This article by Jean Walker (1976) was my first introduction to the professional tensions in midwifery. In fact, it was given to me by the author, with whom I had the privilege to work, shortly after I joined the staff in Nursing Studies at The University of Edinburgh. I don't recall the circumstances but I recall my reaction to the article.

My experience of midwifery until that point had been four weeks during my nurse training at St George's Hospital in London. My group was under the supervision of the legendary midwife Caroline Flint who initiated the - for its time - innovative 'Know your midwife' scheme whereby expectant couples met the midwife who would probably deliver their baby and who, if all went well, would be with them through their maternity journey. I was also exposed to the Radical Midwives, some of whom were members of my trade union branch. With these early mentors in my nursing career I never considered that midwives either suffered from an identity crisis or that their role was not understood.

Walker's article is based on a paper delivered at a conference in Denmark a few years earlier and was based on a study funded by the UK Department of Health (DH) while Walker was working as a Research Fellow at University College Cardiff in Wales, UK. The latter point alone is nostalgic as the days are long past since the DH funded research and I was lucky enough to be a recipient of DH research funding many years ago. Also, the fact that the DH would fund this type of research is reminiscent of better days,
ironically, for research into nursing. I simply cannot imagine them funding such a study now.

The article also shows that, despite its name, JAN included material on midwifery from the outset and that controversial issues were not going to be avoided. The presentation of the article is also interesting. Being based on a conference paper it is not structured like a research paper and, despite the fact that it is based to some extent on research, the description of methods is quite scant. The data were gathered in the course of 'long' interviews with midwives and obstetricians and also on the basis of three questions which could be the response of a midwife during a normal delivery if an obstetrician arrives. It was largely assumed by the obstetricians that they should take over and it was largely assumed by the midwives that they should not.

I view this article by Walker as a 'JAN classic' because it demonstrates the pioneering nature of JAN and the extraordinary vision of Dr Jim Smith, the Founding Editor. It is also worth noting that Jean Walker went on to become the first editor of Nurse Education Today, now on its fourth editor and one of the most established international nursing education journals.

Roger Watson, Editor-in-Chief
Reference