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**MIDWIFERY PRACTICE:
AUTHENTICATING THE EXPERIENCE OF CHILDBIRTH**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Nursing at Massey University

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1988

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify, describe and provide a conceptual explanation of the process of care offered by midwives and the effects of that care on women's experiences of childbirth in hospital. Ten couple participants and their attendant midwives provided the major source of data. The primary data collection methods used in this study were participant observation during each couple's experience of labour and birthing, antenatal, hospital and postnatal interviews with couples along with formal and informal interviews with midwives.

Constant comparative analysis of data eventuated in the identification of a core category termed 'authenticating'. Authenticating, in the context of this study denotes a process that is engaged in by both midwives and birthing women in order to establish practice, and the experience of giving birth, as being individually genuine and valid. Authenticating is multifaceted and is seen to include the intertwined and simultaneously occurring phases of 'making sense', 'reframing', 'balancing' and 'mutually engaging'.

The process of authenticating is proposed as a possible conceptual framework for midwifery practice. It identifies the unique contribution the midwife can make to a couple's experience of childbirth and serves in a conceptual way to unite the technical and interpersonal expertness of the midwife. The conceptual framework of authenticating legitimizes 'being with' women in childbirth and facilitates a woman-centred approach to care with consequent implications for practice, education and research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research endeavour is the culmination of two years of study at Massey University. A very sincere thank you is extended to the faculty of the Department of Nursing Studies for providing a supportive and yet challenging and stimulating environment.

This researcher was privileged to share in the labour and birthing experience with ten women and their partners. Without their willing and enthusiastic participation, this study would not have been possible. My thanks to all of you.

Sincere appreciation is also extended to the midwives who welcomed me into their workplace and participated in the study.

Being a thesis supervisor is a challenging responsibility. I have appreciated the experienced wisdom and sheer hard work that Irena Madjar has contributed to this thesis and a special thank you is extended to you Irena.

Norma Chick and Julie Boddy have contributed to the completion of this thesis in many ways. Your encouragement and support has been greatly appreciated.

Much of the pleasure of living in New Zealand has been due to the new people I've met. In addition to being a special friend, Pat Hickson has contributed her time and computer expertise in assisting with the completion of this thesis. With Jo Walton, Joan White, Bronwyn Paterson, Wilma Young and Pat I have shared happy and special times that will not be forgotten. I thank you and know that 'miles' will not detract from the feelings of friendship and collegiality.

Appreciation is extended to the Nursing Education and Research Foundation for a grant that has assisted with expenses.

I feel very privileged to have a supportive and caring family. My love and appreciation are extended to my mother and father who regularly sent messages of their love and encouragement, to friends and colleagues in Canada, and to a very special New Zealand family who have made our stay here so wonderful.

Most importantly, my love and heartfelt thanks go to John, Christopher, Michael, and Derek who have consistently encouraged and sustained me, done without me when necessary, and together provided a loving and fun time for our family.