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LIVING A DIVERGENT EXPERIENCE: THE MATERNAL PERCEPTION OF CRITICAL ILLNESS

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Midwifery at
Massey University

Elizabeth Anne Reid

1997
ABSTRACT

The aim of this grounded theory study was to describe and generate a conceptual explanation of the experience of maternal critical illness. Sixteen participants provided the data which was collected over nine months. The primary data collection methods used in this study were unstructured interviews, and participant observation. Data was also obtained from three published autobiographical accounts.

Constant comparative analysis of the data eventuated in the identification of four linear stages, from the first symptoms of illness to a subsequent pregnancy, which were conceptual categories. These categories were named 'identifying a problem', 'being overwhelmed', absorbing' and 'getting on'. These conceptual categories were drawn together in the core category, a basic social process 'Living a divergent experience of childbearing'.

The experience of childbearing for the women in this study diverged from the sociocultural expectations of childbearing in New Zealand and from their personal expectations. Their divergent experience of childbearing informed their continuing perception of childbearing as an illness which risked maternal life. These findings have implications for midwifery practice, education and research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is the culmination of two years study at Massey University. The thesis itself represents a year of challenge, stimulation, hard work, and a progressively antisocial lifestyle. It gives me pleasure to acknowledge and thank those who have helped and supported me during the process of completing this research.

Firstly, my sincere appreciation is extended to the women who took the time to share their stories with me. I was privileged to have met and spent some time with them. This study would not have been possible without them. Their honesty and enthusiasm was a powerful incentive for me to finish this study.

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I thank my friends and co-workers for their interest and support; for continuing to ask how this study was progressing knowing, as they asked, that they would certainly be told.

Finally, my love and heartfelt thanks go to my family. To my father who has long believed that not only could I complete a master's degree but that I should. His pride and belief in my endeavors kept me going. To Lawrence who tolerated my disappearing for hours on end to work on this study and, as always, considered my needs before his own.
PROLOGUE

There are no Honest Poems
About Dead Women

What do we want from each other
after we have told our stories
do we want
to be healed  do we want
mossy quiet stealing over our scars
do we want
the powerful unfrightening sister
who will make the pain go away

(Lorde, 1986, p.61)
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