



# **THE GOOD MIDWIFE AND THE VALUE OF A MATERNAL APPROACH TO CARE**

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# Definition of Care

- Swanson (1991:163) defines caring as:  
a nurturing way of relating to a valued other  
towards whom one feels a personal sense of  
commitment and responsibility.
- Five interrelated processes that characterise the  
meaning of care;  
knowing, being with, doing for,  
enabling and maintaining belief.





# Care as Emotional presence

- Use of compassion and empathy (Swanson 1991)
- Midwife is a professional friend (Walsh 1999)
- Midwives' relationships with women (Wilkins 2000; Deery 2009)
- Emotional support (Mander 2001; Hodnett et. al 2007)
- Sensitivity and intuitiveness from midwives (Leap 2000)





# Care as Matrescence

- Nurturing of the new mother as matrescence; care as 'mothering' and an attitude to care (Walsh 2006)
- Mothering qualities as an aspect of the empathetic approach to care
- Forcey (1994:357) defined mothering as:  
'...the socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people. '





# Methodology

- A reflexive auto/biographical approach supported by use of Gadamerian phenomenology
- Twenty seven in-depth interviews
  - study group of 14 midwives
  - study group of 13 mothers





# The identity of the good midwife 1

- Being a good midwife is different from being a competent midwife
- Perceived to have more than technical skills (Nicholls and Webb 2006)
- Good midwives display a maternal approach
  - Active listening and good communication skills
  - Supportive and empathetic
  - Identifies the mother's need for support, reassurance and comfort
  - Physical aspects of care







## Mothers' Accounts

- I think when you are feeling quite vulnerable and you're in that kind of situation, especially with your first baby, I think that no matter how old you are you want to be mothered...

[Angela-mother of two children]

- ...it was like having you know, your mum, you know, just to give you a bit more reassurance....

[Emily-mother of one child]





## Intuitiveness

- ...although I hadn't really known or built up much of a relationship she obviously picked up because I didn't mention anything the minute I got there and she said, "you're not yourself, what's wrong?" ...the fact that she picked up immediately without me saying anything that I wasn't myself I was really, really, really appreciative, you know.

[Belinda-mother of two children]







# The value of a maternal approach to care

- Creates a safe and supportive environment to share information
- Provides reassurance
- Mothers feel safe
- Increases confidence
- Mothers feel empowered and a focus of their care
  - the midwife has made an effort to know and understand them





## Possible Challenges

...I just felt she really, it was like being mothered really, I know that sounds like a silly thing to say but I felt I was like a child (laughs) in a nice way but she really looked after me

[Carrie-mother of one child]

### Issues:

- Challenges the dynamics of the relationship between mother and midwife
- May limit the experience of informed choice and shared-decision making





# Summary

- Emotional engagement is a key feature of midwifery care and draws attention to the relationship between midwifery and motherhood
- The identity of the good midwife is represented by a maternal approach to care
- The maternal approach to care has positive benefits for the mother but it may also challenge the relationship between the midwife and the mother





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