the births of friends and family members” or “help women have better births (not as a doula or birth professional).” They also chose “want to be around women who believe in women’s bodies and ability to birth naturally,” and “knowledgeably discuss birth issues with all women” rather than to become professional doulas or midwives. These are significantly higher percentages than participants who gave professional reasons, which indicates this group had very different needs they were trying to meet by attending.

Cultural Change

In answer to the first question, 46% of the entire group intended to volunteer their services, and 66% sought skills to “discuss birth issues with all women.” One third want to “help women have better births (not as a doula or birth professional),” with 19% stating this as one of their top five reasons. This desire to improve birth, either by reaching out to individuals or by changing the cultural dialogue and knowledge level, were important to doula training participants. Doula workshops may supply the knowledge base about human birth and women’s and men’s experiences needed to influence cultural change.

Implications for Practice

Each workshop participant is likely to have various motivations for attending. Out of any 10 participants attending a doula training, only 6 have the intention to become birth doulas with their own practices. This is the group that wants business and marketing strategies. Another two clearly want to become midwives and are using doula training as a part of their elementary education. The last two attendees are there primarily for personal reasons but also to further nonperinatal career goals. In general, about half are using the doula training as an opportunity to make sense of their own experiences giving

birth or to improve their future births. For doula trainers, understanding this diversity of motivations and meeting participants’ related needs with relevant learning activities is likely to make workshops deeply satisfying for participants. Doula trainers can reexamine their roles as mostly career preparation because there is more diversity in the needs and aspirations of participants than suspected.

The reason “to increase my birth knowledge” was the main reason most people attended, but it should not be dismissed as obvious. This may be an important cultural function in modern society. There are few other skill-based classes or workshops openly available that offer the opportunity to immerse oneself in learning to meet the needs of laboring women and their families during the perinatal period. The doula training may be functioning as a societal mechanism to reestablish this knowledge about women’s bodies and needs as more common. The women who come to workshops require sensitivity and understanding as they integrate their own experiences. It is a role of responsibility as doula trainers may be actively shaping a new era of discerning the meaning of birth in women’s lives.

Nursing students can benefit by being welcomed to trainings and may require specific outreach and recruitment into their networks. Some doula trainers (including the author) conduct workshops specifically for nursing students. In addition to providing additional content for this group, it may be helpful to shift which information to emphasize. In a mixed group of student nurses and others, it helps to present content in dual fashion: “As a doula, I would do it this way; as a nurse, you could implement the same strategy in this other way.” Prenatal yoga instructors may be the newest wave of childbirth educators. In the 2013 study cohort, three mentioned this in the open-ended question. In the changing landscape of education, this may be indicative of the trend for pregnant women to gain information in informal situations rather than in traditional classroom settings, and more of them attend yoga classes now than in the past.

Intention to become a doula before attending a workshop does not mean a person actually becomes a doula. Participants may not understand accurately the role of the birth doula or the challenges of the birth doula lifestyle until they complete their training. One quarter of study participants had not had a child or attended a birth. Yet, 49% of this group wanted to become doulas or midwives. The doula

training offers a way to explore this attraction to birth without commitment. In addition, effective labor support requires sophisticated emotional management and communication skills (Gilliland, 2011) of which newly trained doulas may not be aware.

This study reflects participants who are taking trainings, not necessarily those who are actually functioning as doulas.

Generalizability

Only 60% of study participants took DONA International doula trainings intending to become doulas with their own practices (ranking it in their top five reasons). Can these findings be generalized to other doula training workshops? They are likely applicable to face-to-face workshops that attract participants with varied backgrounds and interests. However, they might not be generalizable to workshops that delegate a substantial portion of their curriculum to a specific interest such as shared religious beliefs about birth, a particular method of labor coping, or a desire to build financially successful doula businesses. It may not apply to courses that are taught as a correspondence course or online or via correspondence. Participants in these workshops are likely attracted to that workshop because of that emphasis.

Strengths and Limitations

The sample size of 467 participants was quite large, with a response rate of 85%. Two cohorts, 3 years apart, giving statistically similar answers, lead to stronger conclusions about the study's findings. Open-ended questions allowed for expression of individual answers. The main limitation is that only DONA International birth doula training participants who took in-person workshops were surveyed. Even though workshops located in Canada were included, most took place in the United States. Racial identity and income data were only available from the 2013 cohort.

CONCLUSION

This study effectively ascertains the motivations of participants enrolling in birth doula training workshops. Only a slight majority of participants

are there primarily to become independent practice doulas, and a significant minority are there for personal reasons.

The doula training is now cemented as part of early midwifery education, either by beginning students or educational programs. As part of a larger picture, the birth doula training offers an opportunity for all people to understand the important meaning of the birth experience and how a woman's body and mind work together to birth. No other workshop provides this open opportunity to people of all ages and backgrounds. So, the birth doula workshop may have a much larger cultural impact than expected.

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