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**PARTNERSHIP, POWER AND POLITICS:
FEMINIST PERCEPTIONS OF MIDWIFERY PRACTICE**

VALERIE E. M. FLEMING

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**MASSEY UNIVERSITY
NEW ZEALAND
SEPTEMBER 1994**

ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an interpretative critique of the partnership of a group of independent midwives and their clients in urban New Zealand. A theoretical basis grounded in the principles of feminism but incorporating aspects of critical social science and postmodernism underpins both the methodological approach and analysis of data. The major concepts of subjectivity, power/knowledge and praxis have been utilised as tools for analysis of data, primarily collected through semi-structured interviews.

Results of this study showed that while the partnership of midwife and client became increasingly intense as each pregnancy progressed, and participants reported that it was important that clients knew their midwives prior to labour, feelings of intimacy and trust only emerged during and after labour. Midwives in this study were aware of the power they had and the potential for abuse of this power despite the notion of partnership.

It is argued that the reflexive processes involved with this research have motivated the participants to become aware that their knowledge and actions are shaped by aspects of the dominant social order. While collective political action by midwives and clients with a view to overcoming this was not fully demonstrated in this study, it is suggested that by engaging in this research there may be ongoing emancipatory effects for the participants and other midwives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have assisted and supported me throughout the time I have been undertaking this work. To each of them I wish to express my deep appreciation and heartfelt thanks. While it is not possible to name everyone here, there are those whom I especially wish to mention.

To all the participants in this study, thanks for agreeing to join me on this journey. Your commitment was wonderful and I hope that you have enjoyed the process of sharing thoughts and ideas as much as I have done.

My partner, Edna Rose, has given me the space and time to undertake this research. For this and for listening to me throughout the process my heartfelt thanks. Our stimulating discussions and debates on midwifery have also helped me focus my thoughts and ideas.

To my supervisors, Julie Boddy, Sandra Speedy and Judith Clare thanks for your patience and academic guidance and challenges to me throughout the period of this study.

There are also many friends and colleagues both in the world of midwifery and in other disciplines such as nursing and medicine who have challenged and encouraged me at various times as this thesis was unfolding. To each of you goes my thanks.

Finally, the Travel Grant and Academic Women's Award from Massey University are acknowledged with appreciation.

PREFACE

This thesis is written entirely in the first person. Initially this felt somewhat uncomfortable, as academic writers rarely use the personal pronoun "I" for reasons of maintaining objectivity. However, as noted by Reason (1981) the concept of objectivity becomes redundant as researchers move from a controlling position to that of a facilitator. Sandelowski (1993) also points out that the loss of objectivity need not mean the loss of rigour.

Feminist researchers such as Duffy (1985) and Webb (1992) have further developed the ideas proposed by Reason and have suggested that the use of the third person is inappropriate in feminist research in which reflexivity between the researcher and participants is a key concept. Such reflexivity is particularly appropriate in this study which focuses on subjectivities and relationships.

It is also equally appropriate that the participants are acknowledged and although for reasons of confidentiality it is not possible to name these participants, pseudonyms approved by each, rather than initials or codes have been used. This helps to maintain the personhood of each participant and is in keeping with feminist thought.

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