

Thesis link: Messaging re infant psychological wellbeing. # 270

[Mothers matter: a critical exploration of motherhood and development through a video card intervention in a local clinic](#)

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Abstract:

New discourses of foetal and infant development, individual well-being and population futures, argue that mothers matter during the first thousand days of a baby's life, which commences from conception to the age of two. Women, particularly (black, working class) pregnant women and mothers, have consequently become the target of several international and local interventions related to maternal and child health (MCH) and early childhood development (ECD). The Together from the Beginning video card is one such intervention that emphasises the value of MCH and ECD, as supported by the latest scientific research, and that presents diverse childcare knowledge and practices to parents and caregivers. The video card intervention was piloted and evaluated over a two-month period in the waiting areas of the antenatal clinic and Midwife's Obstetrics Unit (MOU) at a Community Health Clinic (CHC) situated outside of Cape Town. A total of eighty participants, including sixty pregnant women, eight partners or fathers of their babies, ten nurses and two counsellors, were interviewed and observed during this time. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the clinic, this thesis argues that while mothers do matter in the physical development of babies, mothers are 'developmentally constructed' and thus 'made to matter' through MCH and ECD development discourses and interventions that reinforce and normalise dominant discourses of motherhood. More specifically, it will be shown how three different maternal figures – 'the waiting mother', 'the educated mother', and 'the ideal mother' – were produced, developed and 'made to matter' within public healthcare spaces for the sake of development, which in turn reframed and undermined the time, knowledge, and experiences of these women.

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