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MIDWIFERY PRACTICE:

UNFETTERED OR SHACKLED?

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

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1992
This thesis examines the ways that neophyte midwives experience their everyday practice world. The critical reflexive analysis of the perceptions of five practising midwives illustrate how socially generated constraints function to restrict professional midwifery care. This approach directs attention toward generating emancipatory knowledge which may assist midwives to overcome some of the contradictory and constraining conditions of their practice.

The theoretical assumptions of critical social science expose for critique the ways in which socio-political forces constrain individual and professional action. There is an underlying assumption that the collaborative nature of the research process will enable midwives to make deliberate choices between alternative courses of action. This may be achieved by subjecting values and intentions to inquiry in the light of structural constraints on individual practice situations. The study is particularly timely when legislative changes continue to contribute to the changing context of midwifery practice.

The research process and the findings of this study may provide the basis for an ongoing open-ended dialogue and critique so that midwives may be enabled to transform their practice world through collective action. Although political action was not demonstrated in the time frame of this study, it is argued that engaging participants in critique will provide the basis for an ongoing liberating effect toward autonomy and self-determination in midwifery practice.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Abstract | i |
| Acknowledgements | ii |

## PART ONE - INTRODUCTION, THEORY AND METHODS

### CHAPTER ONE - Introduction And Overview

- Context And Significance Of The Study | 1
- Structure Of The Thesis | 11

### CHAPTER TWO - Review Of The Relevant Literature

- Historical Context Of Midwifery Practice | 12
- Knowledge In Midwifery | 23
- Changes In Midwifery Education | 28
- Summary | 29

### CHAPTER THREE - Critical Theory

- Critical Social Theory | 31
- Hegemony | 33
  - Culture | 34
- Ideology-critique | 35
  - Dialogue | 38
- Power | 39
- Knowledge | 42
  - Autonomy | 43
  - Authority | 46
- Praxis | 47
- Summary | 49
CHAPTER FOUR - The Research Process

Research Design 51
An Empirico-analytic Approach To Case Study 54
A Historical-Hermeneutic Approach To Case Study 56
A Critical Approach To Case Study 57
Techniques 58
Participant Selection 58
The Setting For The Study 59
Access To The field 60
Ethical Considerations 61
Data Collection Methods 63
Participant Observation 63
Interview 64
Profile Of Study Participants 66
Midwives 66
Researcher 66
Data Analysis 68
Trustworthiness Of The Study 69
Summary 71

PART TWO - INTERPRETATION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

CHAPTER FIVE - A Conflict Of Ideologies 72

A Women-centred Approach 72
An Authoritarian Approach 82
Summary 90

CHAPTER SIX - Competing Discourses 92

Polarities Of Practice 92
Lateral Violence 94
An Invisible Culture 96
Science And Knowledge 101
Prenatal Education 106
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vested Interests</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Potential For Conflict</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN - Contradiction Between Belief And Action</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwifery Education</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Appraisals</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Constraints</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care-delivery</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT - Discussion, Recommendations and Limitations</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflexivity</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossip</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common sense</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection-in-action</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications Of This Study</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications For Midwifery Practice</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications For Midwifery Education</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications For Research</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits To Critical Social Theory</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations Of This Study</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Statement</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflection And Action
Interpretive Summary

CASE STUDY THREE - Jessica

General Introduction
A Midwifery Perspective
Taking On A Midwifery Perspective
The Doctor Will Decide In The End
Traditional Authority Versus Sharing Knowledge
Stereotyped Sex Roles
Midwifery As An Invisible Culture
Continuity Of Care
Vested Interests
A Conflict Of Values
Performance Appraisals
Work Constraints
Reflection And Action
Interpretive Summary

CASE STUDY FOUR - Ericka

General Introduction
A Practical Approach
Restoring Meaning
A Women-centred Approach
Two Approaches To Midwifery
Nonrational Versus Rational Knowing
Patriarchal Society And Gender Defined Occupations
Legitimising Midwifery Knowledge
Continuity of Care
Other Structural Constraints
Reflection And Action
Interpretive Summary