HOME BIRTH CULTURE

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by
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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my husband, Daniel, who provided me with the utmost support and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you for keeping the house clean and the kids fed the last few months.
HOME BIRTH CULTURE

Alison Hodgson

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ABSTRACT

*Home Birth Culture* is a photographic essay that examines women’s reasons for choosing to birth at home. Environmental portraits are combined with audio clips to help tell the story of each subject’s experiences with home birth. This work provides an intimate look at the influences that affect women’s decisions about childbirth, and also how cultural expectations help shape the decisions that women make regarding birthing.

Jennifer Loomis, who works as a maternity and family photographer in Seattle, San Francisco and New York, was interviewed using a semi-structured interview for the professional analysis. Loomis’s work was analyzed and compared to how the media has portrayed the pregnant form over time. The purpose of this analysis is to look at how maternity photography has evolved, and how it has helped shape the views women have about their bodies while pregnant.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

My original project proposal was done while I was pregnant and finishing my graduate courses. After having a baby I discovered how time consuming it is to care for a newborn, and my project got pushed to the back of my priority list for quite some time. I realized that it wouldn’t be possible for me to take care of my baby full-time, while also working to complete my project, and financially it would be nearly impossible for our family to travel to Amsterdam for me to document the bicycle culture there. After my son was almost two, I began to have a bit more time and started exploring alternate topics for my master’s project.

I originally began working on my project in early April 2010. I had begun traveling full time with my family in an RV and proposed to do my project on full-time RV families. It proved hard to connect with these families during the short time that we were in each place so this idea didn’t pan out as I had hoped. We eventually settled in Bend, Oregon and I had another baby making it hard to pick up work on my project for a while. After moving again and settling close to family in Arkansas, I decided it was finally time to revisit the idea of finishing my master’s project. After meeting with David and discussing some ideas, I felt more confident that I could finish, even though time was running out.

I decided to pursue a story on off-grid families living in the Ozarks. I began making contacts, but only found one family who was willing and fit my criteria. After following them for a few weeks, while looking for other families, I realized it might take a while to connect with many of these folks who sometime don’t want to be found. At
this point I decided to change directions and go with my other idea of a photo essay on people born at home.

My journey into natural birthing began about eight years ago after watching a documentary about water births that played at a local theater. This was before becoming a mom or even becoming pregnant, but as someone who wanted to have children in the future, the topic was intriguing. I made my husband watch it with me and we both came home with an empowered sense of what birth could be. These women were birthing powerfully and on their own terms, and I think that’s what was intriguing to me. They weren’t lying down having things done to them, they were walking, outside in nature, in water…in places they chose and moving freely about as they needed. It was primitive and I respected that. It was fascinating to me that I had never seen a woman birth naturally despite having watched videos of childbirth.

After having two home births, I felt like I had a good understanding of what home birth was about. After spending months talking to midwives, women, men, and children who have experienced home birth in an intimate way, I’ve come to understand many deeper issues rooted in our culture surrounding birth. The purpose of this project is to explore these issues further and identify areas that need more research to help better understand our society’s birthing culture.

Documenting home birth culture fits with my career goals as a photojournalist because I am interested in working as a documentary home birth photographer. My training as a photojournalist has taught me above all, to capture moments, and I want to use this skill to capture the sacred moment of new life being born.
Chapter 2: Field Notes

The general dates for the most recent work on my project are from August through November 2014. Field notes begin on April 2010 when I began working on my project.

Field Notes: Full-time RV families, April 2010

I met Stephanie Lende one afternoon while walking around our RV Park in Phoenix. We began sharing our stories of when we started traveling and where we'd been. When I found out she had 5 kids, including one 8 month old, I knew I had to photograph this family whether or not their story would end up in my project. After months of having neighbors of mostly retired or short term travelers, meeting this family really revived my low morale about working on my project. One of the reasons my husband and I decided to become full-time RVers was so it would allow me more access to find and follow families to photograph while also staying close to mine. I just wish I had met them earlier so I could have spent more time photographing them. I was able to spend about a week photographing them. There were some situations (noted below) that I wish I had been able to show visually that I wasn't able to because of time or circumstance.

My first shoot was helpful to break the ice and helping them understand what I would be doing while following them around all day. Going into this shoot I felt nervous, and out of practice, but after a few frames I felt back in my element. I love how the camera can instantly connect you with people, situations, and emotions. As the kids became comfortable with my presence, the shots became more intimate.

Things I think I was successful at:
*showing daily life in an RV- making meals, homeschooling kids, intimacy of family

Situations I didn't capture and things that weren't successful:

*bathing kids- this just didn't work out schedule wise, but I would have loved to have shown how much work it takes Stephanie to bathe all of her kids in the RV park shower. She said they usually alternate nights of bathing to save time, but if they all need baths she just files them in one after another to be cleaned. I'll be sure to show this with the next family I find.

*nighttime rituals- Nick (the daddy) worked nights so I was hoping to show what that was like for the family, (tucking in kids, good-night's/goodbye's, etc.)

*laundry at the RV park laundry mat- I never caught Stephanie toting her laundry, but only the stacks of it that she was folding in her home

*having their voices either by audio or video- in the future I'd like to interview each family about their experiences and reasons for choosing this lifestyle

I also thought it would be neat to have some sort of interactive visual of each family's home to help fully paint the picture of what living in a small space is like....there's some creative storage going on in some of these things!

**Weeks 1 & 2: Off-grid in the Ozarks, August 2014**

The first week was spent making contacts and finding subjects. I made contact with Amanda & Ryan from Ripples blog, and sent emails to Mark Stanley, Troy Case, Lisa Majors, Arco Iris Earthcare Project.

I heard back from Mark Stanley, and arranged a time to meet and tour his Earthship home in Rogers, AR. I heard back from Troy Case via email; said he was super busy and would try to respond eventually to my questions through email.
Found another off grid family that looks promising- An American Homestead. They are located in the Ozarks. I attempted contacting them through their website.

Made contact with Zac, from An American Homestead and he agreed to let me come and photograph. We made arrangements for first shoot, Friday 15th.

I met with the Bauer family who live in Witter, Arkansas on a homestead deep in the Ozark Mountains. The homestead consists of the Bauer family: Zac, Jaimie, and their sons, Joshua and Kaleb, along with Jaimie’s parents, Tim and Joann. Upon arriving I got acquainted with the Bauer family and then began photographing Jaimie who was in the middle of doing laundry. I later met Tim and Joann after they returned from town. I was also given a tour of the homestead.

I feel that the family has a better understanding of the goals of my project, and will begin to get used to my presence. Time is usually all it takes to start making more intimate photos and capturing moments and now that I have an idea of the basics of their daily lives, I can begin to go deeper. During the day I spent with them I felt a bit overwhelmed with all that was going on, and after editing photos came up with more questions I wish I had thought to ask while I was there. I felt I had a good rapport with the family and am looking forward to going back. They are nice folk!

Since it’s also a bit of a drive to get there for me, this is something that I have to work around since I have a toddler who is still nursing. Zac offered to let me stay for the weekend in their extra trailer, but again, I couldn’t be away that long. I’m still considering different options of how to make this work, but it might just mean a lot of trips back and forth. Because of my limited availability to be away from home for too long, I had already decided to make my project heavy on writing since it is more mobile.
and can often be done from home. At this point, I’m trying to figure out what that means for how to approach the story. I’m used to using my camera to tell people’s stories, so adjusting to words is going to take some practice. I’m planning to conduct semi-structured interviews on my next visit to let them do more talking.

Things I want to capture either by words or images:

- How hard they work
- What having a homestead means to them/Why they chose this lifestyle
- How their children take part in work (or not)/how they have adapted to this lifestyle
- Contrasting what their lives looked like before the move/now
- How others feel about their lifestyle or what friends & family think of it.

Other concerns:

I don’t have many leads on other off grid families and have attempted to contact several people. This is stressful since my time is so limited. I’m brainstorming for back-up ideas.

**Week 3: Off-grid in the Ozarks**

On this visit to the homestead, I spent the morning talking with Jaimie about how homeschooling works for them. We also discussed her childhood and how this helped shape her desire to live simply. From ages 8-18 Jaimie lived with her parents in Papua New Guinea, while the family worked as missionaries. She thinks living in a third world country and not having all the privileges that most Americans know helped influence her desire to live more simply. I also got to tag along with Zac and Tim as they went into town to pick up their ribbons and checks from the Marion County Fair. (I forgot how much I love small town folk…especially in Arkansas. They are some of the friendliest people you’ll ever meet!)
I tried to do more listening and less talking this time, but it’s hard because they are such nice people and I can relate to so much of what they say. I was also able to get more of their back-story and talk more with Tim and Joanne. It was hot hot hot outside so not much work was going on which meant more time for talking. While Jaimie and Zac are getting used to my presence, I still feel Tim and Joanne feel like they need to show me things or do certain work so I will be able to get the photograph. They are sweet, but it makes it harder to get candid intimate shots of what they are like and how they naturally interact with the rest of the family.

Things I’m still hoping to show:

- What the kids do all day, helping, etc.

- The family’s relationship with their neighbors, fellowship with other community (Zac has talked about how neighbors have to depend on each other in the country & they seem to help each other out.)

- I’m also hoping to photograph them on the Sabbath so I can show them just being a family and doing things other than working. When I mentioned wanting to do this last weekend Zac said another day would be better so I didn’t want to press the matter, but I might explain better what I’m trying to do so he might be willing. If not, I will find a way to ask questions and write about it.

I’m also trying to figure out what my final presentation of the project will be. I’m having a hard time figuring out what I should be photographing versus writing so I’m trying to do both. I’m struggling with knowing how deep to go since I need to include other families and also don’t want to run out of time. This family has so many aspects of being disconnected that it’s hard to go into depth about each one. I still want to cover the
connected part also because I think that by disconnecting from some things they have “reconnected” in others…like being close as a family.

I’m starting to put together some semi-structured interview questions for the analysis part of my project. I will interview three or four female photojournalists who have families to address how this has affected their work/career. I’m also looking into options for interviewing and recording since some or possibly all will be done by phone.

**Week 4: Redirection**

It started becoming clear to me this week that I might need to rethink the off grid idea since I still haven’t been able to locate other families who are willing to participate. I feel I have exhausted my resources in trying to locate these people. I’ve spent weeks calling, emailing, & talking to others with no luck. I found some people who had plans to build off grid homes, but most were in the planning stages or still looking for land. I think the bottom line is a project on groups of people living in seclusion needs more time in the early stages of locating and researching then I could afford. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know and photograph the Bauer’s, and plan to keep following up with them as I have more time. Their youngest has pretty much lived his entire life off grid as the family moved to their land to live in their trailer with no electricity when he was 7 weeks old. It would be neat to follow him through the years as well as the rest of the family. This has also been a nice re-introduction into photojournalism for me after a very long break spent just being a mommy. I'm starting to feel at home again as a photographer, and enjoying the connections I'm making because of my camera. It's been like "breaking the ice" round 2!
Week 5

Another project idea I wanted to pursue is a photographic essay on people born at home. This project will be more straight forward in its approach, and I have already began making contacts for subjects and have invested some time and energy into it. I will find families in NW Arkansas & Mid-Missouri and attempt to tell their stories through portraits and audio. I’m hoping to include an intergenerational story where multiple generations were born at home. I’ve located one family in Columbia where two children and their grandmother were born at home and I’m trying to schedule a time to meet with them. I’ve also made connections with seven other possible subjects in Mid-Missouri, and seven here in Fayetteville. I’m happy to finally have willing subjects and some work to do other than waiting and looking! I feel like I have more control over the project now and can handle the workload and schedule.

Today (Sunday September 7), I interviewed local portrait photographer Andrew Kilgore. The interview wasn’t as in-depth as I had hoped, but he is willing to talk more if I decide I need more info. I wanted to talk with him because I love how intimate his portraits are, and was hoping to learn a bit that I could apply to the skills part of my project. I’m not sure if I will use this interview in my project, as it doesn’t seem to fit quite as well as the other photographers I propose to interview. I really wanted to talk with him, though, to learn about his approach and to better understand how he connects with his subjects. I also love that he uses his portraits to represent misunderstood members of society and helps bring awareness to their issues. I’m also wondering if interviews alone are enough or if I should pick a story or photo from each photographer’s body of work to examine. Overall, a busy week, and I’m happy to have more work to do!
Week 6

After speaking with a local midwife, I am starting to get connected with the home birthing community here. Through Facebook and word of mouth referrals about my project, I have received lots of responses from interested subjects. Most of them are moms of toddlers so I’m weeding through them all to find the most interesting stories and kids of varying ages and situations. I’m scheduled to meet with Shawn House, a midwife, on Friday who also has 2 kids, both born at home. I also heard back from a mom who is 36 weeks pregnant with 2 other children who were born at home, so I’m interested in including her. I asked about possibly photographing her birth, but she already has a photographer. I will talk with Shawn on Friday about other clients she has who might be interested in me capturing their birth.

I’m also starting to feel like I can find enough people for my project in the area, but I’m keeping the option to photograph in Columbia open. I have located an intergenerational story there, but am still looking to find one here also.

I’m working on writing up questions in preparation for my meeting with Shawn and her kids and responding to all the interested subjects that have contacted me. I’m also researching past projects to see how they are put together so I can have an idea of how I want to present mine. This is a hard thing to know at this stage because I haven’t begun listening to the stories I want to tell. I think a lot of this will hopefully fall into place and be more apparent as I get further along in my project. For the young subjects I think it makes sense to have audio of their birth story, which would be told by mom. It would be neat to be able to have audio of all moms telling their birth stories regardless of the child’s age. I realize this will probably not always be possible.
I’m finishing the transcription of my interview with Andrew Kilgore and trying to figure out an angle for interviewing the other photographers. And do I need an angle or something to compare between the photographers work, or can I simply inquire about the how and why’s of their work in doing intimate portraits?

I met with the midwife and her two kiddos on Friday and spent hours just listening to her birth stories. I had planned to record her telling the stories of her daughters’ births, but this wasn’t the time or place since her children were there playing. We are arranging another time to get this done. The house was too dark for portraits and both girls were fussy and sleepy so I didn’t attempt any photos either. They are up for meeting another day this week to get the photos done. All the problems I ran into with this first meeting will help me plan better with my next subjects.

**Week 7**

Finished up the transcription of the interview with Andrew Kilgore.

Met with Amelia (Amy) and listened to her birth stories of her three children who were born at home. Attempted to record, but somehow the red light was on, but not recording. Doh! Lesson learned. She graciously agreed to meet with me at another time to get the audio I need. I took notes and am working on writing those up. I also talked to her about photographing her children where they were born and she says this is doable. We are planning to meet at the farm where her first son was born this weekend. I’m excited! The other two were born in town so I can probably get these shots this weekend also.

Have been in touch with three other moms of possible subjects and also a man in his twenties who was born at home. I’m meeting with a mom (Derrica) on Friday whose
2nd son was born at home. I also have plans to hear the birth stories of Martha (the 37 week pregnant mom of 2).

After talking with only a few moms and hearing their birth stories I feel like this is the glue that will hold the project together. Their stories are different but resonate much of the same sentiment and emotions, and many have a lot of the same reasons for choosing to do a home birth. I also want to go deeper in my story and look at how our culture’s feelings about women and their bodies shape how we view birth.

My busy weekend sort of fell apart as Amy and Derrica both had things come up so they needed to reschedule. I did get to meet with Martha and recorded her birth stories and will meet her daughters to photograph & record soon. (This will likely be after her birth since she’s due pretty soon.) Her 5 year old, Luna, is really into birthing and I thought it would be neat to have some audio of her talking about how she feels about birth. She was also present when her baby sister was born, and will be there to see her newest sibling being born very soon.

I met with Rachael also, and recorded her stories about home birth. I’m waiting to hear back about a time to meet with her kiddos. I finished transcribing her interview/birth stories.

I’m hoping to talk with some fathers and hear their experiences and feelings about home birth, and I’m also hoping to find more variety in the ethnicity, social class, gender, etc. of my subjects. I’m trying to get connected with some non-certified midwives who work with women who might not be able to afford a midwife otherwise, but I’m not sure how to get connected with the high-class women. Though, perhaps the women I am finding is a more accurate representation of the women who choose to do home births.
I have plans to talk/photograph some very interesting people in Columbia in a couple of weekends (Oct. 4-5) and one of these is an M.D. and someone very passionate about women and their bodies. She will be a great resource and also gave birth to her daughter at home whom I will be talking to and photographing.

I also made contact with Jennifer Loomis and have plans to interview her next Thursday, September 25. I have most of the questions completed for the interview, but might add a few more.

**Week 8**

I spent the early part of the week corresponding with potential subjects and setting up times to meet for interviews/photos. Thursday I had the interview with Jennifer Loomis and it went pretty well. After talking with her it made it more clear that for the analysis part of my project I want to look at how intimate portraiture can effect women’s perceptions of their bodies. I also plan to interview a Boudoir photographer to compare the different approaches. Jennifer said she’s trying to take the sexuality away from the nudes she does, and I think this could be compared or contrasted to the approach of Boudoir photography.

I worked on transcribing the interviews of Martha and Jennifer Loomis.

On Friday I met with Derrica who now works for a midwife and had her second child at home after having a hospital birth for her second. It was refreshing to hear someone have a good experience with a hospital birth, because all of the others up to this point, who had their first at a hospital, had a bad experience which led them to explore more options for birthing. I also got to photograph Amy’s three children on Saturday. We drove to the location where each was born to do their portrait. I’m wondering if this
approach will allow my portraits to be consistent enough. I’m trying to show a bit about who they are as well as where they are, but it is proving to be way harder than I though. I’ve struggled with poor indoor lighting, tight quarters, and toddlers who cannot be still or look at a camera without making weird faces!! I’ve posted a few pictures of the Cox family that I photographed this weekend. I included a color and black & white copy of each of the selects because I’m not sure which I will be using. I just did a grayscale version, and didn't spend a ton of time toning them. I recently downloaded a trial of Lightroom, but haven't begun using it. I plan to use it for editing and toning my portraits if I can figure it out in a timely manner. I also welcome any other ideas on how to keep my portraits consistent while also showing something about the subject.

On Sunday I met with Jenni and her husband, Michael, who was born at home. Their son, Oliver, was also born at home. I got to talk with both of them about their thought and experiences of home birth and attempted to take some photos of Oliver. He was having what seemed like an awful day, and I don’t think I got anything usable from this shoot. I plan to go back on a better day. Michael’s mother also lives in town so I got her contact information so I can see if she is interested in speaking with me and being part of my project.

I have plans to photograph Martha’s two girls on Monday morning so hopefully this will go better than my attempt with Oliver.

**Week 9**

Monday morning I visited Martha and took some photos of her two girls who were both born at home (the same home they are currently living in). For logistical reasons I needed to bring my children with me, and Martha was fine with this. Having
them there actually turned out to be a good thing as it allowed me more time to spend getting to know Martha and hearing her thoughts on birth & labor (with fewer distractions as the kids were having so much fun playing together). I think this also made the girls more comfortable with me since they were able to see me as a mother figure and not just a stranger coming to take their picture. Martha is 40 weeks pregnant and I’m planning to go back after the baby is born to talk to both girls who will witness the birth. The oldest, Luna, was also there for her sister’s birth so I thought it would be cool to have her talk about both births while one is such a fresh memory.

I’m starting to notice that I’ve gotten better portraits of people I’ve been able to spend more time with. This isn’t surprising, of course, but oftentimes it’s hard to do this because of schedules, kids, travel time, etc. But maybe the answer is to bring my kiddos along for the photo shoots!

The rest of the week I worked on transcriptions and brainstorming ideas of how my project will be put together. I’m getting behind on the transcriptions so I think I’ll just start doing more of an outline with time markers so I can go back and find the audio clips I want to use more easily. I intend to put some clips on my blog very soon so I can show how the portrait and audio clip layout will be. I’ve also started taking portraits of the moms as it just made sense to have pictures to go along with the voices. David suggested I could approach the portraits of the moms in a way that could reflect the environments of home birth...low lighting, support of husband, etc. I love that idea and will experiment with it. I’m still not sure how all of what I’ve gathered will come together, but I’m trying to wrap up the first phase of my project so I can began to analyze and edit and put it together in some form.
Friday my family made a road trip to Columbia! It was nice to meet with David and touch base about the direction of my project. I’m starting to feel like maybe I really can finish this project after all! My main reason for visiting Columbia was to meet with some home birth families. I met with a Doctor who had her daughter at home, a librarian whose mother as well as her two kids were born at home, and a family who have lived on the same homestead for 33 years and had all four of their daughters there. It was a fun and exhausting weekend, and I’m looking forward to editing all the work I was able to fit in in such a short time.

**Week 10**

Monday evening I met with Amy and her son, Jude, to hear their thoughts on home birthing and record birth stories. Jude was there while both siblings were being born and got to cut the umbilical cords. It was cool to hear his perspective on the birth experience. Tuesday evening I photographed the House family (kids & mom) and edited those photos.

I finally finished the transcription of my interview with Jennifer Loomis. I will be focusing on her approach and work she has done for the analysis part of my project. I’m starting to put together some additional questions for her so I can begin writing up the analysis.

I had hoped to get some audio clips added to my blog to help show what the layout of my project will look like, but I struggled to get it to work properly. I think I finally have it working so I’ll be adding some audio clips to go with some of the portraits I’m putting up this week.
Friday I met with Lisa who has agreed to let me photograph her home birth. I was happy to find someone who had already given birth before because I think she has a better idea of what to expect and also will likely be less affected by my presence. I think my experience having gone through two home births will help me be able to be empathetic to the situation and also be aware of the flow of labor. I’m also glad that Lisa’s daughter will be there so I can capture what it’s like for her to see her little sister being born. I’m excited because this will be the first birth I have witnessed in person. It’s such a sacred thing to watch a new being come into this world, and I feel really grateful to have this opportunity to document it. I’m working on an outline for this part of my project and how it will be presented. I want to have most of the narrative done so I can just fill in the photos of the home birth. She is due November 4.

Week 11

This week I’ve been editing the audio from birth stories and narrowing down the clips I’ll be using for the final edit. I have hours and hours of this so it’s taking a while to weed through everything.

I also met with Lisa and her family, and they have agreed to let me photograph their home birth in early November. I’m planning my approach and thinking about what shots I want to get and where I’ll be for everything. If I have a chance, I’d like to talk to another home birth photographer to get some tips and feedback about their experience. I’ll be working in low light without a flash so I might try to use a small easily portable tripod. I realize the timing of this birth is going to be crucial for me to be able to include it in my project, so I will complete everything I can beforehand so all I will have to do after the birth is edit and insert the images. I am planning to gather some video of the
home birth also, but not sure I will be including it in the final project. It will depend on how early she goes into labor and how much time I have for editing.

I’ve started writing up the analysis and have been in touch with Jennifer Loomis with some follow up questions. The project is starting to come together and I’m hoping to have some completed sections in the near future to send for feedback.

**Week 12**

This week was spent editing audio, toning portraits, and working on the written parts of my project. I’m trying to finish up the professional analysis and introduction so I can get them turned in this week for feedback.

On Saturday I met with Shawn House, a midwife, to record her thoughts about home birth. I also met with Nancy Ward, her son Michael, his wife Jenni, and their son, Oliver. I got some portraits of all of them and redid some audio for Jenni and Michael.

I always like the candid shots I get much better than the portraits, so I’ve been working really hard on my approach with portraiture. It’s hard to plan ahead, because I don’t always get to scout out the environment where I’ll be shooting the subjects ahead of time. I’ve been making the most of using available light and trying to set up times to photograph when the light is good. Some people’s houses are just darker than others so I’ve shot some of the portraits outside, but am still struggling to keep the look consistent. I’m considering using black and white images to help with this. Overall, things are slowly starting to come together.

For Lisa’s birth, I will use a softbox for my flash when needed as long as it doesn’t bother her. I don’t want my presence to affect her birthing experience so I considered not using a flash at all, but depending on time of day it might be necessary to
use it. I want to do my job of capturing moments, but without disturbing the natural process of birth.

**Week 13**

This week was spent finishing up the professional analysis and gathering more sources for my literature review. I edited more audio and worked on toning some more images. I also met with Judy Boyd, mom of midwife (Shawn House) who I have also interviewed. She had her son at home after giving birth to her daughter Shawn in a hospital, and it was neat to hear her perspective having been through both. She is very articulate and passionate about home birthing so I got some great clips from her. We met at the library where there are study rooms that are quiet, which is where I’ve met most of the women to record their stories. It’s worked out fine most of the time, but today there was some kind of event going on so there was a bit of background noise every once in a while. Getting quality audio has proved one of the biggest challenges for me in this project. Most of my subjects have children still at home so that rules out their home as a possible location to record unless we can find a time when their children aren’t there. I picked the library because I thought it would provide a pretty consistent quality for audio and allow a relatively quiet setting to record. Most of the time this has been true. I’m still wishing I had access to a studio for doing portraits and audio just so everything could be consistent throughout.

I was finally able to connect with Rachael again and met her at her house to photograph her children. She decided that she didn’t want to be photographed and wasn’t comfortable with me using audio of her, but she said I could use what she said as text. I’m trying to figure out how I can incorporate that into my project as I was planning for it
to be just portraits with audio that told the narrative. I do have a few others that I wasn’t able to get photographs of for various reasons, but do have some audio that I could use as text. I will brainstorm ideas for putting this into my project. I also got to record some audio clips from her two children who were there when their youngest sister was born.

**Week 14**

This week I met with Martha and her girls (including her newest addition baby Margo!) I got a portrait of Martha and Margo, and some audio of her oldest, Luna, talking about her experiences watching both of her sisters being born. I also got to take some photos of Shawn and her mother, Judy, who didn’t feel comfortable having her portrait done alone. She wanted the photo to include either her daughter and/or granddaughters so I obliged. I really wanted to have a portrait of her to go with her audio clips, but even after explaining this she said she just really doesn’t like having her picture made. So I will likely include one of her with her family.

Photographed Lisa’s home birth! Exhausting, but exhilarating!

**Weeks 15-16**

The last weeks are spent wrapping everything up and lots of editing and re-editing of audio and images. I’m also exploring options for presentation of the final layout for photos/audio, and editing the photos from Lisa’s home birth! I decided per David’s suggestion that it would be best to present my project online through a website, so I worked on getting that set up this week. Some of my web skills are coming back to me, but for time consideration I decided to go with a template based web site. Even so, it is taking a while to get everything put together how I want it.
Chapter 3: Evaluation

Completing this project has truly been a labor of love for me. The project I’m presenting is very different from what I originally proposed, but I think it is representative of who I am as a photojournalist. Telling people’s stories and giving them a voice is the heart of grassroots journalism and something I strive to do in my work. Whether I do this by showing the impacts of environmental issues, or by a photo essay on home birth, I want to connect people to issues that are important and need to be talked about.

One of the most important lessons I learned while doing this project is there is merit in any story that you pursue with diligence and openness. I used to believe that for a photo story to be worthwhile, it had to involve a novel concept or an idea never before explored. I’ve come to realize that because each of us is inherently different with different experiences, we will approach a story in our own way, and uncover truths that others might not.

Looking back at the work I accomplished through this project, I recognize both the successes and failures. Overall, I am happy with how the project came together and feel I was able to present an intimate look at home birth culture. I was successful in capturing what home birth means to women and why they have chosen this method of childbirth. Within the sample of women I found, I was also able to provide a wide range of ages and reasons for choosing and supporting the decision to birth at home.

Photographing a home birth was an amazing experience, and one I will never forget. My personal experience having had two home births was an asset to me while photographing the birth. I think by being able to draw on my own experience it allowed
me to intuitively know when moments were going to happen, and what was going on in her body at any given time. I felt deeply connected to her, and empathetic of what she was experiencing. I think this allowed me to get more intimate photographs, while also being respectful of the birthing process. I experimented with using my flash and softbox because of the very dim lighting, but ended up choosing primarily the photographs that used available natural light instead. I like how the final presentation of the home birth came together in a slideshow format. If I were to change anything about my approach, it would be to take more pictures. Afterwards, Lisa told me that she was not really aware of my presence and picture taking, and having known that I would have been a bit more aggressive with my shooting.

If I could improve the project in any way, it would be to have better quality audio, and a more consistent approach in my portraits. It would have been helpful to use wireless microphones on my subjects, to minimize background noise. I will experiment with this in the future as I continue to pursue this and other projects. For my portraits, I struggled with having a consistent approach because of the different environments of each family. I considered trying to use the same lens to have a more consistent look to my photos, but again, I had to accommodate each setting and there wasn’t always one lens that was the best for lighting, distance, etc. If I could redo the portraits, I might try to find a studio to use and have each subject come for a studio portrait where I could control the lighting and background to provide a more consistent look.

One of the most important things I learned from this project is what it takes to complete such a project. From start to finish, I feel confident that I can now complete a
long-term documentary photography project. I’m excited to take these skills into future projects I pursue.

In many ways I feel like this project is just a start of what I hope it will become. I want to talk to more women and allow their stories to be heard. By including a larger sample of subjects it will give a broader perspective of home birth, and having more time will allow me to uncover more issues about our societies’ beliefs on birthing.

**Lessons from Jennifer Loomis**

One of the most helpful things that I took away from my interview with Jennifer Loomis was that she mentioned when photographing someone, she was looking and waiting for a moment to capture in her portraits. This was a good reminder that even in a posed photograph you are still waiting for a connection or a moment of vulnerability that reveals a little more about the person. I was able to use this in my approach with portraiture for this project. I’m also inspired by how she combines her photojournalistic skills with her artistic expression to create beautiful images. This is one of my goals as a photographer, and it has been invaluable to study the evolution of her work.
Chapter 4: Physical Evidence

The final presentation of my project is a website that includes portraits of women who gave birth at home, along with their children. There are audio clips from moms, dads, and children, talking about their experience and thoughts on home birth. Screen shots from the website are included here, and in the attached media folder you will find all toned images and edited audio clips, as well as a link to the website.
History
Childbirth in the United States has traditionally been attended by midwives. Up until the 1960s, home births were the only option for pregnant women, and laboring women were supported by other women who had gone through birth. Babies were often caught by family members or close friends. As technologies and advancements in birthing progressed, the process of birthing evolved from a private experience attended by midwives and neighbors, to a public display of pregnancy. Many feminists believe that women gave up control over their bodies during birth once male physicians began entering birthing rooms in the early 20th century.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the natural childbirth movement tried to fight against this. Birth activists succeeded in getting hospitals to allow fathers into labor and delivery rooms, mothers to birth consciously (without being put to sleep), and mothers and babies to room together after birth. They fought for women to have the right to birth without drugs or interventions, to walk around or even be in water during labor.

A recent study by Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health looked at nearly 17,000 cases of midwife-led care. Studies found that their babies were born healthy and safe. Ninety-seven percent of babies were carried to full-term; they weighed an average of eight pounds at birth, and nearly 98% were being breastfed at the six-week postpartum visit with their midwife. Only 1% of babies required transfer to the hospital at birth, most for non-urgent conditions. Babies born to low-risk mothers had no higher risk of death in labor or the first few weeks of life than those in comparable studies of similarly low-risk pregnancies. Home birth mothers had much lower rates of interventions in labor, and a cesarean rate of 5.2%, was remarkably lower than the U.S. national average of 31% for full-term pregnancies. (marla.org)
Ida Fogle, of Columbia, Missouri, chose to have her first child at home in 1995. Being a librarian, she was no stranger to research, and began reading about birthing options when she first became pregnant. Her research led her to believe that having a home birth was the safer option for her. She received prenatal care from a birthing center with a certified nurse midwife with both of her children. Her mother, Lanell Bectis, was also born at home in 1925, before the hospitalization of birthing began. Lanell gave birth to one child at home and the rest in a hospital.

HOME BIRTH CULTURE

AN INTIMATE LOOK AT HOME BIRTH THROUGH THE STORIES OF EIGHT FAMILIES

Shawn House, a retired midwife in Fayetteville, Arkansas, gave birth to both of her daughters at home in an off grid cabin just outside of Fayetteville. Being a midwife, she is no stranger to home births, but earlier influences from her family might have had a major impact on her decision to both be a midwife and have a home birth. Shawn’s mother, Judy Lloyd, was a La Leche League leader, so Shawn grew up around nursing women and babies, and had a positive representation of natural birthing and extended breastfeeding, which oftentimes go hand in hand. Shawn also witnessed her brother’s birth, and believes this impacted the relationship they had while growing up, and was another factor in her deciding to become a midwife.
Elizabeth Askemann, 54, of Columbia, Missouri, is a Family Physician who chose to have a home birth with her daughter, Heidi. When asked why she chose a home birth she stated reasons such as: evidence-based care, the incredible personalized care from a midwife, a family-centered process, and her husband's active participation. "I wanted it most for Heidi—for her to be able to gestate as long as she needed, for her to emerge without a lot of touch besides from me, for her to be welcomed confidently and quietly and lovingly—not pulled on or messed with. For her to be colonized with My flora, for our nursing and bonding to be undisturbed, for her to have a birth experience that was safe, yes, but so much more than safe. Oh, and the umbilical cord—for her to manage her transition to newborn circulation with enough time for her to integrate that safely and gently, without shock or trauma or struggle. I know those things can be a part of birth and the rest of life, but there is so much of that that humans can heap upon a baby at birth that just not only isn't necessary, but also undermines their safety and surely robs the baby of the sacredness of the moment."

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Jennifer Florence-Ward, 29, gave birth to her son at home in 2012 in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Jennifer and her husband, Michael, gave many reasons for choosing a home birth including: safety, empowerment, and control of the birthing process. Jennifer chose to do a lobe birth, which is the practice of leaving the umbilical cord uncut so the baby remains attached to the placenta until the cord naturally separates at the navel. After 30 hours, the cord had grown so short it became hard on Jennifer and baby Oliver so they decided to cut it. Oliver's umbilical stump fell off in just five days.
HOME BIRTH CULTURE

AN INTIMATE LOOK AT HOME BIRTH THROUGH THE STORIES OF EIGHT FAMILIES

Martha Cardwell, of Fayetteville, Arkansas, chose to have a home birth with all three of her children. When she first learned she was pregnant, she called a local clinic seeking some guidance about pregnancy, but the response she got prompted her to look elsewhere for prenatal care. Her oldest daughter, Luna, was present for both of her younger sister’s births, and has fond memories from the experiences.

Maria Chowdry poses for a portrait in her office. Maria's herbal line, Birthsong Botanicals is sold locally and online.
Chapter 5: Analysis

The Birth of Pregnant Photography

Jennifer Loomis was one of the first photographers to make a business of pregnant nude photography. Having been referred to as a pioneer of maternity photography, she got her start in San Francisco in 1991 photographing nudes of women. Loomis refers to San Francisco photographer Ruth Bernhard as her biggest influence on her work with nudes. Bernhard is best known for her studio work of still lifes and nudes done primarily in black and white. She is also known for her work with lesbians, most notably Two Forms (1962). In that work, a black woman and a white woman who were real-life lovers are featured with their nude bodies pressed against one another. Most of her work spanned from the mid 1930’s to the 1980’s. Ansel Adams referred to her as "the greatest photographer of the nude."

Sand Dune, 1967
Ruth Bernhard
Loomis respected Bernhard’s work because she was doing something that nobody else was doing. She found that inspiration helpful in approaching her own maternity work. Loomis wanted her work to have a lasting impact and change the way people think about an issue. She used Bernhard’s inspiration when she was younger with her work with nudes, and then carried it over to her maternity work.

By 1994 Loomis had started photographing pregnant nudes. This was just a few years after the Vanity Fair cover of a pregnant nude Demi Moore hit the shelves. The photograph of Moore taken by Annie Leibovitz in 1991 had a lasting impact on society’s acceptance of pregnancy and the pregnant form. Since the cover was released, more
celebrities have posed for photos in late stages of pregnancy, and the trend of having intimate pregnancy photos of the female form was born.

While this photo had a lasting impact on society’s acceptance of pregnancy and the pregnant form, it was met with as much shock and outrage as admiration, according to Matthews and Wexler, 2000. “Liebovitz crossed a boundary at a ripe cultural moment, and with her image of the pregnant woman, pregnant pictures crossed over into the public visual domain.” Carol Stabile points out in her essay “Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance,” the controversy over Leibovitz’s image is evidence that, “in a culture that places such a premium on thinness, the pregnant body is anathema. Not only is it perhaps the most visible and physical mark of sexual

Vanity Fair, August 1991
Annie Leibovitz
difference, it is also the sign for deeply embedded fears and anxieties about femininity and the female reproductive system.” Our culture has historically been uncomfortable acknowledging the sexual associations of pregnancy. Matthews and Wexler (2000) note that “lack of representation of pregnant women is reflected by the fact that Western cultures have traditionally tried to separate the maternal from the sexual roles in women’s lives.”

When Loomis began there was little or no photography out there in the field of maternity photography to look at for inspiration so she had to find her own. Having been an artist her entire life, she drew inspiration from friends who were painters, along with many photography books. Working as a photojournalist also helped Loomis develop an eye for what she was looking for. After receiving her Master’s Degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia, she worked as a freelance photojournalist in East Africa. She was able to draw on her experience as a photojournalist in her work as a portrait photographer. One of her biggest influences was Henri Cartier-Bresson. Loomis explains that she is looking for a moment when she is doing family or maternity photography.

“So it’s not all about setting up this gorgeous shoot with gorgeous lighting and just fitting the pregnant woman in there. It’s waiting for her to do something.”

In this way portraiture is very much like photojournalism: the image is about connection and intimacy and feeling like you learn something about the subject. Otherwise, it is just another pretty picture.

**Approach**

When Loomis first got started in maternity photography she was motivated by her art, and felt passionate about changing society’s definition of beauty, and our acceptance
of the pregnant form. Loomis described herself as a rebel in her twenties and thirties, and loved the idea of forcing people to look at an issue they are uncomfortable with. She says, “I felt that we were all coming from pregnant women and now that I’ve had a baby it even more so drives it home.” Loomis felt passionate about exposing our societies’ tendencies to disregard pregnant women and had a chance to do so in a gallery show in Seattle:

“I had huge torsos printed and we hung them in the window; it was this gallery owned by these gay men and we would sit on the sofa and drink wine and watch everybody walk by and do a double take and come back and look at the pictures.”

Loomis’s motivation began to change as she photographed more women because they began talking about how beautiful it made them feel. This is when Loomis realized it was “something for them.” Her work was not only helping to change societies’ views of women’s bodies, but also allowing the women to see their bodies in a new way.

Loomis’s motivation changed again after years of doing maternity photography, as the kids who used to be inside the bellies were now grown up and able to talk about it. Loomis describes their reactions to the photographs as “completely enthralled,” and states it has given her a third reason for doing this work.

Over the years, many women have confided their stories of pregnancy with Loomis, and this is what motivated her to put together her book, “Portraits of Pregnancy-The Birth of a Mother.” Her book combines artistic portraits of pregnant women accompanied by narratives from each woman’s journey through pregnancy and into motherhood. It’s another way for Loomis to bring exposure to the pregnant form, while also providing women with relatable stories of pregnancy and birth.
**Representation of the Pregnant Form**

Loomis made a conscious decision in her approach to take the sexuality away from the female body and look at it from a sensual perspective.

“I have worked hard to divorce my work from sexuality and objectification. I like to think more about sensuality and light. I want to show the soft curves of the pregnant woman—any shape or size, they are all beautiful. I want to show how the body grows in so many different ways to hold life. I see the pregnant woman and her womb as the holding place between heaven and earth, I am not religious but it is a sacred space and these bodies are sacred.” (Loomis interview)

Loomis believes that “society has accepted the pregnant woman’s body, at least in the urban areas and the locations that are more liberal. But there are other areas of the country where it is still shrouded: typically these are areas of the country where women are more oppressed whether they admit it or not.” When referencing the influence of her work, Loomis states that she is most proud of how the pregnant female form is being recognized as beautiful and is being photographed daily around the world.

Loomis has spent most of her career studying and photographing the pregnant form. In her most recent series, she began studying the landscape created by this form.

“Worthy of examination and discussion, this shape represents an area of the women’s body that is surrounded by debate of ownership, degradation by toxic environments, and depravation of corporate fertility centers charging exorbitant fees for women who want to become pregnant.” (jenniferloomis.com)

The well-known Japanese photographer, Hiroshi Sugimoto, famous for his black and white seascapes, inspired Loomis’s work on maternal landscapes. Loomis states her idea when approaching a maternal landscape is, “to strip this form of all of its identifying features and let the viewer absorb the beauty and the softness of each individual shape.”

By experimenting with a macro lens, a 35mm, and a 4x5 view camera, Loomis explores
all that the maternal form represents and questions why the shape isn’t better represented in visual history.

Loomis looks at pregnant women as the backbone of society and is using her maternal landscape work to make people get up close and personal to it. In line with Loomis’s rebellious side, she wants the images in their face where they can see the lines and stretch marks and really study it. Loomis has printed large-scale prints of the landscapes from 6-feet to 12-feet wide. She found that if she “could create it as a landscape that becomes unidentifiable, more people will get up close to it and then be like “what is this?”

_Mediterranean Sea_
Hiroshi Sugimoto
Maternal Landscape Series, 2012

Maternal Landscape Series, 2013
Maternal Landscape Series, 2012

Maternal Landscape Series, 2013
Effects of Images on Pregnant Subjects

Many women struggle with the shape and changes in their bodies while pregnant. Our culture’s standards of beauty for women are hard to uphold, and impossible during pregnancy. While magazines featuring celebrity pregnancies focus on how fast the woman can lose her “baby weight,” Loomis’s approach seems to contradict that by making women of all shapes and sizes feel beautiful. Loomis notes that many of the women she photographs are struggling with the shape and changes in their bodies, and she believes it’s partly due to our cultural ideals that force women to believe that they need to be unhealthily thin.

“I think this pregnancy photography is a time for them to pause and reflect on the specialness of what’s going on truthfully for them because often they’re so busy they don’t have that luxury.” (Loomis interview)
For this reason, a good photo session becomes important because of the effect it can have on a woman’s body image. Over the years of photographing women, Loomis has learned what women like and don’t like about themselves in the photographs. She says, “I can see things now ahead of time that they may not even be able to articulate or maybe a newer photographer doing this may not be able to see, but I know I’ve got to turn her 3cm to the right and she’s going to like that better.” Loomis’s work has given many women and their partners the ability to see their bodies in a new way.
On Being a Mom

After devoting many years of her life to photographing pregnant women, Loomis recently became a mom herself. Loomis believes spending years with pregnant women helped her be more prepared for her pregnancy. It’s also given her more empathy and compassion toward pregnant women. Loomis feels like pregnant women in our society are generally not well cared for by the male population, so in her photo shoots she wants them to feel well cared for.

Recently with her own pregnancy, Loomis decided to “document the reality of the pregnancy instead of beautifying it.” Her intimate portraits are powerful and show the struggles that so many women have faced in their journey to motherhood. Loomis has found that other women are very private about their stories, and have not expressed an interest in having a realistic documentation surrounding their pregnancies.
Evolution of Maternity Photography

One of the challenges Loomis faced when she began was finding a market for photographing pregnant nudes. The sentiment was, “nobody is going to pay you to photograph them semi-naked and pregnant. That’s pretty much stupid.” There was resistance to showing her photography if she wanted to run an ad in a newspaper or magazine. While pregnant celebrities had begun making appearances on magazine covers, our society was not fully ready to embrace images of the pregnant form. When Loomis began there was secrecy surrounding her work. She says, “a lot of times I found that the women who would come to me would not tell their friends and family that they had done this.” Between 2001 and 2002, her business starting taking off, which Loomis feels was in tandem with what was going on in our culture’s obsession with celebrities. Now that maternity photography is widely accepted, Loomis is embracing the plateau as a chance to push herself into a new direction in exploring the pregnant form. While her approach continues to evolve, her passion remains the same- to challenge society’s definition of beauty.
Appendix A: Project Proposal

Project Proposal, Winter 2008

Introduction

I've always felt drawn to do something to help people and make a difference in the lives of others, but it took a while to figure out what that would look like for me. I inherited my father's love of travel and my mother's love of art so I think this is why the job of a photojournalist is so appealing to me. I love the intimacy of documenting people's life stories and the ability to make a difference in their lives by telling them. My experience as a graduate student here at the Missouri School of Journalism has enabled me to become a better writer, reporter, communicator, photographer, and storyteller.

Things began to make sense in the first course I took, Fundamentals of Photojournalism with David Rees. I finally had the ah-ha moment where I knew I had found the outlet for me to what I wanted to do with my life. Being forced to approach strangers with nothing to hide behind except my camera was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. I needed this class to force me out of my comfort zone and overcome my shyness. It taught me many things, but one of the most important was confidence.

I decided to take a field-reporting course through the agricultural journalism department because of my interest in the environment. This course was helpful in shaping my direction by opening my eyes to field reporting and providing valuable hands-on experience. I was able to gain skills as both a writer and photographer while learning about many issues affecting the Missouri River and its resources. I came home from the trip exhausted but excited about all the story ideas that emerged during this trip.
Taking staff photojournalism and picture desk management allowed me to gain an inside look into how a photo department functions and to better understand the relationship between photographer and editor. During my time on staff, I shot daily assignments during my shifts, toned and captioned images, and prepared video and audio slide shows for long-term projects. Being a photo editor taught me valuable editing and communication skills, but more importantly the impact that being reliable, enthusiastic, and having a positive attitude can have when you bring it to the job. I feel that ninety percent of your success as a photographer can be attributed to your attitude and passion for what you is doing.

Many things have led me to where I am today. Going through graduate school with a husband has certainly influenced my direction within photojournalism. And now as I'm preparing to bring a new life into the world, my priorities and outlook have changed in many ways. When I began graduate school, I dreamed of being the photographer who traveled to far off places and put herself in dangerous situations, if needed, to tell the story. I wanted to do the kind of documentary work that makes people think and stirs them to action. My passion for this kind of work has not changed, but the outlet to do it has. Now more than ever, I'm increasingly aware of our environment and what kind of world I'll be bringing a child into. I've never been more driven to use my acquired photojournalism skills and passion for the environment to cause change. I've simply become more aware that these changes can and need to be done in our own communities. Small changes can often lead to the biggest impact over time. The professional skills component of my project is aimed to do just that. I hope by analyzing what makes a city successful in creating a bicycle and pedestrian friendly environment, it
will allow other communities to follow. In theory, this would lead to fewer cars on the road and a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and better communities for us all.

Completing this Master’s project will enable me to gain a deeper understanding of the process of covering environmental stories, and the opportunity to document the work of successful photojournalists.

Professional skills component

For the professional component of my project, I will be working in Columbia, Missouri, and Amsterdam, Netherlands to document the bicycle culture and do a comparison on what makes some cities more successful than others in maintaining a safe environment for cycling. The finished product will be a in-depth photographic essay on bicycle culture. I will start the work this summer in Columbia, using PedNet as a source of information on current projects as well as a way to make contacts with cyclists in the area. I would like to do profile pieces on people in both cities to document their commutes by bicycle and to show what obstacles they may encounter.

Amsterdam is rated as the #1 most bicycle friendly city in the world, based on criteria by the League of American Bicyclists: 1. Engineering (bike parking, designated lanes, etc.); 2. Encouragement (events and campaigns); 3. Evaluation and Planning (ongoing political bodies that make changes to existing laws and plan for the future); 4. Education (bike maps and awareness campaigns); 5. Enforcement (making motorists yield to bicyclists).

I've spent the last six years of my life in Columbia commuting by bicycle to work and now school. I'm a member of the PedNet coalition, which is “a group of individuals, businesses, and non-profit organizations with a vision for the future of Columbia, in
which it is safe and pleasant to walk, cycle, wheel, and skate throughout the city.” I've participated in numerous bicycling events during my time in Columbia, including Bike, Walk and Wheel to Work Week, which takes place every year in May. I also participated in the Low Car Diet Challenge in which participants were only allowed to use non-motorized transportation for an entire month. I was also able to document many experiences I had this month through photography.

Since my project will take place in two different cities, I will begin this component by focusing on Columbia this summer. After completing all my coursework here, I will be able to travel to Amsterdam to complete the second half of the project. I will divide my time between the two cities, but I foresee spending much more time than the required total of 30 hours a week for 14 weeks.

I will spend at least the equivalent of one day a week during my time in each city to focus on the research component. While in Amsterdam, I will send weekly email correspondence to my committee members to keep them aware of my progress. David Rees will act as my supervisor by being available and providing feedback throughout the project.

My passion for environmental issues and my love of photography have led me to this topic of research. I have a deep connection to all things in nature and want to spend my life bringing awareness to issues relating to our environment. This project is a step towards that goal.

**Analysis Component/ Methods**

For the professional analysis component of my Masters project, I plan to conduct interviews with environmental photojournalists working at different publications and
organizations that have an environmental perspective or agenda, such as Greenpeace and National Geographic. So far I have consensus from Daniel Beltrá from Greenpeace, Joel Sartore from National Geographic, and Steve Liss from Polaris Images. I'm interested in looking at advocacy journalism in the context of where objectivity and journalistic ethics fit in. By including questions on both personal and psychosocial factors, I will examine the lifestyle of these photojournalists in an attempt to understand how having a family or not having a family, influences their decisions for the kind of work they do, and also whether these journalists are adopting the lifestyle of environmentalists. I want to look at what kind of people choose to work for non-profits or advocacy organizations to examine if they share certain traits or beliefs. I will include background questions about their work and personal history and whether or not they consider themselves to be environmentalists. I will examine the content of some of their individual projects to look at how it covers a specific environmental issue. I will also look at factors such as organizational sponsors and where the stories get published.

By examining different photojournalist's work, I hope to determine if a false balance exists in coverage of environmental issues. Are journalists in general pressured to cover both sides of an issue with equal weight despite evidence that one side is factual and based on conclusive scientific fact? And how are images used in general to portray environmental issues in the media? These questions will be approached using the theories of gatekeeping, framing, and agenda setting to help define the level of objectivity in environmental coverage.

Findings from my professional analysis will be applicable to coverage of all environmental issues, and will give us a better understanding of biases that might exist in
media’s coverage of these issues. Determining how and if objectivity exists within the realm of advocacy journalism will help to better define the line between journalism and advocacy. This has relevance for young journalists like me who wish to cover environmental issues, but also for the public in determining their trust in the media.

While conducting the professional component of my project, I will be able to apply what I learn from my research to how I document the story of bicycle cultures in the two communities of Columbia and Amsterdam. Possible outlets for the publication of my work include E, The Environmental Magazine, and the SE Journal.
Appendix B: Project Proposal Addendum

Project Proposal Addendum

April 2010

For the professional component of my masters' project, I will document the lifestyle of full-time RV families. Specifically, I want to look at the environmental aspects of living in a small space, and the impact that it has on the environment. By profiling different families, each with their own unique reasons for choosing their current lifestyle, I hope to document what living in such a small space is like with a family. I want to understand reasons for choosing this lifestyle, and to determine if there is a bigger trend of families choosing to 'downsize' their lifestyle.

I plan to find at least three families to document, spending about a month with each family. When choosing families I will use the following criteria: 1) a family will have at least one child 2) a family will have chosen to live in an RV 3) a family will be living in an RV full-time while traveling. I will use my blog as a place to show the work I am doing as well as to keep in touch with my committee. Upon completion of the project I would like to show the profiles of these families through a website or blog.

Being a full-time RVer has put me in a unique living situation and I feel compelled to document this lifestyle to others from a first-hand perspective.

After choosing to leave our home in Columbia, Mo to start traveling full-time, we decided we liked it so much that we would buy a trailer so we could bring our home with us wherever we go. With a 15-month old and black lab, the decision was not an easy one.
We wondered what living in such a small space would be like and if we would miss having a bigger home and yard to play in. I began to search online for other people choosing to do this and the more I read, the more it clicked. I found many groups and blogs devoted to families that choose to leave their big houses to downsize to life in a trailer. I kept reading about how close their families became, and how nice it was to be able to open up your front door to new places all the time. Something just made sense about that, and I liked the thought of it opening up the world to my son, and allowing us to spend more time outdoors as a family. Just months into it, we're still relatively new to this lifestyle, but so far we're loving it. It has had its ups and downs, but we're learning to love our tiny home on wheels, and the intimacy it has created for our family.

Project Proposal Addendum

August 2014

Home birth was, until the advent of modern medicine, the prescribed method of delivery. In many developed countries, home birth declined rapidly over the 20th century. Even with the revival of midwifery practice during the 1970’s, the rate of home births in the United States has remained remarkably low over the past twenty years. (Martin 2007). But according to a new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of U.S. babies born outside of hospitals has reached its highest level in nearly 40 years. Home and birthing center births have been on the rise since 2004, and the 2012 level is the highest since 1975, the report said.

For the professional skills component of my project, I will explore the increasing trend of people choosing to give birth outside of a hospital setting by completing a photo
essay on people born at home. I will photograph and interview 8-10 individuals of varying ages in the Northwest Arkansas and Mid-Missouri regions who were born at home. I will conduct semi-structured interviews and gather audio of each individual to allow the viewer to hear the subject’s story in their own voice. Depending on the subject’s age, I will include other family members as needed to help tell their story.

For the professional analysis component of my project, I will examine the niche of intimate portraiture as a business by interviewing two or three photographers who make a living doing this kind of photography. Possible photographers to interview include: Jennifer Loomis, Meredith Benfield, Maggie Rife, and Andrew Kilgore. Jennifer Loomis has made a business of photographing nude pregnant women. Meredith Benfield and Maggie Rife are both boudoir photographers. Andrew Kilgore is a local portrait photographer who uses his portraits to bring awareness to misunderstood or disadvantaged members of society. By conducting in-depth interviews and examining their work, I hope to learn about the process of creating intimate portraits. I will be able to apply what I learn to the professional skills component of my project.

I will use my blog as a place to show the work I am doing as well as to keep in touch with my committee. I will send weekly field notes to update my progress to my committee. I will be working on my project from August 2014 through December 2014, though I plan to continue to pursue this project on my own after my professional project is complete.

Possible publication outlets for my project include local galleries, websites, or magazines. The project can be published as either a multimedia piece on homebirths or as a photo essay by just including the photos.
Literature Review

Fall 2007

Environmental photojournalism is devoted to depicting man's influence on nature, whether it be destructive or constructive.

This review's purpose is to gain a better understanding of how environmental issues are presented by the media visually, and how this affects public perception of them. It examines the relationship between objectivity, ethics, and perception of photographs and attempts to answer how photographs are being used in presenting environmental messages.

Theoretical approaches to looking at the media involve agenda setting, gatekeeping, and framing. Sources included help lay the groundwork for the theories and provide a historical look at past research in these areas, as well as point out gaps in literature.

Historical beginnings of environmental photojournalism

The New York Times and a few other major national news organizations, along with their sources of information, were effective in placing the global environment on the American agenda of problems during the late 1980's. Scientists and environmentalists have discussed global problems for two decades or more, well before most of them became as salient as public issues. Today, world problems like population, resources, and environment have been given priority in the public mind and merged into an ensemble of hazards threatening the global biosphere. (Mazur & Lee 1993).
The Society of Environmental Journalists helped define environmental journalism. During a time of rapid change in the field, members debated to define the parameters by which practicing environmental journalists operate today. These debates also explored the influence of deeper biases (Palen, 1999). One of the questions Palen identifies is: Do most environmental journalists get into the field because they are environmentalists, and if so, how does this affect their work?

The most widely accepted effect of news media on public opinion is 'agenda setting', the placing of certain issues or problems foremost in the public mind simply by making them salient in the news. (Mazur & Lee). The news media are not successful in telling us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The mass media's ability to direct public attention toward specific policy concerns has been documented in many cases, including publicized instances of scientifically-appraised risks to health or the environment.

**What is photojournalism's role?**

Newton's, The Burden of Visual Truth examines the development of the role of photojournalism as a tool to better understand our place in the world and our relationship to others. Newton approaches the subject matter from several perspectives, examining the theoretical and ideological bases for visual truth, as conveyed by the news media, and applying relevant research on photojournalism to newspaper and other forms of media.

Chapnick details the foundation of photojournalism in Truth Needs No Ally. Specifically, by following the visual biography of man on earth, he documents the responsibilities and ethical concerns of photojournalists. Notable photographers such as James Nachtwey, Don McCullin, Ernst Haas, Dr. Roman Vishniac, Hiroshi Himaya,
Gordan Parks, Bruce Davidson, and W. Eugene Smith are introduced as concerned photographers. First defined by Cornell Capa, concerned photography is something that can help change the world. “They do it because they have a concern for mankind and because they believe in its importance and relevance to our times,” says Capa, (Chapnick, 1994).

**Can photojournalism change the world?**

Even though no single photojournalist has succeeded in stopping wars, eliminating poverty, or solving every environmental crisis, they still work with a hope that their work evokes positive change. W. Eugene Smith, for example, personalized the impact environmental pollution has on people. His photographs showed the deformities caused by exposure to industrial mercury wastes being poured into the waters around Minamata, a fishing village in Japan. Because of its power to move the world, to change people's attitudes, to stir their emotions and stimulate action, I am convinced of the importance of photojournalism within the totality of contemporary journalism in this visual age. It therefore becomes urgent that every participant in the photojournalistic process recognizes his or her responsibility to use this tool for maximum impact. (Chapnick, 1994).

Photographs have the potential to change public perceptions on social issues, to stimulate people to action, to affect the ways in which people live and influence how governments conduct business. Photojournalism has a profound effect on people's understanding of the world in which they live and on their perceptions of important social and political issues. Throughout the history of photography, photographers have used
their cameras to promote their specific causes, social and environmental. (Chapnick, 1994).

In *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*, Dunaway explores cultural environmental history and seeing nature in the twentieth century. Dunaway focuses on the production and consumption of images and their influence on American society, and how visual imagery has attributed to American ideas about nature. Dunaway refers to the camera as “a technology of representation,” but also challenges the flawed medium of the camera capturing objective truth. Visual examples include of land during the depression, and natural disasters such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989. In the latter example, Exxon could not afford to be seen acknowledging their responsibility for the spill and feared that images of the tanker engulfed in fire would constitute a public relations nightmare. The nightmare came anyway, as news reports showed countless images of nature in jeopardy, prompting public outrage and Congress's swift passage of the 1990 Oil Pollution Act (Egan 2006). Environmental photojournalism does have the power to create positive change in the world and specifically, the environment.

Concerned photography can help change the world and lead to advocacy photography. Advocacy photography is where the photographer moves from being dispassionate to participatory and identifies with a specific cause (Chapnick, 1994). An example is Stephen Shames, who has done a seven-year project on child poverty in America. Shames qualifies as both a concerned photographer and as an advocate using photography as a means to change social landscape. During his project, Shames lived and ate with the people he photographed. Living in the same conditions allowed him to
develop a closer rapport with them, to be part of their lives, to share their pain, and to develop a greater understanding of them, which is reflected in his photographs. Living with subjects often blurs the line between objective journalism and subjective participatory journalism. Subjective participatory journalism may be colored by the photographer's involvement, but it also makes for greater insights and deeper revelations by the photojournalist (Chapnick, 1994).

Concerned photography defines the work of a special subgroup of those documentary photographers whose overwhelming personal dedication to and concern for mankind is transcendent. An illustration of this is James Nachtwey's simple but eloquent reply to the question of how he chooses sides when covering both sides of a war, "I'm on the side of humanity. That's the only side you can take." (Chapnick, 1994)

**Agenda setting and framing theories defined**

The term framing draws a clear parallel with photography. A photographer chooses what to include or exclude in each frame of an image, therefore effecting what message is presented. The idea of a theoretical frame is explained in Robert Entman’s article, Framing: Toward the Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. A frame selects certain elements and then gives them prominence. (Entman, 1993). Environmental stories are often told through the frames of crisis and conflict. Robert Entman's notion that “frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements..” has held true for environmental journalism. (Moore, R.C. 2001)

In Constructing Climate Change (Trumbo,1996), framing theory is used to look at how climate change is presented in five national newspapers in the US. The study showed that scientists tend to frame by emphasizing problems and causes, while
politicians frame with judgments and solutions. Results also show how environmental issues have become more political with the decline of scientists used as news sources. This study opens more questions about gate-keeping by the media. How do different sources influence decisions?

According to the theory of agenda setting, the media influences public priorities more than simply reflecting them. In this longitudinal study by Ader, it was found that agenda setting occurred by the media in their coverage of the issue of pollution from 1970-1990. For this study, content analysis of the New York Times was used to determine media agenda, and Gallup survey data was used to examine public agenda. Real-world conditions were added as a control variable to strengthen the design. The environment is considered an unobtrusive issue, meaning individuals have little personal contact with it, i.e. they don't spend a lot of time in direct contact with pollution. But the fact that they often rely on the media as a primary and often only source of information on the topic demonstrates a strong agenda-setting effect. This study found that the media isn't influenced directly by real-world conditions and are not effective at determining the importance of environmental issues from real-world cues. It was also found that the public needs the media to tell them how important the issue of the environment is.

A historical look at agenda setting research over the last twenty-five years provides an excellent framework to help better understand this theory and how it's previously been studied. In Building Consensus, McCombs looks at how news media can build a sense of community by reducing individual differences among people in a community. Groups were examined according to race, gender, age, income, and education. Men and women in each group were examined at three levels of exposure to
daily news to determine if consensus would increase as news exposure increased.

Findings show that news media has a significant influence on which issues the public view as important.

The topic of agenda setting is looked at in context of politics by comparing what voters said were key issues of the 1968 presidential campaign with the actual content of the media used by the voters. The importance of editors and newsroom staff in deciding what makes it to the news is looked at in terms of how it affects the public. “Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position,” (McCombs & Shaw 1972).

Peter Sandman discusses the seven principles of mass media and environmental risk. The observation that journalism focuses more on big controversies than on big health risks is neither novel nor debatable. There is a niche for public-service features about smoking, seat belts or radon, but in the absence of a news peg these perennials are bound to get less attention. Journalists are in the news business, not the education business or the health protection business. Sandman assesses that “the amount of coverage accorded an environmental risk topic is unrelated to the seriousness of the risk in health terms. Instead, it relies on traditional journalistic criteria like timeliness and human interest,” (Sandman, 1994).

Who ultimately decides which photographs are used and thus serves as the final gatekeeper?

Photo editors have the ultimate say in which images get selected for print or web.

In, A Return to “Mr. Gates”: Photography and Objectivity, Bissel looks at the
gatekeeping forces influencing photographic selection at a small newspaper. In her study, each editor gave different reasons for accepting or rejecting content (Bissell, 2000). Her research suggests these reasons are based upon the editors’ individual opinions and biases (Bissel, 2000). Bissels’ subjects most often cited an images’ content as reasons for rejection, but her study did not address the influence of the gatekeepers’ personal opinions of the images’ aesthetic merits.

**Objectivity defined**

In Subjective Objectivity, journalists in Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, and the United States were compared in terms of how they view and define objectivity. A questionnaire was given to reporters and editors involved in making daily news decisions to assess differences in the value of objectivity and how this affects the viewers perception of reality and influence on public opinion. Donsbach refers to Walter Lippmann's notion of objective journalism. “In 'Liberty and the News' (1920) he wrote: 'Without protection, against propaganda, without standards of evidence, without criteria of emphasis, the living substance of all popular decision is exposed to every prejudice and to infinite exploitation,' and: '...good reporting requires the exercise of the highest of scientific virtues,' (ibid.:82)” (Lippmann, 1920). The evolution of the definition of objectivity is studied in context of how this changed the responsibilities of journalists. (Donsbach & Klett 1993)

David Mindich's Just the Facts provides a historical look at the debate of objectivity over the last century. Walt Whitman's quote at the beginning of the book serves as a wonderful introduction to the thought of objectivity: “You shall no longer take things at second or third hand. You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things
from me, You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.” This book serves as a foundation for important definitions and a historical reference of objectivity of journalists. Objectivity is described as being the supreme deity of journalism.

Donsbach's Psychology of News Decision looks at theories of journalists’ news decisions by focusing on factors in the news, the subjective beliefs of journalists, and institutional objectives. The author holds that two general functions involving specific psychological processes can explain news decisions: a need for social validation of perceptions and a need to preserve one’s existing predispositions. (Donsbach 2004). Data from several surveys and studies among journalists are used to looks at the psychology of news decisions.

In Problems in Photojournalism, documentary photography is looked at in terms of its contributions as well as its limitations. Taylor addresses three major problems of photojournalism; its compromised nature, the push for more sensational and novel images, the fact that shocking images are a measure of a contribution to society's debate. “Media academics and commentators reject documentary photography because they believe it to be seriously compromised by its liberalism, optimism and unsustainable claims of objectivity,” (Stallabrass as quoted in Taylor, J. 2000). Photography, even in its most realistic style, is no absolute guarantee or proof of events. (Taylor, 2000). Photojournalists have the ultimate power to include or exclude information in each image, thus effecting the way it is perceived by viewers.

**How are green stories perceived by viewers?**

The greenhouse effect, global warming, global climate change: the environmental phenomenon so important that it needs three names. (Trumbo& Shanahan, 2000). The
social research presented by Trumbo and Shanahan, recognizes climate as an issue of urgency. A variety of studies are examined to determine the relationship between the science of climate change and social systems, and how they involve communication, public opinion, and public understanding. One conclusion drawn was that climate is one of the highest-stakes issues facing today's governments.

Public understanding of environmental problems is often looked at as a mass media problem. Studies have shown that media often contribute to misunderstanding of global warming and other environmental issues. In an article by (Stamm, Clark, & Eblacas, 2000) a detailed, self-administered questionnaire was given to 100 undergraduate communication students at the University of Washington. This was followed by a shorter telephone survey and a final interview with questions about how students felt about global warming. Compared with previous studies, these findings showed that the public was more knowledgeable of global warming than anticipated. There was also evidence that mass media had a positive contribution to this knowledge.

“The crucial understanding of the connection between fossil fuel consumption and climate change was significantly related to use of major media (television, newspapers, magazines, and books) and to communication through interpersonal channels (family/friends),” (Stamm, Clark, & Eblacas, 2000). This illustrates how the media can shape both what society thinks about and how they think about it. It also demonstrates the importance of our responsibilities as journalists to be both objective and inclusive.

**How does greenwashing fit in?**

The term greenwashing has been around since the early 1990's. According to the sustainability dictionary, greenwashing is the merging of the concepts of “green”
Greenwashing is defined as any form of marketing or public relations that links a corporate, political, religious or nonprofit organization to a positive association with environmental issues for an unsustainable product, service, or practice. In some cases, an organization may truly offer a “green” product, service or practice. However, through marketing and public relations, one is wrongly led to believe this “green” value system is ubiquitous throughout the entire organization.

(http://www.sustainabilitydictionary.com/g/greenwashing.php)

Is greenwashing necessarily a bad thing?

In Jenner's dissertation he attempts to better understand how interest groups achieve their goals by examining environmental public lobbying. His hypothesis is that environmental public lobbying operates as strategic framing and that text and photographs have unique and subtle effects on public opinion and policy action. (Jenner, 2005).

“If huge corporate ad campaigns help cultivate a green-conscious public that doesn't stop at voting with their dollars but also votes its greenness at the ballot box, we have a better chance of moving sustainable policies forward. Greenwashing, for all the ire it raises among the truly green, might have long term political benefits,” believes Anna Fahey, of Gristmill. (http://gristmill.grist.org)

Green journalism in action

“At Grist, we believe that news about green issues and sustainable living doesn't have to be predictable, demoralizing, or dull. We exist to tell the untold stories, spotlight trends
before they become trendy, and engage the apathetic. We're fiercely independent in our coverage;

With a fresh spin on environmental news and views, Grist informs, inspires, and links America's next generation of green activists. Grist's motto: Gloom and doom with a sense of humor. (http:gristmill.grist.org)

PDX Green

PDXgreen is a blog that aims to filter, illuminate, sift, explore, tweak, herald and question all things green, or so-called, especially when they happen in Portland or the Northwest. (http://blog.oregonlive.com/pdxgreen/)

Synthesis and what's next?

For some photojournalists, using the media to inform the public of environmental issues is a calling. Man's relationship and effect on the natural world is worthy of devotion. Many excellent photographers have devoted much of their careers to covering issues concerning the environment. Photographers approach these issues from their subjective viewpoints and their photographs reflect this. And how, in turn, they do this will result in what messages are communicated to a viewer.

When covering environmental issues, there is a place for both subjective and objective photojournalism. It has been shown that being involved with a subject or issue allows for more intimate storytelling. This allows for greater insights and deeper revelations by the photojournalist (Chapnick, 1994).

Current literature on environmental photojournalism leaves a good deal to be studied. Many opportunities exist for looking at environmental coverage by photojournalists. It would be interesting to examine how the way in which an
environmental issue is presented visually through the media effects its perception. The relationship between scientists and journalists in covering these issues should also be looked at. Is there competition to control the issue and how does this effect coverage? A closer look should be taken at how scientific information takes shape in the news media.

Societal dependence on media narratives is especially important in cases involving environmental issues, such as global climate change, where the mass media assist people in understanding obscure yet potentially threatening situations in terms of their everyday lives. Translating “issues” into meaningful “stories” essentially involves dramatic consideration, i.e., how to portray issues in the most vivid, affecting manner possible (Trumbo & Shanahan, 2000). This is where the greatest strength of the photograph comes in: to give a face and voice to important issues, thus allowing people to relate and care.
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Additional Sources for Literature Review

The theoretical framework of objectification as described by Frederickson and Roberts, implies that women’s bodies are looked at, evaluated, and potentially objectified. Through the abundance of sexualized images of the female body presented through the media, Frederickson and Roberts believe they are virtually unavoidable in American culture. The sexual objectification of the female body has clearly permeated our culture and is likely to affect most girls and women to some degree. This theory takes the fact that women are objectified as a given and aims instead at shedding light on the psychological and experiential consequences that sexual objectification might have in women’s lives. ((Frederickson & Roberts, 1997)

Objectifying gaze occurs directly through social encounters, through media that depicts social encounters, and through visual media’s depictions of bodies, (Mulvey, 1975 & Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Frederickson and Roberts point out “whereas men tend to be portrayed in print media and artwork with an emphasis on the head and face, and with greater facial detail, women tend to be portrayed with an emphasis on the body,” (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997).

Considering western cultural ideals requiring women to be thin, it’s no surprise that historical images of pregnant women are very rare throughout U.S. culture. Matthews and Wexler (2000) found very few images of pregnant women in public visual culture throughout history, and when they were found, the pregnancy was shown in a limited or idealized way. The public presentation of pregnancy was a source of cultural anxiety, and the few images women saw were very constricted reflections of themselves.
(Matthews & Wexler, 2000) In 1991, the appearance of actress Demi Moore, nude and pregnant, on the cover of an issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine began to shed light on the pregnant form, but the reactions that followed proved not all of society was ready to accept the maternal female.

Throughout much of history, the reproductive female figure was considered highly desirable, and a woman’s full stomach was touted for representing fertility, (Grogan 1999). In most societies, roundness, curves, and even obesity were seen as desirable and attractive at some point in history (Ford & Beach 1952). In the 1920’s the female beauty ideal changed from plump and curvy to slender, and this is still seen in todays media presentation of women. This ideal puts unneeded pressure on pregnant women to uphold some standard of beauty that is impossible to achieve while their bodies are performing the amazing feats of growing life. Our cultural ideals require women not only to be thin and young, but also to hide any signs of their reproductive functioning in fear of inciting negative reactions from others (Goldenberg, Goplen, Cox, & Arndt, 2007).

There are limited studies that examine how pregnant women are portrayed in the media visually. One such analysis by Hopper, 2010, examined how pregnancy images in celebrity gossip magazines impacted pregnant women through quantitative and qualitative methods. Some of her results showed that exposure to full-body sexually objectified images and text concerning pregnant celebrities resulted in more social comparison than nonobjectifying images and text (Hopper, 2010). Another content analysis by Addie Martindale examined the content of *People* magazine issues from 2000 through 2007 to look out how pregnant and postpartum bodies were presented through
written editorial content. One of the studies aims was to analyze how pregnant and postpartum bodies were framed within *People* magazine. Martindale found that pregnant and postpartum bodies were framed as physically attractive, as stylish, and/or as miraculous/amazing. It was also revealed that the pregnant and postpartum bodies were presented by *People* contributors as objects in need of bodily control and were framed as “spectacles” to be viewed, surveyed, or scrutinized by readers (Martindale, 2012). While this study focused on the written content of the magazine, it would also be interesting to do a similar analysis on how the images were used in the same or similar magazines for comparison. A study by (Sumner, 1993) examines whether the media's portrayal of the ideal woman's shape (as slim) affects pregnant women's body image distortion. The results suggest that pregnant women are affected by these media images, but that the pattern of enhanced distortion changes throughout pregnancy (Sumner, et. al. 1993).

These findings help identify issues related to how pregnant bodies are presented through media and received by pregnant women, but there is still room for additional research. While studies have shown the negative effects of media images of pregnant women, I believe the media can also play a positive role in helping society overcome its uncomfortableness with the maternal body. At the same time, journalistic and artistic representations of the pregnant form can help women feel more comfortable in their pregnant bodies.
REFERENCES


R - Well the reason I chose home birth was because I was pretty well educated about birth and did a lot of reading and knew about the interventions and knew about some of the possible problems that could happen from the interventions. So, with my first child I wanted to but I was a little hesitant because I had a health issue and I didn’t know how that would play out during the birth and it ended up not being an issue at all. And my hospital birth was a really, really unpleasant experience. I had a really long labor with my first child and I was in transition when we went to the hospital and I stalled there so I was at the hospital for another 14 or 16 hours after already being in labor for 24 hours. And just the way the hospital staff treated you like a child, like you have to do this or else this, and they would threaten you with interventions if you didn’t do what they said and there was this whole thing of...it was bullying really. I had a wonderful doctor who was a family practice physician and he stayed with me and he wasn’t going to...you know he couldn’t do a cessarean and he wasn’t going to hand me over to a surgeon unless it was really required. So he let me - I mean I pushed for four hours and that was hard. So I had 3rd to 4th degree tears for that birth, because the nurse kept whispering we’re going to have to get her a cessarean and that scared me so I just pushed him out really hard. And it was just - that was horrible. So that took 8 mo, 9 mo to recover from and I was not going back.

R - So with my second, I worked with a Midwife and we had long talks about long labors and prepared for that long labor. And it was a real textbook birth; textbook labor, delivery, the whole thing. It was probably one of the best things for my marriage. I labored on my own until 2 or 3 in the morning and then when I felt like I needed some help I woke up my husband and he got up and so we did the whole labor by ourselves, just alone in the dark. We really bonded. And then we called the midwife and her helpers. They came and Katrina was born an hour later so really the whole thing was just the two of us and that’s something that even now in our marriage if we start to struggle we both go back to that and that sense of working together and connection to feel connected again.

A - That’s awesome. I can see how it bonds you because you are totally a team and you work together.

R - Another good thing about that is the home birth is more than where you are giving birth or how you are having your child, to me it affects my whole life. I usually just had male friends more than female friends and I needed more female friends and wanted that and needing people to help me with the birth allowed me to develop those relationships and feel like I could trust women and be closer with women. So that was really healthy and I don’t think I would have done that if I didn’t need the help. And it also is hard for me to ask people for help, so that was nice to do, and feel supported. And that was another thing that I like about having the home birth.

R - Faye, she’s my third child, and what I really like about her being born at home was that her siblings were there and they remember it, and they were involved. Even though my daughter was only 3 and a half, she came in and she cut the cord and she sat with the
midwife and examined the placenta and learned about that. It was just really good for both of them. They both still like talking about the stories of when Faye was born and what I did and what they said. And so that was good too.

A - That’s something I wanted to look at too with my project, just how when other siblings are involved, their memories of it, and how that affects them.

R - My son was two and a half and he woke up just as she was being born. So he was being carried out of his bedroom and she came out and he looked at her and said, “No, that’s my mom!” and those were his first words, so he knew what it meant; that he was going to have to share.

A - Laughter. He had it figured out. And what’s your son’s name?

R - Silas.

A - So how old is he now?

R - He’s 10, he’ll be 11 next month.

A - So does he have memories of that?

R - No, he remembers that house, but he doesn’t remember the birth.

A - And they were all at different houses?

R - Yeah, I lived in 3 different houses for all of the children.

A - Some people it’s worked out that I can take pictures of them where they were born and others I imagine it won’t.

R - So we live in the house where Faye was born. And I had to recover the couch that Katrina was born on.
M - So we found out we were pregnant with Luna and like I said we’d only been dating for 8 months. So we were definitely established in our relationship so it was okay that we were pregnant. But i called the women’s center here where everybody has their babies and they just talked about forms and fees and all the technicalities having to do with basically paying them; making sure they were paid. And it was obvious that they didn’t care about how terrified I was. Or, you know I didn’t have anyone to talk to, about what pregnancy meant. How am I going to feel, what’s going to happen to my body. I didn’t have any pregnant girlfriends, you know I was young. And so I got off the phone with them and I was like “no”. This is wrong. This is just wrong. And I have had enough life experience to know that when I get that feeling, I need to go with my gut.

So my husband came home from work one day (we were not married at the time) and he had copy of The Business of Being Born. Which, you know, was the documentary that talks about home birth vs. hospital. And so we watched it and it really resonated with us and we just sat there and cried. We were like, no we are not, this is such… We loved each other so much...and our baby was...we didn’t even know what our baby was; what that meant. Our baby, like what does that even mean. But it was such a sacred thing to us already that we wanted to keep it that way. And so we started interviewing midwives. And we told my parents we were going to have a home birth.

And they lost it! My dad didn’t talk to me for a while. Um, my mom was really concerned. They didn’t understand what a licensed homebirth Midwife was. You know, because they are from a small farm town in Arkansas; people there, they have their babies in a hospital and that’s just the way that you do it because it’s the safest way to have a baby there. My dad was a little upset and told us that I was putting myself and my baby in danger. And he was really coming from a place of just not knowing. And that’s fine, I understand, but I did know and it was my body and I was willing to just be like “well I’m doing this”. My mom was offering to come “run a line of Ptosin” if I needed it. And so I immediately; I just shut her out a little bit and set some boundaries. It’s amazing how many boundaries you have to set when you get pregnant. It’s crazy!

-Laughter-

Especially with family members.

A - Yeah, that’s hard to do too.

M - It is. Cause I think they love you and they have your best interests at heart. [Their concerns are] valid, and I hear you, but “Hey this is what I’m doing.” And they didn’t know about life experiences I had had, but going to a hospital with people I’d never seen before reaching inside my body was not going to be a good thing for me. It wasn’t going to work. It was not going to work.
So we interviewed Midwives and we settled on one in town. And her name was Maria Chowdery; she took really good care of us. And then, um, I got really fat. -Laughter- Super, super fat, it was great! And went into labor with Luna and I did not realize what was going to happen. I had no idea. And it hurt like otherworldly nothing, sent me to another place, like nothing had ever hurt before. At 4 cm I was like no, I can do this no longer. You know, it’s crazy. So that birth was tough; it was at home, but it was really really hard. And I’d heard all these stories about these women who had had home births; every one of them was magical and misty and twinkly and mine was not like that, it was brutal. It hurt; it hurt down to my emotions, like way past my bones you know. Um, and my husband would not stop talking to me and coaching me along, which...I think I hit him a few times actually. He just wouldn’t stop talking! It was just intense and hard and all the things that birth is. And it was about a 20 to 24 hour labor which is typical for a first baby. But, um, afterwards I was kind of in shock. I hit transition and I remember having an out-of-body experience and hovering above the room and knowing that these people were with me, but they weren’t with me cause they were not feeling the things that I was feeling. And I kind of felt alone, you know. I feel like for American women typically when we’re going through something hard there’s always a way out, you know. We don’t have to haul water two miles a day. We do have to do the things that indigenous women have to do. There’s always a way out. There was no way out of this and it was terrifying. Even though I was respected and safe and all of those things that a woman should be during labor... I’m getting chills just thinking about it, it was horrible, just horrible.

So, um, that was my transition. And then I moved to our living room and got into the birth pool to push. And I pushed for two and a half hours, which, again, that’s typical for a first time. But I was just so exhausted and ready to get that baby out. Whatever that meant; I didn’t even know what that meant! I didn’t know. I don’t even think I realized there was a baby in there, if that makes sense, because it was my first time. So when she was born, I was on hands and knees leaning out of the birth pool and she came out behind me and i turned around and swung my leg over the cord and they handed her to me and I said nothing. For like a whole minute and a half which is like a lifetime after you’ve had a baby. And I just could not believe what had just happened. Like everything; it’s so crazy. I thought I had been everywhere emotionally in life, like I’ve seen so much, I thought I’d seen it all. So, I look down and my husband is talking to her and crying and he’s relieved, you know he’s not going to get hit anymore. -laugh- And his hands were bruised from me hanging on to him. And I look down and then I look up and I go “It’s a baby”. I had no idea, I had no idea. I don’t know, i don’t think you can know until you’ve had that little breathing, squalling little thing. And that’s another thing, she wasn’t screaming like I’d seen in the hospital birth videos that I had watched.

So after she was born, I kind of went into shock a little bit. Like an emotional shock, not a physical. And um, I took another bath and, it was just all so intense, it was the most intense birth. And then Zane held her and they ended up going and laying down in the bed together and then I joined them. And I remember laying down in the bed and just thinking what am I supposed to do now? -laugh- So there’s this new person in between us and I guess I’m just here doing whatever. But she had latched and I knew I was
supposed to nurse her and all that. And I guess I skipped over the part, but after I gave birth and we got out of the birth pool she nursed and I delivered the placenta. I’m not good at talking about timelines as far as that birth goes because I don’t remember. It felt so chaotic that it was just like a cluster mess of fear, pure fear, I was just so scared. The labor hit me like a bomb going off in the house. I woke up and it was like labor punched me in the face and was like “Wake up, you’re doing this shit today!”

I tore pretty bad and I refused sutures and so that was bed rest for two weeks. I ended up not being able to talk about birth for like three months. I was just really, really hard. I still haven’t fully processed it I don’t think. And I have a big part of me that is fearful to give birth to this baby just because I don’t ever want to go back to that place, it was like purgatory. It was horrible.

So anyway, baby’s fine, everything’s good. Baby nurses, gets super fat. 2.5 years later, my husband and I surprisingly found out we’re pregnant again. All of our babies were surprises, to put it lightly. And so I found out I was pregnant and I let out the biggest, purely hysterical laugh I’ve ever let out in my life. He was at home on his lunch break. I was like I’m 5 hours late for my period where’s that pregnancy test. So I took the test and I was pregnant. And then I thought for a second, okay, I can either run the risk of going through that again or schedule a c-section. And I seriously considered scheduling a c-section. I feel bad saying that because I know that home birth is supposed to be dreamy and lovely and my second one was but that first was just so hard.

We actually ended up using a different midwife because of my fear of it being like the first birth. So we used a different midwife, thinking that maybe seeing a different face would change it up. We decided to get some new furniture. We moved the birth pool; we went about it a different way. So I met with the midwife and she assured me that my second baby - she promised that the birth was not going to be like the first. And so after her telling me that about 374 times I believe her. And so we settled on another homebirth because I really believed it was what was safest for the baby. Of course. So, Frances, that was my second pregnancy, um, we found out we were pregnant in July, she was due in March. My first baby was 14 days late. My second baby was 6 days late. So Frances, we hired, we were really, really proactive about having a good experience and we hired a doula. My sister lived in town; she was going to help take care of my big girl. And we had our midwife. Let’s see, Frances’s labor, how did that start?

Oh it was great, it was so good. Everything was ready, I had been having like the crazy cramps for about a week in the evenings. I didn’t really think I was going into labor, like nothing is picking up. I wasn’t really leaning over having to seriously work through anything. So finally one night I started getting these tremors in my legs and I noticed I was out of garlic. We’ve got to have garlic for the initial herb bath. So I called my doula and said throw a bulb of garlic in your bag, I think something is going to happen. So I woke up about 4:45 the next morning. Thank goodness I was like, “I need to sleep”. Thank God! So I went to sleep, woke up about 4:45 the next morning. My husband co-sleeping with my daughter in the other room cause we’re making the transition so that I can take care of baby and he takes care of big girl. And so I’m in the master bedroom and
I’m timing my contractions, writing them down like, it was great. It started out great. It was no big deal. I wake him up about 5:30 AM, and “would you come in here with me.” So he calls everybody. Everyone’s so peaceful this time around, it was so much different. It was almost like we knew what we were up against. And so the doula and the midwife arrive at about 6:30. My daughter got up, started doing her morning thing. My sister who was 5 months pregnant at the time, showed up to take care of my daughter. Instead of pulling on my husbands hands this time, I had ropes hanging from these bots that were in the beams of the house. And so I got to pull on ropes which - total game changer - instead of my husband. I realized during that labor (this sounds super feminazi but) (I hate to sound this way) but I have to say this: hanging onto a woman who has been there and who has done it and who is totally connected. It’s like she’s rooted. It’s completely different than hanging on to a man who is watching his woman go through these horrible things to give birth to their baby. So I felt that insecurity in him and decided I really needed to make sure that I had either some inanimate object to hold onto or a doula or a midwife. So that was a big, big difference. He was able to do what he needed to do. I made a list of things for him to do. Men like lists, you know, they like that stuff. I’m kind of being stereotypical here but they like it, like they need stuff to do so that they’re busy and not focused on the mama bear. And so I labored, I’m going to say around 10:30, I looked at my midwife and I was in transition and I was like “should we go to the hospital?”. I was in the birth pool, pulling on these ropes and she was like, “Baby, if we go to the hospital, you’re going to have this baby in the ambulance and that’s not going to be a good thing.” And I’m like, “I need to poop.” [And she says] “Well if you poop you’re going to have the baby on the toilet so just do your thing in the pool and we’ll get you out.” So I did. I went to the bathroom in the birth pool while everyone was watching me, which you know, sometimes is really demoralizing but when you push it comes out; you can’t help it. And they are so gracious about it, they just roll up their sleeves and get it out of the birth pool. Doula work and midwifery are just pure labors of love. So sweet. It’s like, watching my doula gloveless doing that - it sounds silly, but it was the sweetest thing.

So her head was down low and I ended up needing to get out of the birth pool to have some help with gravity. And so I got out of the birth pool and I climbed up on my bed on all fours and started pushing. And my water broke, and I was hanging onto my midwife at that point. And then I was hanging onto my husband and then Zane, my husband, wanted to catch. And I wanted him to catch. And I told him to run back there and then I was hanging onto my doula which felt good, I’m glad that I was hanging onto her when my baby was born because like I said, she felt more...it’s weird, the difference. I can’t even explain it, she was very rock-like and she is not a large woman. So I pushed and Frances’s head came out and you know there was a lot of “Get it out. Oh my God, this hurts.” There was a few high pitched noises in there from the burning. And Frances’s head was out and she was making eye contact with her daddy, and looking at him. And my sister was recording and she had Luna on one hip and a camcorder in the other. And her baby in utero was kicking like crazy she said, and my big girl, Luna, says that she remembers Eli kicking her on the leg when she was being held by Carolyn. And so Frances came out, and her head was out for like 4 minutes. I couldn’t have another contraction. And so I was just like, “Get it out!” And so, Jennifer said, “Could you give
yourself some nipple stimulation to help get the baby out?”. And I was hanging onto my doula and I looked up and said, “Sarah, would you be so kind?”. And everybody died laughing, and there’s this baby’s head hanging out of my but and is was just the most hysterical thing ever. - laughter - And you know all the things: the blood, I’m naked, sweaty, large. So she lifts my bra and she’s like “Okay”. I don’t think I’m supposed to tell people, but she’s like, “Martha that’s kind of out of my scope.” So I’m like, “I’m sorry” and she’s like “No it’s fine, but I normally don’t do that for other people.” So I don’t know if I’m supposed to talk about that or not, but that’s a key part of the story.

So Frances was born and it was totally different from the first time. An overwhelming amount of gratitude washed over me. And everyone in the room including myself was just like, “Woah, what just happened.”. So then I wanted to have a party! You know to celebrate. I’m like, “Call everybody!” So then I lean back and the placenta was delivered and we do encapsulation; that’s a big deal to us, it’s a lifesaver for me. I had all my tinctures for postpartum cramping and stuff right next to the bed. The baby latched on pretty quickly. It was totally different from the first time. Totally different. And I hear a lot of these moms talk about a lot of their girlfriends who had their first at home or their first in a hospital or birth facility and then the second one at home and about how different they are. And I’m like, “But listen, you have to understand that it’s all relative.” And a lot of them are grieving because they feel like they’ve missed out on this opportunity the first time around but I don’t think that that’s necessarily true. Because my first time, I describe it as traumatic. That’s the word I use. And I’m okay with that, I’m okay using that word. But yeah, it’s not all misty and pretty just cause you have your baby at home. But my second one was, it was really good...and painful, but it was good. So that’s about it.
Me: Tell me a little bit about how your life has evolved as an artist and how you got started doing portraits

Andrew: I didn’t start photographing until I was 29 or 30, I had tried various other things: I have a degree in philosophy, and went to seminary, I was in the Peace Corps in India, and after that I worked with children who were blind and developmentally disabled and institutionalized in Texas for a couple of years. On the way home from the Peace Corps, I bought a camera and when I was working with children in Austin I started taking my camera out and taking pictures of them and my next door neighbor had built a darkroom and invited me to use it and when I started developing pictures of these kids I was immediately drawn to the process and fell in love with it and had one of those spine tingling moments where you realized that’s what you were supposed to be doing and that was in 1970 so I’ve been doing it for 44 years now. And for a while I just photographed whatever interested me, but over time I came to realize that the photos that really worked for people were the portraits. And also I had a family to support, and portrait photography is one those ways of doing photography that if you are successful at it you can make a living. So I did that, but one of the, I was determined that the photographs I make have artistic value as well as portrait value so I developed an exhibit project to kind of show people what an archival documentary black and white portrait looks like.

Me: When was that?

A: That was 1977. I worked on that project for 4 years and it toured (I got a grant) and it toured all over the state and it helped me to develop a market in Little Rock so in 1981 I moved to L.R. hoping to do more exhibit length projects and did several for several years and worked on a whole series of projects that were largely advocacy based. So I did an exhibit about developmental disability that toured all over the country and I did a project for the AIDS foundation and did work with youth at risk and the aging population and I did a whole range of things. And even recently I’ve worked with people in extreme poverty and I’ve done a series on women’s prisons and have continued to use the skills as a portrait photographer to draw attention to people who have been stigmatized and try to break down that stigma that our culture seems to be drawn to.

Me: How do you get connected with the advocacy groups that you choose to represent?

A: I usually, well it varies according to what I’m working with. The last big project I did photographed people who are served community meals at St. Paul’s church and these are almost entirely people who live in extreme poverty may sleeping outside or in makeshift kind of situations, and vary marginalized people who very often that’s the only way they have of getting for for the day is showing up for a free lunch at the church. So I photographed over 300 people in that population and put together a
book that has not been published, but I kind of hope at some point it will be published and I’ve exhibited those photographs locally so and in that case that’s the church that I go to so I just showed up and talked to the people who run that organization and got permission to photograph the people. But in the past what I’ve done is partner with specific advocacy organizations and then the advocacy organization would (or in partner with the advocacy organizations) I’d write grant proposals and get grant support to do large scale exhibit length projects. And then the advocacy organization I was working with would help me contact the people who would become the subjects of the photographic work.

Me: So the advocacy groups are the ones who would manage the grants?

A: Sometimes they would manage the grants. They are what you call pass through grants. So for example the advocacy group might apply for a grant through the natural endowment for the humanities but the understanding all the way through is the grant money will be paid to me to produce an exhibit of photographs. So the whole thing would be well organized with respect for what I was going to be paid to do and what I would do to be paid. (Exclamation)...that’s redundant I think! And of course I’ve always done client work all along to supplement, well actually I’ve earned more income from client work than from the advocacy work, but the advocacy work is the work that’s most important to me.

Is your recorder still working? seems like there is a light on that wasn’t on before...

So I photograph people’s kids and fortunately I really like photographing kids.

Me: Do you also do family portraits or just specialize in kids?

A: I prefer to just photograph children by themselves, but I do a lot of family photos too, but I prefer to photograph people individually.

Me: Do you use the same artistic approach?

A: Almost exactly the same. But when someone is paying you to photograph their kid the anticipation is different than when you are photographing somebody who is not part of the exchange of income. Most of the people I photograph for advocacy work participated in those projects because they wanted people to know about them, to know what their life were like; to challenge popular ideas about who they were.

Me: So what are some options for local galleries for displaying of work? If you say you have a traveling exhibit are there local places that display that kind of work or is it mostly through the organizations that you work with?

A: I’m 73 almost 74 so it’s been a while since I’ve... Mainly right now I’ve got a bunch of work up at my church and a lot of people go through there because they have a lot of functions there other than church functions. So a lot of people get to see
the work over there. In the past, work has been exhibited in various different kinds of municipal settings: big banks, public art facilities. I’ve had several shows at the Arkansas Arts Center in Little Rock and various other, more institutional kind of venues.

Me: I was just wondering if there were more galleries that showcase local artists in Fayetteville?

A: Yeah there are but I haven’t done that much of that kind of exhibit work in the last several years.

Me: We talked a little bit about how you find subjects. Mostly through the groups that you are trying to represent right? How did you start working with the blind children?

A: Oh, that was just a job that I applied for in 1969. I was living in Austin and I had some friends that work in this special project; it was at the state school. It was a project within the state school grounds for multiply handicapped children, that were mainly severely retarded and totally blind kids. I think there were 20-something kids involved in this project and the director of it liked to hire people that he thought would bring some measure of creativity them. Because of my Peacecorp experience they thought that I would have something to offer that project. Now I worked there for a couple of years and just learned a great deal doing that. I think that 2 years and the 2 years in the peacecorp really had a big influence on my interests and diversity, and just depicting the human family as broadly and inclusively as I possibly could. Even the occasional Republican.

Laughter

Me: Out of all of your work that you have done, what is something that you think is the most influential?

A: Over a long period of time probably the exhibit I did called We Drew a Circle in the early 80’s about people with developmental disabilities. It toured all over the country, it went to 37 different states and 18 different state capital buildings. Oh yeah, state capital buildings, a lot of my work has been exhibited in state capital buildings. And large public libraries and that sort of thing. But, I’m not done yet so… I did a major exhibit in the 90’s about people with serious mental illness and it was never very widely exhibited, but every now and then people find some interest in it. This last work that I did, at the church lunches; a significant number of people who were in extreme poverty in this country suffer from serious mental illness. You know, people just get pushed out into the street, into the criminal justice system and have no where to go. So a lot of the people that need to be treated for their illness, because the treatment opportunities are so meager, or intrusive, they just run away and end up out on the street. I’m still very much interested in trying to do some work that would change the basic situation for people with serious mental illness.
Me: I think you connect a lot with your subjects and it makes the portraits much more intimate and I’m just wondering how long you spend with your subjects and if there are tips for…

A: You know, that’s a fascinating question. The interesting thing is that sometimes I spend a lot of time with subjects, but a lot of the best photographs that I’ve ever made, I was with the subject for maybe 3 or 4 minutes. Very brief periods of time. In the 80’s I did an exhibit for an organization that was providing services to youth at risk and they had a bunch of people in one of the high schools in Little Rock they wanted me to photograph. There were like 50 kids and the principle of this high school said I was only going to be allowed to photograph for one period. So I photographed all 50 kids in one period. It was like a kid per minute. And we just lined them up in the hallways and we did this mammoth…and some of my best photographs were taken in that time. So, there’s a kind of skill that you develop with practice, you know that old 10,000 hours thing, you do it enough and you just develop a facility for becoming open with people very quickly. People can recognize openness and respect almost instantly. If you approach somebody to photograph them in a public place with a certain kind of respect they immediately appreciate that…and offer it to you in return.

Me: Yeah, I can see that, it’s like that when you are talking with anyone. You can sense if they are open and it’s much easier to talk. I saw that there is a documentary, is it still being made?

A: Yeah, it’s finished actually; they’ve just finished it. It’s going to be premiered at the Fayetteville Public Library on September 28th at 2 o’clock in the afternoon.

Me: And how did that come about, did someone approach you about making a film?

A: Some people that are good friends and are film makers just decided that they wanted to make a film that would be; it’s not a bio pic, it’s about my work more than it is about my person. Thank God. And uh, so you know hopefully, it’s about an hour long and it will be an introduction for a lot of people of how I’ve spent the last forty years.

Me: How do you choose which advocacy groups to work with?

A: Oh, gosh. You know, it just kind of appears. I don’t know how to answer that question. I think in each case of all the organizations I’ve worked with over the years it varies from organization to organization. Some organizations approach me because they were familiar with what I did. Sometimes I had particular interests and I would find an organization that was serving the people that I wanted to advocate for. It just varied from time to time.

Me: Do you ever do environmental portraits or do you stick with studio work?
A: In the last several years I’ve done...I’ve worked with a studio background. The first major exhibit I did, I did do several environmental portraits but it’s been a while since I’ve done much environmental work. Every now and then, I kind of play around with it, but really nothing very serious in quite a while.