The Japanese Experience of Giving Birth in North Carolina

Medical Anthropology Honors Thesis & MacDonald Community Fellowship

Alyssa Cooper

MacDonald Community Fellowship

Chapter 1: Tension Between Japanese Values and American Biomedicine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese Values</th>
<th>American Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detail Oriented</td>
<td>Vision Oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Friendliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>Individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expectations of Japanese Women
- Consistency (Inflexibility)
- 空気を読む (Reading the Air)
- 我慢 (gaman: endurance/self-discipline) & 麻痺かけない (don't cause issues for others)

American Values in US Hospitals
- Disorganization (Flexibility)
- “Just getting the job done”
- Having to assert yourself & 説ったもん勝ち ("The person who speaks up wins")

Chapter 2: Physicians’ Authority and Patient Centered Care

Autonomy

Physician’s Authority

Chapter 3: Social Support and Information

Physicians and Institutions

Community

Interpersonal Connections

Conclusions
- perceptions and practices of birthing persons come from culturally based conceptions and worldviews, while obstetrics is equally defined by its cultural values and institutional structure
- the American perception of autonomy and self-responsibility is not a universal desire/goal
- there is a need for more cultural advocates, like birth and postpartum doulas. Even when pregnant women understand cultural differences and know what they must do to get what they need, it may still feel distressing and uncomfortable to have to do something that is so inherently against their cultural values
- Further anthropological studies to understand the pregnancy and birth experiences of other minority populations in the US can be used to identify their specific needs in order to structure educational programming, advocate for system and policy changes, and provide institutionalized medical care that aims to accommodate for cultural differences.