

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Department of Adult Education

**LEARNING SELF NURTURANCE  
AND UNLEARNING PATRIARCHY:  
A FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF  
RURAL MOTHERS' CONSTANTLY SHIFTING IDENTITY**

A Thesis in

Adult Education

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

May, 2005

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to glean insight from and illuminate the lived stories of four working mothers of school-aged children living in a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven community. The objective was to discern how the perceived realities of this cultural context influenced the mothers' understanding of and engagement in the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance as a facilitator of their personal health and well-being.

The theoretical perspective of feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self were the guiding framework for this narrative inquiry. Feminist poststructuralism considers the positionality of women within society and in this particular inquiry offers a lens to address the intersections of identity as a mother, patriarchy, rural living, and conservative religious beliefs of the women who were engaged in this narrative inquiry.

Data collection was completed through an initial interview, journaling, a follow-up interview, creative synthesis project, and a final group process dialogue between the mothers and researcher. It was not surprising that each mother had her own story to tell during this narrative inquiry which comes through magnificently as *narratives in motion*. In addition to each mothers' unique narrative central themes arose from various angles during the story-telling which were revealed as *intersecting narratives in motion*.

This study contributes to the field of adult education in four primary ways. First, it presents findings from a narrative analysis inquiry of an ignored population that of rural mothers and their informal learning in a rural, religiously conservative,

and patriarchal-driven environment particularly as this learning relates to self nurturance. Second, the study offers to the field additional insights as to what narrative analysis research might look like when guided from a feminist poststructuralist perspective. Third, in addition to drawing on the elements of feminist poststructuralist theory and practice, it highlights the importance of creativity in ways perhaps implied but not highlighted in other discussions of feminist poststructural theories and pedagogies. Fourth, and most significantly for pedagogical implications, it highlights a shift in the notion that women's identity is primarily developed through relationships with others. The outcome of this study brings to light that a woman needs time to go within and develop a relationship with self demonstrating the importance of the notion of non-unitary self in terms of coming to know, learning about, and engaging in personal health and well-being.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals who have facilitated my learning and ways of knowing upon this journey and to them I owe a debt of gratitude. First, my deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell for her unwavering encouragement and guidance throughout this process. Her insightful direction, patience, and care throughout this process allowed me to succeed. I further extend gratitude to Dr. Daniele Flannery who taught me how to have grace under pressure and encouraged me to write when I thought I had nothing left to say. I also want to thank Dr. Holly Angelique and Dr. Mary Napoli for their encouragement and support throughout this journey of learning.

My deepest appreciation must next be extended to Jere, Brandt, and Blake who always believed in me and never failed to encourage me to continue upon this journey of knowing and becoming. You had me at hello - I admire and adore you so much!

Warm and gracious heartfelt thanks to my *Blue Skky Sisters*. Without you - Julie Beck, Marion Edmiston, Joan Ports, Andrea Kirshman, Marilyn Parrish, Lisa Ruth-Sahd, and Kay Shattuck - I would have indefinitely lost my way! Your friendship, words of wisdom, and steadfast humor allowed me to enjoy and endure the emotional highs and lows. Furthermore, I must thank all of the kind and caring friends in my life who listened to the constant hum of my tune, "I'll go to lunch and/or help you with that project as soon as I'm done writing". There are too many of you to name, but you know who you are and I deeply appreciate your patience and generous spirits!

Next, without the truth of their lives this inquiry would not have been possible. I owe a debt of appreciation to Laci, Roxy, Victoria, and Grace for taking time out of their very demanding schedules to tell me their stories. I wish only the best for these amazing women as they continue to balance life in order to find sweet moments to nurture self.

Finally, I also wish to thank Abby, Jamie, Mary Jane, and Roby. Your willingness to take care of whatever I needed at a moment's notice without question along with your prayers, unconditional love, and support throughout this journey did not go unnoticed!

## DEDICATION



This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my grandmothers, Mary Ellen Poe and Anna Nenninger Wingert. Their encouragement, creative teachings and spirit of faith urged me to walk onto this path of learning. This doctoral journey has been a blessed journey – it has afforded me the time to appreciate and acknowledge the faithful and nurturing women who impacted my way of knowing, being, and becoming.

By taking time to spiral back and engage in the creation of a *significant translation*, I have gleaned that I do not have to reinvent myself; I need only go with the flow of my constantly shifting identity. I owe testimony to these two strong and faithful women who walked before me - who made nurturing self a part of their daily walk and knew intuitively that it was the basis of their health and well-being. Mary and Anna truly knew what it meant to be quiet and still in those moments that tend to overwhelm and cause confusion. I have found throughout this journey it is when the gap between our inner knowing & outer actions become too wide that we must return to those whose wisdom continually shines brightest in our lives.



## **PART I**

Part I of includes the first three chapters of this narrative analysis inquiry.

Chapter one offers the introduction and purpose of the inquiry, chapter two offers an extensive review of the related literature, and chapter three offers a detailed description of narrative inquiry as the methodology.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*The shape of one's knowing becomes the shape of one's doing, being and becoming.*  
Author Unknown

This chapter provides an overview of a narrative inquiry that sought to glean a more informed and in-depth understanding from stories of four working mothers of school-aged children and how they pursued and engaged in self-nurturance within a rural, religiously conservative, and historically patriarchal-driven context. The chapter includes the background to the problem, a purpose statement, guiding research questions, an overview of the theoretical framework undergirding the study, an overview of the research methodology, an identification of the significance of the study, and a delineation of the assumptions and limitations associated with the study.

#### Background of the Study

My interest in facilitating a narrative inquiry with mothers of school-aged children living within rural, religiously conservative, historically patriarchal-driven environment and their subsequent journey to situate self-nurturance within their daily living stems from my experience as a woman, a mother, and as an occupational therapist interested in women's wellness education within rural communities. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, "Narrative inquires are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). As a woman living within this contextual environment I have consistently received unconstructive messages about how much time and effort I should

put forth nurturing self. The majority of the messages I have received over the years questioned whether I should, as a wife and mother, take time away from my household, husband, and children to facilitate and/or maintain my own personal health and well-being. One of my closest and dearest friends, who happens to be a woman, has posed this thought to me numerous times throughout the years, “Is it really appropriate for you to take time away from your children and husband to have a facial or sign up for a painting class – what if the boys need you and you aren’t available because you are doing something for yourself – what if all mothers spent time taking care of themselves – who is going to cook, clean, and help the children with their home-work?” A religiously conservative man within the community, who has always been slightly irritated with my independent nature, once told me “Your place is in the home – you don’t need time for yourself – your children and husband *always* come first!” These and similar messages from my socio-cultural environment have facilitated my confused narrative about the worthiness of my identity as it relates to a mother who nurtures self. As an occupational therapist I have struggled for nearly a decade to conceptualize and move forward with an educational program focused on facilitating mothers’ engagement in nurturing self within this socio-cultural environment.

At this juncture, it is important to explain what self-nurturance means to this inquiry which is focused on in-depth narratives. For the purpose of this study, self-nurturance refers to the invaluable and precious time required to refuel a mother’s mind, body and spirit -- those moments of time that mothers capture to take walks, engage in gourmet cooking classes, write in journals, and/or join a book club. Additionally, as a function of this study, self-nurturance is defined as a meaningful occupation which

supports and enhances mothers' overall health and well-being. In occupational therapy, meaningful occupation is defined as those experiences which promote, enhance, and/or maintain an individual's state of well-being (Christiansen, 1999). It has been further defined by Pierce (2001) as being personally constructed within perceived temporal, spatial and socio-cultural conditions. Wilcock (1998) describes engagement in meaningful occupation as, "the synthesis of doing, being and becoming" (p. 249). Consequently, in the field of adult education, Parker Palmer's (2000) perspective of coming to know self enough to allow one's life to speak of its needs is closely related to Wilcock's interpretations of doing, being, and becoming (Hasselkus, 2002).

During the past decade as a mother, woman, and as an occupational therapist I have heard other mothers wanting to engage in self nurturance; however, due to both time constraints and socio-cultural influences that told them their needs are less important than husband and children they had left the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance unexplored, untouched, and unattained. Nurturing self and taking care of one's emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual needs is important to women's overall development, thus the conceptualization of this study was that self-nurturance and women's development of self must be dealt with simultaneously. It would be impossible to address nurturing self without the parallel notion of women's formation of self. Therefore, the focus of this inquiry was to deconstruct mothers' lived stories around nurturing self within their contextual environment and how their identities shifted over time as they attempted to or successfully engaged in self-nurturance.

As will be discussed later, key assumptions of the study were grounded in the feminist poststructuralist notions of constantly shifting identity and non-unitary self.

The notion of non-unitary self is defined by Clark (1999) as a self that is consistently challenged by society and split between an experience and the interpretation of the experience. What one thinks and feels about one's self is not totally in that individual's control; rather it is largely shaped by ideas and experiences within many different contexts in light of gender, race, class, religion geographical location, etc. The conjecture is that as an individual's knowing and understanding of how these factors influence their constantly shifting identity, a conscious-raising is developed, hence individuals have an enhanced understanding and management over their doing, being, and becoming.

This narrative analysis served as a means of focusing on the mothers' ownership and investment in self-nurturance as a positive determinant of their health and well-being. I was hopeful that by the conclusion of this study, the mothers had a deeper understanding of their constantly shifting identities and the impact discourse and power had within their environment on their learning, knowing about, and participation in self-nurturance. In addition, I was certain this narrative study would assist me in understanding how to more efficiently and effectively organize wellness education for mothers within this specific cultural context.

#### Need for the Study: Situating the Problem

In light of insights from my personal life and professional practice it was my impression that there was a preponderance of women, more specifically mothers with school-aged children living within this environment, who did not consider or engage in self-nurturance primarily for three reasons. First, they had a limited awareness of its value in relationship to their overall health and well-being. Secondly, they found the

contextual and socio-cultural barriers of engagement too great to overcome. Thirdly, these women did not feel they have the right to engage in self-nurturance. Throughout my years of living within this socio-cultural context, I had noted nurturance of self was not generally highly regarded; therefore it was rarely thought of or even talked about as a facilitator of women's health and well-being.

Again, I must note that I had heard mothers tell stories over and over again about not engaging in self-nurturance which revealed the basic fact of these women having limited amounts of time and energy; however, this fact appeared to be compounded by an overwhelming feeling of guilt and responsibility to make those around them content and comfortable above and before nurturing self. These mothers shared an unspoken truth with me - they knew they are neglecting and sacrificing self-nurturance, however, they had been unable to resolve key barriers in their path towards this important component of mothers' personal health and well-being.

As a researcher, I wanted to further explore mothers' stories of negotiating self-nurturance, in relation to their culturally defined roles and responsibilities as a mother with school-aged children. By engaging in this narrative inquiry, it was hoped that both the researcher and participants would construct an expanded understanding of women's identity and more importantly their role in nurturing self. My agenda was to find four mothers willing to participate in the study and then glean insight from their stories. I then planned to narrate their stories in an effort to afford them the opportunity to reflect upon their constantly shifting identities within their cultural surroundings and determine how this impacts their balance of self-nurturance, health and well-being. As Tisdell states (2001):

It is the unpacking of the story around issues of positionality, and the critical reflection, both on the story and on the story's unpacking that helps us understand our constantly shifting identity around systems of power, privilege and oppression that inform our lives. It raises our consciousness, it changes our behavior, it does indeed, move us to action (p. 283).

By affording these mothers the opportunity to share their stories around the cultural paradigms of motherhood, rural living, conservative religious beliefs/value systems and patriarchy, I suspected that they would better understand the state of their constantly shifting identities and how this negatively and/or positively impacted their ability to nurture self.

Within the field of women's studies, Carol Ryff (1985) has argued that research needs to focus on combinations of identity, experience and development as they specifically address lived experience. While conceptualizing the study I felt that many mothers were unable to validate and put worth on the learning they incurred while engaging in meaningful occupations that were focused on self. As an occupational therapist, I conceived this lack of importance and negotiation of self to other's needs on a consistent basis was having a negative impact on mother's health and well-being.

Studies have been completed about women's inability to care for self; however, these studies are fueled by issues such as eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and older women's life experiences of well-being (Morris, 2000; Rashotte, 1997; Sherwood, 2000). Recently, Nemcek (2003) reviewed nineteen research studies conducted within the past eight years specifically related to self-nurturance. The research topics focused on eating disorder studies, ways of living (i.e., surviving grief and living

with HIV/AIDS), and well adults (i.e., employees and college students). The research methodology for these studies included phenomenology, grounded theory, concept analysis, descriptive, and quasi-experimental.

There is a substantial amount of literature that consistently heralds women as being nurturers of others; however none of the literature addresses why mothers consistently do not find the time, the privilege, and/or learning experiences aimed at nurturing self (Bateson, 1990; Chodorow, 1978; Duffy, 1991; Esdallie & Olsen, 2004; Gilligan, 1987; Ruddick, 1989). In addition, literature from the field of psychology implies that women have been socially constructed to take care of others, which consequently informs the basis of their identity of self (Duffy, 1992; Gilligan 1987; Kegan, 1994; Miller, 1986, 1990; Rogers, 1961). Throughout my review of the literature on women's construction of self and nurturance of self, it became increasingly evident that the voices and experiences of mothers nurturing self, no matter what socio-cultural environment they are living in, are absent.

Several research and conceptual pieces focused on women consistently advocate for inquiries that will offer a greater understanding of women's learning and knowing (Bateson, 1996; Collins, 1990; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 1994). From a narrative inquiry perspective Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, "We need to continually ask questions about the way narrative inquiry illuminates the social and theoretical contexts in which we position our inquiries" (p. 124). By engaging in narrative analysis inquiry guided by the theoretical perspectives of feminist poststructuralism and non-unitary self, whereby women's voices and stories were heard first hand, I hoped to contribute to the acknowledgement that this type of inquiry is important enough to put time, faith and



effort into as a woman, mother and researcher. I feel this contribution has constructed new knowledge which will inform the way women teach, learn and engage in self-nurturance.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative analysis study was to glean insight from and illuminate personal stories of four working mothers of school-aged children living in a defined cultural context and to explore how the cultural realities impacted their engagement in self-nurturance. The study took place in a rural Northeastern community, which was defined by the following characteristics: Ninety-five percent white or Caucasian with fifty-one percent of the population being female. Seventy-two percent of the households are two parent households with sixty-four percent of these households having both parents in the labor force. Seventy-six percent of the business industry within the community is owned and operated by men. Of the twenty religious faiths in the community, the largest percentage is identified as conservative Christian (i.e. Bible, Brethren, Pentecostal, and Mennonite).

The narrative inquiry was completed in an effort to gain a greater understanding of the complexities and multiplicities that influence four mothers' lived experiences of self-nurturance. With the above described context, as DuPlessis (1985) states, "Women need to make the conflicts that emerge from their marginalized status and their rebellions against marginalization *central* to their stories" (p. 67). It was the purpose of this narrative inquiry to provide an opportunity where four mothers' gendered perspectives

and subjectivities, within their specific socio-cultural context, are created into narratives as they related to self-nurturance (Bloom, 1998).

### Guiding Research Questions

The goal of this narrative analysis inquiry was to concentrate on the socio-cultural contextual issues that influenced engagement in self-nurturance for the mothers who participated in this study. Specific questions that I was concerned with were as follows:

1. How do these women explain their identity as a mother living within a rural, religiously conservative and historically patriarchal-driven environment?
2. What positive and/or negative messages have these mothers received within their contextual environment about engaging in self-nurturance?
3. How have these mothers re-negotiated aspects of their identity over time in order to nurture self within their cultural environment?
4. What aspects of self-nurturance are these women still struggling with at this point in time, secondary to perspectives and notions of the cultural environment?
5. How has past and present engagement of self-nurturance been simple and/or complex in relation to gender within this cultural environment?
6. How has past and present engagement of self-nurturance been simple and/or complex in light of living in a rural environment of conservative religious beliefs/values and patriarchal-driven systems?

## Overview of Theoretical Framework

After considering many theoretical perspectives and insights gleaned from everyday experience, the theoretical perspective of feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self were most appropriate as the guiding framework for this study. Feminist poststructuralism considers the positionality of women within society and offers a lens to address the intersections of gender, rural living and conservative religious beliefs of the women who will be engaged in this narrative inquiry. Weedon (1997) broadly describes the relationships among the different aspects of positionality as discourse, knowledge, and power. Positionality being the intersections of social structures such as race, class, sexual orientation, geographical location, etc. (Tisdell, 2000). Furthermore, St. Peirre and Pillow (1998) state “the representation of positionality is always in crisis, knowledge is constitutive of power, and agency is the constitutive effect, and not the originator, of situated practices and histories” (p. 5). The mothers engaged in this study were and still are deeply embedded and situated within a socio-cultural context that for the most part does not understand and/or promote the discourse and active engagement of mothers nurturing self.

For this reason, the premises of non-unitary self were an integral part of the study. Actually, it is difficult to understand the notions of feminist poststructuralism without considering the notions of non-unitary self. Non-unitary self is defined by Robinson (1999), as “the active and continual process of production of self within historical, social, and cultural boundaries...non-unitary subjectivity is an ongoing process of production and transformation [and]...a *doing* rather than *being*” (p. 11). Non-unitary subjectivity is a compatible venue for narrative inquiry, since the participant usually feels

more open to exploring multi-layers of self. The experience most often opens up the self-reflective nature of the participant (Bloom, 1998). Furthermore, it is extremely constructive to combine social appraisal with the theoretical perspectives of non-unitary self. This approach encourages the clarification of the cultural norms, power issues, and dominant ideologies that an individual must navigate and negotiate throughout their daily lives (Bloom, 2002). In this light, the notion of non-unitary self just made sense from my perspective as a woman, mother, and researcher.

By utilizing feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self as the theoretical lens guiding these mothers' narratives related to self-nurturance, it was anticipated that cultural norms would be challenged and their participation in nurturing self would be facilitated by the insights gained in relation to the deconstruction and construction of their constantly shifting identity among the intersections of gender, rural living, conservative religious beliefs/value systems, and patriarchy.

### Significance of the Study

Specifically, this narrative inquiry sought to tell the stories of four mothers who kindly gave of their time, among already overwhelming schedules, during a five month period as a means to open up dialogue in relation to their personal health and well-being. To this end, the four mothers who participated in this study presented narrative accounts of nurturing self around the cultural realities of motherhood, rural living, conservative religious beliefs/values, and patriarchy.

This study is significant to adult education in that it considered women's learning outside of academic structures utilizing deconstructed narratives. Stories from women

about their lives and learning continue to be voices that need to be considered within the field of adult education (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Consequently, at the recent *Mid-Atlantic Women's Studies Associations Annual Conference*, Mary Catherine Bateson (2004) noted the need for adult educators to actively pursue inquiries focusing on women's lived experiences and stories in rural communities.

Furthermore, there continues to be a need for the employment of feminist methodologies focusing on the diverse frameworks of women's learning within the field of adult education (Bloom, 1998; Brooks, 2000; Clark, 2001). The significance of this study utilizing the feminist poststructuralist philosophy was that it facilitated a collective group of women to question the circumstances of various oppressive forces alongside their routines of health and well-being. This philosophical standpoint appeared to give these mothers more of an opportunity to question what had been facilitating and/or squelching their collective health & well-being. A narrative study of mother's nurturance of self guided by feminist poststructuralist philosophy afforded the opportunity to dive deep into the societal norms/thoughts about how the four mothers did or did not nurture self on a daily basis. It moved them to question, challenge, and critique society's minimalist notion of women's health and well-being (World Health Organization, 2002).

Lastly, this study is significant for occupational therapy theory and practice. Yerxa (1998) purports that occupational therapists must develop a better understanding of how to assist individuals in learning how to promote their own status of health and well-being. She states, "Occupational therapists need to learn much, much more about how human beings develop adaptive skills, rules, and habits that enable competence...such knowledge of "coaching" could benefit all persons who need to develop skills in order to

survive, contribute, and achieve satisfaction in their daily life occupations...” (p. 418).

In addition, it is gleaned from a wide range of literature on women’s learning that women who have a greater understanding of their own learning and knowing can more effectively and efficiently promote the positive aspects of self (Belenky, et. al., 1986; Goldberger, et. al., 1996; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 1994). The outcome of this study provides occupational therapists with a greater understanding of how mothers, who were up against socio-culturally prescribed issues of power and discourse, attempted to and successfully engaged in the meaningful occupation of nurturing self.

### Overview of Research Design and Methodology

Narrative analysis or narratology was utilized as the methodology for this inquiry in an attempt to understand the mothers’ process of nurturing self and how this plays out in their everyday lives. The narratives focused around the cultural realities of motherhood, rural community living, religious values/belief systems and patriarchy and it was guided by feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self. As Bloom (1998) states, “Personal narratives provide primary data through which we can explore ways that different dominant ideologies and power relations are maintained and reproduced, or subverted in the discourses of the respondent’s narratives” (p. 145).

Reissman (1993) describes narrative analysis as the investigation of a story, in order to discern how individuals telling the story make sense of their actions and the surrounding contexts of the story. Mishler (1995) feels there are many methods of approaching, defining, and studying narrative analysis. He feels the researcher should be clear in the design and methodological premises under which they will conduct their

study. Denzin (1989) provides insight to the notion of narratives in the following statement:

A narrative is a *story* that tells a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator and his or her audience. A narrative as a story has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end. It has an internal logic that makes sense to the narrator. A narrative relates events in a temporal, causal sequence. Every narrative describes a sequence of events that have happened. (p. 37)

As noted earlier, this narrative analysis inquiry was informed by feminist poststructuralism. Bloom (1998) contends there are three core objectives that theoretically structure a feminist poststructuralist approach to narrative research. These core objectives are as follows: (a) the study focuses on individual life stories of women as the primary source of data; (b) narratives of *self* as a location from which the researcher can generate social critique and advocacy is necessary and (c) deconstruction of self as a humanist conception, allowing for non-unitary conceptions of self by women is a primary goal for narrative inquiry. The challenge for me, as stated by Polkinghorne (1995) was to, “Construct a display of the complex, interwoven character of human experience as it unfolds through time” (p. 18). As a researcher, I planned to focus on Bloom’s charge those poststructuralist feminist researchers engaged in narrative analysis inquiries must, “Embrace the idea that an understanding of non-unitary subjectivity in women’s lives is critical” (p. 3). The concept of non-unitary self was critical to this study because it was utilized as the grounding by which these mothers explore the multi-faceted, multi-layered, complex and fragmentation of self within this specific socio-

cultural context and how this notion of self impacts their past, present and future nurturance of self.

Bloom (1998) further suggests that any narrative, which utilizes the notion of non-unitary self as a theoretical lens, is a solid grounding for studies that wish to get to the heart of women's stories. Narratives are indispensable resources for occupational therapists since they are individual interpretations and perspectives of their engagement in meaningful occupation (Wicks & Whiteford, 2003). To this end, it was the goal of this narrative study to gain a deeper understanding of how working mothers with school-aged children living in a rural, religiously conservative, and historically patriarchal-driven environment nurture self, while at the same time deconstructing the foundations on which their daily living is constructed and experienced (Bloom, 1998). Within this inquiry, four mothers elaborated and offered extensive accounts of nurturing self as related to the realities of their socio-cultural context. It involved my careful interpretation as I completed an in-depth analysis of and reflected upon the experiences that these women recalled in relation to their personal stories of health and well-being (Grbich, 1999; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

The data collection consisted of two semi-structured interviews, participant journaling, a creative synthesis project, and a dinner gathering post all other data collection. The first interview utilized a semi-structured interview guide and the second interview was lead by questions gleaned by the reading of the first interview and journal. Both interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The women kept a self-nurturance journal focusing on the cultural components of motherhood, conservative religious beliefs/values, patriarchal-driven implicit and explicit dynamics, and rural community



living. In addition to completing two interviews and journals, each woman completed a creative synthesis project focusing around the following themes: (a) How does it feel when you are not engaged in self-nurturance?; (b) What are the obstacles to self-nurturance?; and (c) How do you feel when you are engaged in self-nurturance? The creative synthesis projects were completed after the second interview and were to be brought to the dinner gathering where the women met one another. Following the completion of their creative synthesis projects three of the four women came together for the research process dinner to discuss their overall participation in the project and to share their creative synthesis projects with one another. The interview transcripts, journal entries, creative synthesis projects, and the research process dinner provided the data for which the findings of this study were based and are explained in more detail in chapter 3.

Consequently, feminist poststructuralism demands that researchers be more responsive and attentive to women's everyday life contexts (Bloom, 1998). I discerned it was my responsibility as a researcher to listen to the lives of women in relation to their needs and strengths of nurturing self as a unique dovetailing into their personal health & well-being. Throughout the study I felt comfort in Bloom's (2002) sentiment, "For feminist researchers, the need to know is based on a need to understand the forces that shape women's lives and a need to discover ways for women to transform and have authority over their own lives" (p. 147). The research environment provided the lens of feminist poststructuralism to initiate and enlighten these four mothers' understanding of the oppressive and sometimes overpowering socio-cultural realities of their lives. As hooks (1989) notes, women need to learn to resist sexism in the home – "That special place in which there should be care for others...the need for transformation of the self, of

relationships, so that [women] might be better able to act in a revolutionary manner, challenging and resisting domination, transforming the world outside the self” (p.22).

The central objective of this narrative inquiry was to offer these mothers an opportunity to deepen their understanding of their self-nurturance routines within their socio-cultural environment.

### Assumptions

The following were the major assumptions that I held as I entered into this inquiry from a feminist poststructuralist lens:

1. For research to be valid and useful in the everyday lives of individuals, those individuals must actively participate and be actively represented in all aspects of the research process.
2. The feminist poststructuralist perspective of constantly shifting identity (non-unitary self) is an empowering notion for women living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
3. The process of motherhood has not been researched adequately, in terms of the overall positive and negative affects it has on the health and well-being of women.
4. The feminist poststructuralist theory is a powerful and meaningful lens to view the deconstruction of power and discourse within women’s lives.
5. Individual understanding of and the engagement in meaningful occupation is a positive aspect of personal health and well-being.
6. The primary researcher is always present in the inquiry and the final product.

7. Attending to my feminist poststructuralist sense of being, I am going into this research project thinking and feeling that the participants will want to speak for themselves in the data collection and data analysis section of this dissertation.
8. The unique relationship that exists between researcher and co-researchers in a narrative inquiry present a unique set of ethical considerations that reflect the unique relationship between researcher and co-researchers.
9. An inquiry should challenge beliefs of *truth* that have held some women in bondage for generations – knowledge production outside of the box is empowering and/or emancipating.

### Limitations

The following are the major limitations that I felt were relevant as I entered into this inquiry:

1. I was a novice researcher; therefore, this was my first official attempt at conducting a narrative analysis inquiry.
2. This study was conducted within a small geographical area of the United States. It may or may not be pertinent and/or useful to other mothers of school-aged children living in different contextual environments.
3. A potential limitation was the loss of data outside of the narrative structure; however, I made every attempt to conduct a global analysis of the entire transcript, as well as specifically focusing on intact stories.

## Summary

To date, insights from feminist perspectives have not been addressed adequately within the field of occupational therapy and occupational science. Personally, I see this as the major reason why the occupational therapy profession continues to struggle with finding its place in providing preventative and holistic education for women, more specifically mothers of school-aged children. Most importantly, the outcome of this research is for the women involved in the study and for those lives that are touched by the extensions of this research. I hold the overwhelming belief that a large majority of working mothers of school-aged children living in rural environments are in eminent need of a starting point of conversation for learning more about their constantly shifting identity and how this relates to their constructive engagement in self nurturance as a facilitator of their everyday health and well-being.

This narrative analysis inquiry situated from a feminist poststructuralist lens will hopefully assist adult educators in understanding more about research outside of formal academic and work structures. It will hopefully assist occupational therapists in understanding the unique wellness education needs of the mothers in rural communities. In addition, on a broader scale, I am hopeful that this inquiry will serve as a facilitator for occupational therapists to consider how they may incorporate concepts of women's learning and knowing into their daily practice.

## Definition of Terms

In order for the reader to understand, with more clarity, I have defined the following terms that will be frequently utilized throughout this dissertation.

*Constantly shifting identity* - based on the ongoing development of women's understanding of their positionality (see definition below), which encumbers their historical, political and cultural lives.

*Feminist Poststructuralism* – notions of deconstruction and reconstruction of power, discourse and knowledge as related to the everyday lives of women.

*Health and well-being* – includes elements of choice, meaning, balance, satisfaction, opportunity, and self-actualization (Wilcock, 1998).

*Meaningful occupation* – meaningful work, play or daily living tasks in the stream of time and in the contexts of one's physical and social world (Kielhofner, 2002). Wilcock (1998) describes engagement in meaningful occupation as, “the synthesis of doing, being and becoming” (p. 249).

*Non-unitary self* - active and continual process of production of self within historical, social and cultural boundaries...non-unitary subjectivity is an ongoing process of production and transformation [and]...a *doing* rather than *being*” (Robinson, 1999, p. 11).

*Occupation* – activities, tasks, and roles for the purpose of productive pursuit, maintaining oneself in the environment, and for purposes of relaxation, entertainment, creativity, and celebration; activities in which individuals are engaged to support their roles and needs (Christiansen & Baum, 1997, p. 60).

[A]ctivities...of everyday life, named, organized, and given value and meaning by

individuals and a culture. Occupation is everything people do to occupy themselves, including looking after themselves (self-care)...enjoying life (leisure)...and contributing to the social and economic fabric of their communities (productivity) (Law, Polatajko, Baptiste, & Townsend, 1997, p.32).

*Positionality* - An understanding of “particular structures” such as racism, sexism, or eurocentrism. A form of theorizing with first knowing where you are positioned. Locating the self in relation to others within social structures (Maher & Thompson Tetreault, 1994, p. 202).

*Self-Nurturance* – the acts of engaging in meaningful occupations which promote, enhance, and/or maintain one’s state of health and well-being (Nemeck, 2003).

### Synopsis of this Dissertation

The following is a *picture in preview* of the remaining chapters of this dissertation will offer. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature, both research and conceptual, deemed relevant to this study. Chapter 3 of the study provides a detailed explanation of and the rationale for the methodology utilized to conduct the inquiry. Chapter 4 to 7 is the presentation of *narratives in motion* for each mother who participated in the study. Chapter 8 will present the *intersecting narratives in motion* which is collective theme interpretation of the *narratives in motion*. Chapter 9 offers an in-depth analysis of the findings which represents the insights gleaned from this narrative inquiry and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter explores six bodies of literature which are pertinent to this study. The first body of literature addresses feminist poststructuralism and the notion of nonunitary self which will provide the theoretical grounding of this study. The second body of literature focuses on the development of women's self. It addresses the psychological, sociological and feminist theoretical perspectives on development of self. The third body of literature offers insights related to women's caring particularly as it relates to self-nurturance. The fourth body of literature offers insight into the relationship of women and religion. The fifth body of literature offers a description of the limited insight available related to women's personal health and well-being as related to rural living. The final section of this literature review offers consideration to self-nurturance as a meaningful occupation in light of occupational science and occupational therapy literature. Collectively, the bodies of literature create the background for understanding the modes and patterns of mothers' nurturing self in relation to the issues of knowledge, power, and discourse. The analysis of the literature highlights the limitations of existing research, providing justification of this study and its research methodology.

#### Theoretical Framework: Notions of Feminist Poststructuralism & Non-unitary Self

The theoretical framework of this study is a dovetailing of the premises and conceptual foundations of feminist poststructuralism and non-unitary self. In general, feminist theory is interested in addressing the areas of self, power relations, shifting

positionalities, voice, individual experience and socially constructed knowledge (Collins, 1990; hooks, 2000; Tisdell, 2001). It was essential to find a framework that would encompass the nature of mothers' nurturing self within a rural, religiously conservative and historically patriarchal-driven environment. The dovetailing of these perspectives very much recognizes and values women's self-related experiences and shared stories. Within this section, a short description of feminism will be provided in order to highlight the significant influence it has on this study. Next, a dialogue related to how feminist poststructuralism informs this research is offered followed by a rationalization of how the notion of non-unitary self lends itself to this narrative analysis inquiry.

There are many feminisms, including liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, Marxist feminism, black feminist thought, global feminism, postmodern, and poststructural feminism to name a few (Tisdell, 1995). Each of these feminisms has a slightly different emphasis and/or belief in the ways of going about bringing social change for women. Because of some of these different emphases among strands of feminist thought, bell hooks (2000) feels feminism in general is difficult to define; however, she does offer the following definition:

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into. (p. 28)



She offers the notion that the majority of attempts to define feminism mirror the socio-economic class laden nature of the feminist movement. Nussbaum (1999) characterizes feminism as being a more informed social awareness and understanding of women and interprets feminism as challenging the social and political inequalities of women within a larger global sense of justice for all persons.

Drawing on this notion of feminism as challenging social and political inequities of women, Alcoff (2000) describes feminism as the sole power giving rise to feminist ethics, feminist epistemology, and feminist political philosophy, while utilizing women's lives as the model to expose weaknesses in existing principal theories and forcing the issue of reconstruction. It is evident that there are many methods to theorize the varied aspects of women's lives given their socio-cultural and historical backgrounds.

Furthermore, Kourany, Sterba, and Tong (1999) offer the notion that although no single profile of a typical feminism exist; however, feminisms do have a few tenets in common. These tenets include: (a) Gender equality is at the forefront of their cause; (b) An unyielding realization this reality is far from being recognized; and (c) A relentless desire to push ahead until greater equality for women is a reality.

Consequently, no matter which feminist philosophical lens is offered, it points out there is a very elaborate relationship between the voice and consciousness among and between women (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Feminist thoughts and interests are at the center of this study. This study is about offering women a platform to tell their stories related to the confusion, negotiation, and success of self-nurturing around the themes of motherhood, religious beliefs/value systems, rural community living, and patriarchy. Considering the objective of this narrative inquiry, it was deemed that the feminist

poststructuralist focus on gender, power, and discourse integrated distinctly with the goals and objectives of the inquiry. Therefore, the discussion will now move into describing feminist poststructuralist perspectives and the relationship to this inquiry.

### *Basic Tenets of Feminist Poststructuralism*

Feminism is unnecessarily conflict ridden within the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, one area that feminists agree upon is the need to challenge and uproot patriarchy (Alcoff, 2000). Add this belief to the notions of deconstruction, an individual possessing values and patterns of behavior that is dynamic, and nonessentialist thinking along with feminist poststructuralism and a picture is painted upon a canvas of interpretation for many women's lives. Challenging patriarchy, as well as examining how the intersections of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religious orientation and so on affects women's lives is feminist poststructuralism's intent and purpose. The action of deconstructing and reclaiming identity is central to the notions of feminist poststructuralism. It is through these ideas that the nonessentialist understanding of non-unitary self and constantly shifting identity rest. Luke (1992) suggests that the tradition of feminist poststructuralism emphasizes positionality – meaning where people are “positioned” based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion and so on is relative to the dominant culture. It emphasizes women's constantly shifting identity based on the ongoing development of their understanding of positionality, which encumbers their historical, political, and cultural lives.

Within feminist poststructuralist philosophy, a foundation of difference is acknowledged among/between women, whereby these differences are viewed as

combined strength for social change. For example, within this framework women are moved to action to reclaim and assert the notion of their multi-dimensional and constantly shifting identity within everyday living. Women are encouraged to deconstruct master/patriarchial narratives, in order to make sense of new ways of learning, knowing and being within society. It appears that a man's identity and behaviors are consistently underdetermined which allow him more options in designing his life's journey, whereas a woman's identity and behaviors (i.e. caring for others) have been overdetermined whereby limiting her life's journey (Alcoff, 2000).

In addition to the notions of positionality and constantly shifting identity as discussed above, Tisdell (1998, 2001) offers three additional primary elements of feminist poststructuralism as it specifically relates to women as learners. The first element argues for the significance of gender, along with other structural systems of privilege and oppression.

The second element of feminist poststructuralism is its problematization of the notion of one single truth. On a daily basis, individuals come to know heart-felt versions of reality and what is supposedly true to their being, in light of their positionality. It brings to the forefront that the power and discourse demanded by a patriarchal-driven society blurs women's *lived experience* based on their *lived realities*.

The third element very much questions the designation of categories and binary opposites within the environment and one's being. It acknowledges that there must be a deconstruction of dichotomies for women to truly come to understand the nature of self. Feminist poststructuralism questions the notion that there can *only* be a rational linear self, thereby encouraging women to explore alternatives to this modernist notion of self.

In relation to identity, it emphasizes that there are multiple ways of knowing, not only rational ways of knowing. The feminist poststructuralist challenge to this rational, linear self is termed non-unitary self. It is defined as a natural, healthy and fluid sense of self (Ewing, 1990, MaMa, 1995; Wicke, 1991) that is continually evaluated as an individual deconstructs how race, class, sexual orientation, and/or religion affect identity. This perspective of self brings to light the consideration of dealing with the navigation and negotiation of self within the varied demands of society. Inevitably this constantly shifting identity arises from the realities of gendered, oppressive, and power related influences on self.

The notion is that as an individual's knowing and understanding of positionality increases, so does the control an individual has over one's life – one's doing, being, and becoming. The notion of non-unitary self is defined by Clark (1999) as a self that is consistently challenged by society and split between an experience and the interpretation of the experience. What a woman feels about self is not totally in her control, but grossly shaped by ideas and experiences within the many contexts she experiences on a daily basis. The assumption is that as a woman has a better understanding of the notions and practical experience of deconstructing self, she may become more aware of how the dominant culture's demands and understanding of women has shaped her notion of self. Western culture's ideals of power and discourse have shaped women's construction of self in a way that has coerced women to "play back" constrained ways of knowing, learning and being (Alcoff, 2000).

Alcoff (2000) clarifies that in contrast to humanist notions of the biologically determined and rational self, feminist poststructuralists notion is that an individual must

deconstruct their notion of self from social discourse and/or cultural practices. She notes that although feminist poststructuralists acknowledge that it is inevitable that individuals are socially constructed, it is feminist poststructuralists who wish to bring to the forefront this fact and assist individuals in “maneuvering” through dominant social discourse and power relationships within the environment in which they find themselves. She states, “It is the totalization of history’s imprint that I reject” (p. 408) and suggests that it is important to deconstruct the binary oppositions – man/woman, culture/nature, positive/negative, and analytical/intuitive. The only way to rid women of this legacy is to encourage women to be what is not. Furthermore, Alcoff (2000) takes the following position:

The attraction of the post-structuralist critique of subjectivity for feminists is two-fold. First, it seems to hold out the promise of an increased freedom for women, the ‘free play’ of plurality of differences, unhampered by any predetermined gender identity as formulated by either patriarchy or cultural feminism. Second, it moves decisively beyond cultural feminism and liberal feminism in further theorizing what they leave untouched: the construction of subjectivity. (p. 409)

The purpose of feminist poststructuralism is to assist women in understanding that self is multi-layered, complex, every changing, and fluid.

This inquiry sought to open up mothers’ narratives of nurturing self. The narrative analysis inquiry created an opportunity, whereby these mothers were able to relate their stories of nurturing self outside of the boundaries of traditional representation of mothers of school-aged children. The narratives expanded upon the renegotiation of aspects of the self around motherhood, religious beliefs/notions, and the cultural context

of rural, conservative, patriarchal-driven community living. The role of self-nurturance in their lives was addressed from the viewpoint of *self* that is encumbered and/or empowered within each context. To this end, the next section further explores the notion of non-unitary self within feminist poststructuralism.

### *Concept of Non-unitary Self in Feminist Poststructuralism*

It is difficult to discern the notions of feminist poststructuralism without understanding the notions of non-unitary self. Poststructuralism views self as being multi-faceted, conflicted, complex, fragmented, and in a constant state of flux (Bloom, 1998). This notion of self is identified as the *non-unitary notion of self* and is in stark contrast to the modernist notion of the unitary self - a self that is autonomous, linear and rational (Clark, 1999). To appreciate the female identity we must move towards an understanding of non-unitary self – a self that is fragmented, complex and multi-faceted (Alcoff, 2000; Bloom & Munro, 1995; Braidotti, 1991; Davies, 1992; Hollway, 1989; Munro, 1995; Richardson, 1994). Alcoff (2000) based her concept of positionality from de Lauretis's (1984) view of subjectivity as being fluid, constantly moving and amenable to alternation. Supporting and expanding upon these notions, Bloom (2002) states, "By theorizing the self as non-unitary, especially when combined with social critique, is particularly powerful for how it illuminates the ways that social norms, dominant ideologies and power relations call upon the individual to respond in very situated ways to daily life" (p. 312). However, drawing on de Lauretis, Alcoff (2000) cautions that a woman's identity or self must not be lost among the issues of race, class, gender and so

on; however women and researchers alike would be wise to remember that these “particular discursive configurations” do permeate a woman’s understanding of self.

Within the feminist poststructuralist philosophy, an individual’s core identity is viewed as being made up of the various discourses and structures that shape society and one’s experience within it. Numerous feminists and poststructuralists have taken this case further and emphasized that the self is by its very nature fragmented and in reality completely fluid (Ewing, 1990; MaMa, 1995; Wicke, 1991). Inevitably this fluid nature arises from the realities of gendered, oppressive, and power related influences on self. Clark (1999) challenges adult educators by with the notion that the perspective of unitary self within the field needs to be re-evaluated and replaced with the postmodern perspective of non-unitary self. She asserts that what one thinks and feels about one’s self is not totally in one’s control, but grossly shaped by various levels of involvement within many different contexts.

The poststructuralist feminist perspective of non-unitary self takes into consideration the public and personal intersections of power, gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion (Tisdell, 1998). Thereby, it is acknowledged that these key constructions of self are formed from the intersections of gender and other systems of oppression and privilege (Tisdell, 2001). The feminist poststructuralist perspective requires an understanding of the self that is both challenged by society and split between this experience and the individual’s interpretation of the experience; hence the description of non-unitary self, which again is in contrast to the modernist notion of a rational, unified self. As Alcoff (2000) notes:

Therefore, the concept of positionality includes two points: first, as already stated, that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context: but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where meaning can be discovered. The concept of woman as positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than a locus of an already determined set of values...Seen in this way, being a 'woman' is to take up a position within a moving historical context and to be able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context. (p. 413)

This notion brings to light the consideration of women dealing with the navigation and negotiation of self within the varied demands of society. At this time the discussion will focus on narrative as a means to develop aspects of non-unitary self.

#### *Narrative as a Way to Develop Aspects of Non-unitary Self*

It has been noted that by engaging in narrative, individuals' multi-faceted self is made more visible. Collins (1990) advocates using women's narratives as a starting point for defining self and experiences. The purpose of examining women's narratives of self is to allow women to compose, inform, discuss and most importantly explore their journey in relation to the silencing notions they are up against practically on a daily basis (Bloom, 1998). Primary data found in personal narratives can illuminate dominant ideologies and power relations within the women's stories which are maintained,



subverted or reproduced in daily living (Bloom, 1998). Furthermore Bloom (2002) states, "...narrative research that focuses on non-unitary subjectivity creates a context in which respondents are not bound by unitary self-representations and, therefore, have the opportunity for greater self-knowledge from the experience of being a respondent" (p. 292).

Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) feel the narration of self is best presented through women's storied lives. Clark (1999) notes, "Those stories, through both their content and structure, give us a way to understand a person's inner experience and the meaning that it has for them" (p. 15). Utilizing non-unitary subjectivity as an interpretive lens for narrative data, Bloom (2002) suggests, "It encourages researchers to generate alternative and more complex understandings of those who are studied and because it helps respondents understand and interpret their lives in more forgiving and thoughtful ways" (p. 312). This narrative inquiry challenged women's memories and lived experience as related to social norms, dominant ideologies, and power relations running parallel to their engagement in self-nurturance. Clark (2000) suggests that narratives related to the most important and somewhat different aspects of non-unitary self consistently answer questions women have about their lives specifically and in general.

Through this review of the literature it became increasingly evident that the voice of women nurturing self is absent. Although there are studies that have been completed about women's inability to care for self, secondary to issues of gendered role responsibilities (i.e. cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, etc.) and/or disabilities, women's actual stories were minimally present. A search conducted via *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Medline, Proquest, OTBib System related

“narrative and self-nurturance/caring”, “narrative and well-being” and “narrative and health” revealed not one study focusing on the deconstruction and most importantly the reconstruction of the meaningful occupation of mothers nurturing self. Therefore, as this literature review progresses, so too will the notions and concepts of feminist poststructuralism, narrative inquiry and non-unitary self. This chapter will now shift into the bodies of literature related to women’s development of self and caring.

### Women’s Development of Self and Identity

It is difficult to appreciate the literature on women’s development of self without giving consideration to the larger picture of self and identity. Toward that end, this section of the literature review will be organized into the following sections:

(a) historical perspective on the development of self; (b) women’s individual construction of self and identity; (c) women’s self and identity in relation to others; and (d) women’s self and identity in relation to societal issues of gender, oppression, and power.

#### *A Historical Perspective on the Development of Self*

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century if one referred to the *self* it was equivalent to referring to the soul, will, or spirit (deMunck, 2000). The self as an immaterial entity was the foremost consideration of Plato and Socrates and it was Descartes (1596-1650) who conceptualized the mind and body as different yet parallel beings (deMunck, 2000). His key mark phrase, *I think therefore I am* has made its way across the centuries.

Therefore, it stands to reason that for hundreds of years individuals have been attempting to answer the question - *Who am I unto myself?* (James, 1892). James (1890)

envisioned a global self that encompassed both the *I* and *Me*. He considered the seat of consciousness, the observer and the evaluator as *I*, whereas *Me* was the actor, the doer, the performer part of the self. In addition, James (1890) envisioned the true self or the *I*, as being comprised of four complementary, yet hierarchal selves of which the highest ranking self is that of spiritual self, which continues down to the social self, material self, and the bodily self (deMunck, 2000). James (1890) defines the spiritual self as being related to thinking and feeling, whereas the social self is influenced by individual and group interactions. The material self consists of possessions, while the bodily self is focused on images of one's body.

It is easily recognized that concepts of self have become more complex and complicated as individuals' relationships within their environment and society have expanded throughout the years. This literature review will progress through and past the self James (1890) conceptualized and it will introduce the multifaceted self that individuals attempt to bring into balance on a daily basis within the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Historically, most theorists took an individualist conceptual notion of construction of self; however, Kelly (1955) addressed an individual's being as the intricate constructs and cognitive formations "he" [sic] has power over. This perspective of self is viewed as a cognitive process that enables an individual to distinguish "himself" [sic] from others (deMunck, 2000). According to Rogers (1983) the self is a way of being and it is the leader of an individual's personal growth and development. Rogers (1961) identified ten directions individuals may take when attempting to become self-actualized, that is making the most of the self or developing the best self. Those ten directions the individual moves through are as follows: (a) away from facades; (b) away from

“oughts”; (c) away from meeting expectations; (d) away from pleasing others; (e) toward self-direction; (f) toward the “being” process; (g) toward being complex; (h) toward openness to experience; (i) toward acceptance of others; and (j) toward trust in the values of self. Rogers (1995) became very much aware of the importance of the person and self within learning environments. He felt that for individuals to be creative and productive in the learning environment, they must come to know how to tap into the power of developing a relationship with inner selves. Rogers (1961) was firmly committed to the thought that it was extremely important for the individual to develop a sense of her/his own being without concentrating on the external factors of the environment. Furthermore Rogers (1983) believed that as individuals move through the stages of making self and their worlds, the self is ultimately controlled by the individual and not by society. He states, “A self is synonymous with experience, being the subjective awareness of that experience is reality” (p. 149).

Laing (1961, 1969) agrees with Rogers (1961) on the point of individuals being their own agents and that the self is tied to the discovery of personal consciousness. However, he emphasized that an individual’s definition of self was influenced and affected by the relationships one had with others. Consequently, he felt that often times these relationships lead to an avoidance of discovering the true self (Laing, 1969).

Advancing the individualist notion of self into a greater understanding of the role of the social context in constructing self, Mead (1934) envisioned the self as being primarily socially constructed. He stated, “The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience” (p. 14). He felt the construct of *I* was the biological baseline from which the social self develops,

eventually rising above the biological self. Mead (1934) contended that the presence of others alters one's awareness of oneself and consequently one's behavior. He did not envision the self as inherently situated and/or in charge of the consciousness, to the contrary he believed the self develops out of social experiences.

Rosenburg (1979) described the development of self as personal thoughts and feelings mixed internally with social interactions. Furthermore, Gergen (1991) and Kegan (1982, 1994) brought to light the notion of individuals possessing a multiplicity of selves brought about by the dual function of history and cultural representations within an individual's life. Gergen (1991) made these notions clearer by giving the following example:

Although it grows increasingly difficult to be certain of who or what one is, social life proceeds. And in one's interactions one continues to identify oneself as this or that sort of person. One may identify oneself as American in one situation, Irish in another and a mixture of nationalities in still others. One may be feminine for certain friends, masculine for others, and androgynous still for others. (p. 145)

Gergen's (1991) point is that the self is viewed as being equally socially-constructed through the meaning-making of the environment and the relationships individuals have within those environments.

Kegan (1982) further conceptualized individuals as meaning makers and explorers of inner experience; however he felt that ultimately society transformed an individual's self by the influence of culture, history and societal expectations of outward behavior. He believed the self was socially constructed through meaning-making of the environment and through the relationships with other individuals in various contextual

environments. Kegan (1994) began to focus more on society's impact on the self when he wrote the book, *In Over Our Heads*. At this point Kegan's (1994) view of the self had transformed from the self having some control over the consciousness to an overwhelming awareness of the role the environmental has in the production of self. So as one may glean, this perspective views self as socially constructed; therefore the boundaries of self and social contexts can not be easily divided. The making of the self is not only at the individual level, but also at the social level with its margins and expectations.

#### *Women's Individual Construction of Self & Identity*

As Mansfield (2000) notes, traditional theories of self have focused on male development as it has been presented within the biological, experiential, socio-cognitive, social construction, and psychological lens. In addition, modernist conceptual frameworks and empirical studies, related to the development of self, have consistently offered the perspective of a rational, unified and linear self. The poststructuralist and poststructuralist feminist literature of self further the above perspectives by emphasizing the notion of non-unitary self that is in part socially constructed based on power relations and the individual's constantly shifting sense of self and identity within those power relations.

The notion of women's individual and social construction of self and identity is difficult to discern directly within much of the literature, though it is there implicitly. A majority of the literature focuses on women's development of self being parallel to the development of their relationships and connections with others, which implicitly gets at

how women individually construct their identities through social relationships.

Nevertheless, this first section will focus on how women construct their individual identity, keeping in mind this research purports that women do so through relationship with others, an idea that will be taken up more in the next section.

Weedon (1997) views women's self as being the collective effort of unconscious and conscious thoughts that form an understanding of the sense of self and connections within a various contexts. Maslow's studies did not include women; however his notions have had a great impact on the notion of women's construction of self throughout the years, so his perspectives are briefly presented here. Maslow emphasizes the significance of the individual with all his/her differences. His perspective contests that no matter how powerful cultural influences and how weak an individuals instincts may be, the impetus for the formation of the healthy self can not be based on the opinions of others, but that the individual must overcome opinions of others and rest on one's own capacities.

Taylor and Marienua (1995) provide sources of insight concerning the relationship to self and the development of self. They feel it is within the moments of being able to discern what the self needs from a relationship, where healthy or unhealthy choices are decided upon by the majority of women. Bateson (1990) offers the notion that it is of the utmost importance and value that women create their life by learning about their preferences, needs, and wants in relation to their environments. Neumann and Peterson (1997) suggest, "A woman's efforts to re-present her everyday life reflect a deeper impulse to know and learn authentically from her own question, concerns and understandings rather than to assume unquestioningly the perspectives of presumably more knowledgeable others" (p. 229).

Furthermore, Flannery (2000) states, “Women often revisit, unlearn and recreate their own self definitions and those others have for them...Women are all sorts of combinations of identities” (p. 54-55). Flannery (2000) suggests subjective knowing or individual development of self within women’s lives has not been explored to its depths as of yet. Subjective knowing being defined as, “The way women go about connecting with *themselves*, rely on their own knowledge, and struggle with broader issues of power and control related to acknowledging themselves as authorities” (p. 123). It is from the perspective of subjective knowing, that women must honor their connections to self and guard against oppressive and unfair actions that are not consistent with a woman’s core understanding of self and her surroundings (Flannery, 2000). This subjective knowing or individual development of self goes beyond acquiring new information or acting out new behaviors within the environment. It involves discovering compelling ways of thinking about self as a way of being (Goldenberger, et. al., 1996). Cherin (1987) offers the enlightening notion that to know oneself more effectively, women need to fully surrender self to self. She further notes that it is through these efforts that women will be more effective and efficient in going inside their being to listen to and honor their own voice.

Related to Cherin’s notion, Hayes (2000) considered the meanings of voice as *talk, identity, and/or power* of self. Women engage in talk with others and with themselves as a means of their outer and inner voice. Women identify themselves by the voice they give, develop, or reclaim in different situations. In relation to giving voice, women name the experiences, which have formed them at the moment. In developing voice women are changing or restructuring a voice within/outside of their *self*. As for reclaiming voice, women select to take back or ignite a voice within them that has been



silenced in the past secondary to cultural issues, oppression, or other societal reasons.

Hayes(2000) further offers the thought that women's voice may be identified as a very positive and constructive personal authority for women – as a woman finds and utilizes her voice it may offer her immediate internal and external control over her life. A woman's inner voice and outer voice has clout. Women need to listen to their inner voice and honor the expression of their needs based on this voice. Over the centuries, women's voices have been heard individually and collectively as powerful influences, however an imbalance of power in a women's voice still remains in today's society.

Women of Color have consistently offered insights to the differences *within* and among women. It makes sense to take into consideration the many different ways women lead their lives and form impressions of self within communities, at work, and within the home. Collins (1991) defines these impressions of self as “mother wit” or wisdom. She feels that “mother wit” is the value of black women's knowing based within the self, in experience, in intuition, in connection, and in embodiment. The individual self must be valued for what it has to offer women – freedom, confidence and insight to their own way of doing, being and becoming.

### *Women's Self and Identity in Relation to Others*

Miller (1976) first proposed that women are socialized in a culture to take care of others before finding/searching for their *self*. She felt this was the overarching factor in a woman's psyche and stated, “It is of extreme importance to stress that women have been led to feel they can integrate and use all of their attributes if they use them for others but not for themselves” (p. 60). She went further to assert a woman's sense of self is

primarily determined by their ability to care for others. Gilligan (1982) like Miller (1976) researched women's relationships of care. She did so by researching women's moral development within several situations. She also concluded that not only do women define their self in terms of relationships, but they evaluate their sense of self by their ability to give of themselves to others.

Chodorow (1978) asserts that self development for women is all about constructing one's self while at the same time maintaining and supporting relationships. Much like Chodorow's perspective, Surry (1985) has conceptualized women's *self-in-relation* as the primary means of women's self development. She feels relationships are the primary means by which women's sense of self is organized and matured. She contends that all aspects of a woman's subjectivity are developed from experiences within relationships. Furthermore, Surry's theory contends that women would have a difficult time developing a sense of self in isolation of other individuals.

Gilligan (1982) was concerned that prior research related to moral development of self by Piaget and Kolberg implied a moral deficiency in women. Secondary to this concern she engaged in two separate studies with women focused on moral reasoning. The conclusion of these studies contend that women's ethics of care rest upon the notion that women's self is ultimately found within relationships and the nurturing of those relationships. Gilligan's (1982) conclusions about women's ethics of care will be defined in more detail within the women's caring section of this literature review.

Similar to Miller (1976), Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982) and Surry (1985), Josselson (1987) established that women's identity formation is closely linked to their relationships and connection with others. Her research implies that a woman's self is

intimately linked to how her *self* is connecting and/or communicating with others. If the relationship/connection is healthy, the self is more than likely to be healthy. If the relationship/connection is under tension, the self is more than likely going to be under tension. Josselson's (1987) study revealed that as some women aged they were able to shut out negative childhood selves and become more flexible and form a more consistent and healthy self; however in times of stress these women did find themselves reverting back to "hidden" identity/self. Furthermore, other women in her study seemed to forever remain in conflict with their childhood identities, which translated into more multidimensional and/or fragmented selves. At the conclusion of Josselson's (1987) study women did not experience the modernist notion of a rational and unified self whether their relationships were healthy or under tension; in contrast, they experienced what is termed by Tisdell (2001) as constantly shifting identity formation.

Like Gilligan (1982) and Josselson (1987), Belenky, et. al. (1986) were concerned that previous theorists/researchers had spent too much time focusing on male development, so they decided to conduct a qualitative study focusing on women's ways of knowing and development. The outcome of the study revealed that women's ways of knowing and development are divided into five categories: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. In respect to women's identity of self in relation to others the received way of knowing is most associated to women looking to others for wisdom and taking others insights as "right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, black or white" (p. 37). Women at this stage of knowing or development feel that there are only a few right answers and very few other answers are plausible. Belenky, et. al (1986) did not see this way of knowing as

damaging to women and contend that it is a means for women to have a sense of power from receiving well-informed knowledge and insight from a source of authority. Hence, “received knowers” deem relationships to be very important and almost essential to their knowing and development.

Going beyond the findings of Belenky’s et. al’s study, Rockhill (1993) contends that a woman’s self is constructed and contested out of her positioning of being a caretaker within the dominant culture. This self is the product of dominant discourses and fashioned out of the conscious and unconscious effects of sexism, classism, and racism (Rockhill, 1993). At the time of her study, Rockhill (1993) contended that women living within the constraints and expectations of western society experience a fragmented and multidimensional self. Although this was natural for the women in this study, at the time it was viewed atypical by society’s standards. Some fifteen years later, Cain (2002) contended when addressing women’s self within the educational environment, adult educators must *always* take into consideration the dimensions of class, gender, and race which affect women’s relationship with self and others. She believes it is within these dimensions that the intersections of psychological and social constructions of self are challenged on a daily basis within women’s daily lives. She insisted that adult educators must become more aware of the salient and overt values placed on a women’s sense of self if they want to make the teaching-learning process fruitful. More about women’s self and identity, in relation to others will be addressed in the discussion on caring for others later in this literature review. At this point the following section speaks to the affects societal issues of gender, oppression, and power has on defining women’s construction and/or knowing of self.

*Women's Self in Relation to Oppression and Power*

*This is not the life of simplicity but the life of multiplicity...It leads not to unification but to fragmentation. It does not bring grace; it destroys the soul.*  
*Anne Morrow Lindebergh, Gifts from the Sea, 1955*

Modern perspectives of the feminine self demand that it be unitary, rational and well put together (Clark, 1999). This demand is impossible and hooks (2000) offers an exceptional illustration, "I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self" (p.149). She also offers the notion that a woman's self can not be identified by gender alone. The self is made up of intertwining positionalities of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, societal expectations, history, culture and/or religion (hooks, 1989).

Meyers (2000) points out that another problem with the unified, rational self is it neglects to give an accurate picture of oppression and a women's dilemma of self in the process of overcoming it. Barkty (1990) and Babbitt (1993) feel that women are often overcome by their internalization of patriarchal values and norms of self, thereby having an oppressed cognitive, emotional and affective view of how they should react and interact in their daily lives. Meyer (2000) infers that paradoxically, the more completely women full fill these oppressed views of self, the worse off they become in their personal well-being. She states, "Women need a conception of self that renders emancipatory transformation of one's values and [care of self]" (p. 2).

McDonagh (1996) points out that a woman's self was at one time explicitly nullified by a law which stated, "The legal doctrine of overture held that a woman's selfhood was absorbed into that of her husband when she married" (p. 58). Still today, a preponderance of women are viewed as having no-minimal need for establishing and/or

developing a self, whereby self is extinguished or null within certain patriarchal-driven environments (Fenwick, 1998). Haslanger (2000) contends that at the heart of women understanding self is the connection between their gender and social positions. She advocates that the only way women will overcome the oppression of self is through conscientious reflection on “who we think we are” (p. 36). It is through this narrative of self that women may find the key that unlocks the oppression and discourse which suppresses their nature and will to find their true self.

Clark (2001), Duffy (1991) and Fenwick (1998) focused their research on the oppression of women’s self via multifaceted relationships within prison, at home and at work. The theme of power in claiming, understanding, and discovering self was discussed in terms of the basic agency of self in these three studies.

Clark (2001) examined how a group of marginalized women construct their sense of self within a prison. She found that most of the research on women’s development of self was focused on white, middle-class, educated women, so she relied heavily on postmodern and poststructuralist feminist literature on self and subjectivity as her theoretical framework. Clark utilized the notion of non-unitary self to analyze life history narratives of twenty-four women. Her findings revealed that these women constructed a sense of self that maintained them among the oppressive confines of prison life. She concluded that the process of these women narrating about themselves from a feminist poststructuralist perspective allowed them the opportunity to view their self and identity as fluid and complex. She felt the site of contradiction – the modernist rational self versus the poststructuralist multi-dimensional self brought these women to new ways of knowing and being within an oppressive environment.

Duffy (1991) addressed the relational nature of women's self in her study. It offered women's stories that questioned the gestalt of individual perceptions of one's attributes, the relationships between oneself and others, and the values attached to the perceptions of self. Duffy (1991) challenged current literature which supported relational development of self and contended that cultural rewards for behaviors in opposition to natural self-enhancing directions could result in contradictions between the conscious self and women's tendency to self actualize.

Fenwick's (1998) study inquired how the workplace influences the manner in which women compose a self or selves. She states, "This study explored women's workplace learning, in which this very search for self and meaning of life emerged as a primary thread" (p. 1). She feels that for most adults the workplace is a keystone to learning and development of self. Lynn and Todroff (1995) as cited in Fenwick (1998) state, "For women, work-lives and work-learning are woven into family and other relations with particular fluidity and complexity and are marked by struggles that are critical in their learning and sense of self" (p. 1). Fenwick (1998) notes that the process of finding and/or making self for the seventeen women in this study was not absolute or able to be pre-determined by basic assumptions found within adult development of self. Within the workplace, these women found self within the contexts of power relations, historical influences, and socio-cultural-political dynamics.

In conclusion, these research studies test the modernist perspective of a women's self and support the feminist poststructuralist notion of non-unitary self. The self and identity of the each woman in these studies was challenged and shaped by oppression,

power, and discourse. Each woman explicitly found a safe haven in the meaning and reality of non-unitary self.

### *Summary of Women's Development of Self*

The conceptual and research literature offer numerous resources related to how women come to learn, know, and process the multiple facets of self within their daily lives. As noted by Sedikides and Brewer (2001), there appears to be a coming of an era where it is acceptable to entertain the individual self, relational self and collective self without being termed psychotic or otherwise be disenfranchised from one's environment. As the old saying goes, "We can not be all things to all people (including ourselves) at all times...there is a time and a season." For hundreds of years the question posed to researchers looking at the self as a major point of inquiry posed the following question, "How can we conceive of an entity that is, at once, both a known object and the knower of that object?" Allport (1961) considered this notion for many years and finally came to the conclusion that researchers utilizing the self as a means of inquiry should focus on the self as a known object and leave the self as a knower to the field of philosophy. Under this concept of self, researchers can relate the self to another entity and that entity can be related back to the self. By being active and/or involved in action, the self as a knower can be more aware of how the self is shaped by the experience and the experience is shaped by the self (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001).

Again, James (1890/1983) argued the self, "Implies the incessant presence of two elements, an objective person, known by passing subjective Thought and recognized as continuing in time" (p. 350). After decades of ignoring James, it appears now that many



researchers are finally taking his thoughts to heart – acknowledgement of the self and the changes of that self over time, through circumstances, conditions and/or various contexts.

### Women's Caring

This section commences with an introduction of the conceptual literature related to women's caring followed by research related to women's caring. Though this current study will specifically attend to the topic of mothers' nurturance of self rather than mothers' caring for self, this review will attend to literature related to the latter. The review of the literature indicated that the concept of nurturance of self was predominantly encompassed within rather than addressed separately from women's caring for self and others. It was evident early on in the review of the literature that women's self and women's caring are closely if not sometimes impossible to separate. It appears that women's identity is defined in a relational context and often judged by the care women provide to others (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Waerness, 1984). Collectively, the bodies of literature create the background for understanding the modes and patterns of mothers nurturing self within the context of knowledge, power, and discourse. The analysis of the literature highlights the limitations of existing research and conceptual frameworks, providing justification of this study and its research methodology.

*Women's Caring as an Extension of Mothering*

*In some ways it is the ultimate alienation of our society that the ability to give birth has been transformed into a liability. – Eleanor Leacock*

The basic notions of caring are rooted in mothering with much of the activity focused on women caring for husband and children (Chodorow, 1978). Although the broad term of caring is a concept encompassing human experiences where a feeling of concern for and the taking care of others is brought to mind; caring is most often thought about in relation to needs and it is usually about the relationship between mother and child (Waerness, 1996). Pearce (1999) notes that ninety-five percent of women get married at some point before the age of 65 and ninety percent of those that marry have children. Pearce (1999) feels that society must begin to recognize that caring is gendered with much different affects and cures when it is experienced by women as compared to men. Roughly ninety percent of women will become mothers during their work lives and over forty percent of workers are caring for children under eighteen (Williams, 2000). Countless mothers face the quandary of honoring one's self or honoring another (Glenn, 1994; Weingarten, 1994). Adding self-nurturance as an additional daily occupation appears to be an uphill battle. It appears that working outside of the home is a minimal barrier to nurturing self as compared to motherhood.

Women continue to have restraints placed on them by a patriarchal-driven society when it comes to childcare and household responsibilities Williams (2000) notes that the primary responsibility of caring, in a two parent household, consistently lies with the woman and that it is much more difficult for the woman to seek balance than the man

living in the same household. Smith and Valenze (1988) note that the act of caring is extremely laden with beliefs and values from religious, cultural, and social philosophy. So much so, that it is conceptually and for practically purposes almost impossible to separate a mother's sense of self from the reality that caring is weaved into the majority of their daily activities. Furthermore, they insist that mothers' caring involves dimensions of politics, power, and conflict which realistically should raise questions in women's minds about justice, equality and trust (Smith & Valenze, 1988).

Thurer (1994) examined the cultural ideology of motherhood given the influence of patriarchy and found that theories of child development infer that the mother should consider and make accommodations for her child's needs and act as a constant, comforting presence to the child. Thurer (1994) states:

It is no wonder that mother is terrified by her own power. Yet, even as mother is all-powerful, she ceases to exist. She exists bodily, of course, but her needs as a person become null and void. On delivering a child, a woman becomes a factotum, a life-support system. Her personal desires either evaporate or metamorphose so that they are identical with those of her infant. Once she attains motherhood, a woman must hand in her point of view...In effect, they have invented a motherhood that excluded the experience of the mother". (p.xvii)

Furthermore, Thurer (1994) examines the effects of mothering and feels that the cultural ideal is that a mother should provide limitless amounts of unconditional love upon her children bringing about the point that, "A sentimentalized image of the perfect mother casts a long, guilt-inducing shadow over real mothers' lives" (p. xi).

In a study about subjectivity and identity negotiation in lesbian mothers, Silvia (2002) states, “Mothers’ difficulties in meeting or sustaining this ideal are rarely discussed... the ambivalence that can only come from such pressures and expectations is a threat to mothers’ identities and to society’s fantasy of the perfect mother” (p. 8).

Chodorow (1978) noted twenty-seven years ago that mothering should not dominate women’s lives, even though women are the primary caregivers to children. Chodorow (1978) contends with the onset of capitalism and industrialization the family structure was reorganized and mothering became privatized. At this point, a once cooperative unit of husband and wife were polarized into the roles of worker (husband) and mother (wife). At this point in time, it was quickly assumed that the mother’s role was to promote the self in others through selfless and constant nurturance. Later, Chodorow and Contratto (1989) asserted that in order for women to explore their own self, they must begin to move away from their child’s perspectives/needs and into their own needs. They note, “To begin to transform the relations of parenting and the relations of gender, to begin to transform women’s lives, we must move beyond the myths and misconceptions embodied in the fantasy of the perfect mother” (p. 96).

Furthermore, Miller (1976, 1991) contends that a majority of cultural belief and value systems set up women’s lives around the principle of serving others. She feels strongly about the dynamic and states, “It is of extreme importance to stress that women have been led to feel that they can integrate and use all their attributes if they use them for others, but now for themselves” (p. 60). Eichenbaum & Orbach (1983) contend women’s roles as care-taker and nurturer are so intense that they are consistently “on-call” to the needs of others, consequently putting their needs second in line. Within the

patriarchal-driven environment these norm and roles continue to be handed down mother to daughter without question (Duffy, 1992). Ideology of domesticity revolves around the institution of motherhood as women's primary calling, part of which entails caring for others before self and subverting personal needs until everyone else's needs are taken care of (Hart, 1992).

Aisenburg & Harrington (1988) note that the responsibility of raising children more often than not is managed by the woman. They state, "For one thing, a point so obvious it is easy to ignore – if women bear primary responsibility for the family, that responsibility is reduced for men, leaving their state of personal/professional equation relatively easy to manipulate. Men, even if married and with children, can increase or decrease their civic responsibilities, cultural pursuits, even engagements in family affairs to adjust to the demands of "their work". And if they cannot achieve perfection of both life and work, they can at least seek a fair balance over the long run, and with it, a satisfying expression of various facets of their personality. Furthermore, the bearer of primary responsibility for family, usually a woman, is far more constrained in seeking such a balance.

To be a mother is to be committed to meeting demands of works of preservative love, nurturance, and training before all else on a daily basis (Ruddick, 1989).

Idealization of maternal power and motherhood in many societies is equal to the opportunity to be oppressive to women's basic needs and rights. Maternal work is defined as a consuming identity requiring sacrifices of health, pleasure, and ambitions unnecessary for the well-being of children (Ruddick, 1989, p. 30). As Hart (1992) notes, "The cult of true womanhood and, consequently, the notion of the housewife whose

‘natural’ calling it is to care for husband and children, is inherently tied to the rise of the bourgeoisie and the development of capitalism” (p.25). Ultimately, the deconstruction of the ideologies of mothering as it relates to caring should spark awareness of the multiple identities and roles of women who mother...it should bring to the forefront that mothers often suppress and ignore their own needs, until the point where they may be unaware that they have any (Silva, 2002).

There have been many individuals interested on the demand placed on women to nurture others (Miller, 1976; Thurer, 1994; Weingarten, 1994; Westkott, 1986). An insight by Weingarten (1994) may bring this interest swiftly to light:

The new [post-eighteenth-century revolutions] concept of motherhood supported the new centrality of the individual, although not by endowing *mothers* with individualism. Rather, the purpose of motherhood was to nurture individualism in others. Mothers were to seek not personal gratification but the selfless gratification of caring for others...the script of motherhood collides with the script of individualism. (p. 64/67)

The expectation of maternal nurturance placed on women is particularly complex, if not impossible to uphold (Silvia, 2002).

Most recently, women’s self-nurturance has been defined by Domar (2000), as “A fierce and tender concern for every facet of our being. A basic philosophy of learning how to care for yourself. Self-nurturance is not about being selfish. It is about self-care” (p. 12). Gilligan (1982) notes that when “in the name of virtue” females think that it is more important to care only for others and consider it “selfish” to care for self, there are going to be negative issues that dramatically hinder their personal growth and

development. Domar (2000) suggests that women tend to forget the act of nurturing self in their daily routines and too often the act of self-nurturance is not taught as an important and positive aspect of their lives. Woodman (1991) explains to us what she has observed as the major barrier to women engaging in self-care to be is, “One of the problems women have today is that they are not willing to find the river in their own life and surrender to its current. They are not willing to spend time discovering themselves, because they feel they are being selfish...then life starts to feel meaningless because they live in terms of pleasing, rather than in terms of being who they are” (p.141). Baines, Evans and Neysmith (1991) note that a feminist approach to caring offers a collaborate relationship between the cared for and the one who care, which provides women with more options and power in their own lives.

If we really want to clearly examine the experience of mothers’ caring within Western society, we must recognize that caring defines both the identity and the activity of women (Finch & Groves, 1983; Stacy, 1981). Otherwise we will continue to ignore the socio-cultural processes of power and discourse in relation to the unequal sharing of and responsibility of caring placed on women. To expand on the above notions the next section will address research related to mothers’ caring.

### *Research Related to Mothers’ Caring*

In the mid-eighties there was a wealth of studies done on the “burden of care” which focused on the well-being of women who cared for elderly persons within the home (Cantor, 1983; Brody, 1985; Brody, et. al., 1987, George and Gwyther, 1986). The evidence showed that regardless of the conclusions of the studies, which indicated that

women's health and well-being were adversely affected by this "burden of care" the traditional beliefs and practice of women doing primary care for other individuals in the home were minimally affected and/or changed by the results of studies. Additionally, in the mid-80's feminists addressing the unequal care models within the home spoke out against the social practice, however the emphasis of women doing the majority of care appeared to remain status quo even through their efforts (Lawton et. al., 1989). Tarlow (1996) notes that "Much of the research and writing on caring in the public sphere has been confined to study of a single substantive area such as child care or health care..little research looks at the relationships of caring" (p. 56).

Through her studies, Miller (1991) concluded that women's self is highly dependent upon the opinions and perceptions of others. Miller (1976/1991) further asserts that a woman's sense of self is primarily based upon her skill of caring for and nurturing others. Miller's (1976/1991) studies concluded caring for others usually does, in some form or another, have an unfavorable impact on a woman's sense of self and well-being. Duffy (1992) conducted a study on women and depression, based on Miller's (1991) assumptions related to women's care of others and found that the belief of women being the primary caretakers of others was deeply embedded in the cultural norms and practices of the environment in which these women lived. She concluded that a culture laden with male bias about women's responsibility to care for others has a profound negative effect on women's sense of self and self-esteem.

In MacRae's (1995) study, *Women and Caring: Constructing Self through Others* she addressed what the caring experience means to women. She conducted in-depth interviews with 142 elderly women and found that their interpretation of caring ran



parallel to their route to self-meaning. She concluded that for these women caring was an important developmental component of self-identity. She also found that caring is not so much a naturally feminine activity, but that women learn caring through a socialization process wherein girls learn from their mothers and others that caring is women's work (MacRae, 1995).

Silvia's (2002) phenomenological study aimed at exploring lesbian mothers' sense of subjectivity and their negotiation of the alleged dichotomy between identity of mother and that of lesbian offers insight to the current inquiry. The study explored issues of femininity, sexuality, nurturance, and reproduction. In relation to self-nurturance, the study concluded that all eleven mothers interviewed felt that they had nurtured their children at the expense of their own needs. One participant stated:

We [mothers] have this notion that to be a good mother is to be selfless and we have this feminist notion that to be selfless is to not be a good person...So, it's this constant struggle...Is to be a mother to be selfless or is to be a mother to be full and nurtured as a woman? (p. 55)

Silvia (2002) concluded that the lesbian mothers in this study sustained contradictory roles of the caregiver and that the society does not yet know how to accept the notion of lesbian mothers caring for self and children simultaneously. She felt that the experiences voiced by the women in her study were reflective of Benjamin (1988) and Glenn's (1994) perspective of liberating mothering from the current ideological notion, thus allowing "an awareness of multiple identities and roles for women who mother" (p. 104).

Through their research, Coltrane and Adams (1998) found that significant role changes occur when women give birth. Mothers usually go through a dramatic re-

alignment of relationships, a negotiation of child care and work responsibilities, and the role of mothering throws a woman's internal identity formation into question. A large body of research suggests that mothers do in fact experience a detrimental affect to their overall psychological health and well-being over a period of time, secondary to their efforts to care for their children. They note that this feeling of being overburdened increases with each child and that there is a strong relationship between a mother's overall well-being and her perception of her parenting skills (Goldsteen and Ross, 1989). Consequently, other research has reported that mothers have an increased rate of depression and anxiousness in their overall daily lives than childless women (Ryff & Selzer, 1996).

### *Summary of Women's Caring*

This literature is not implying that the actual role of motherhood and caring for children and the household are harmful activities or primarily oppressive; however, it does suggest that some women get into an oppressed-state in relation to their personal health and well-being, secondary to the socio-cultural norms implying that their main concern should *literally* be their children and the general state of the household for the majority of time. The research presented confirms that in some socio-cultural contexts even when the children are at school, mothers are expected to stay at home preparing meals and the house for the pending arrival of husband and children. Throughout the literature it is explicitly implied that women's well-being should be automatically put at the end of the list. As Hart (1992) so aptly states, "What makes housework a dirty-job and the raising of children a 24 hour juggling act, is not the work itself, but the

constraining and alienating conditions under which it has to be performed” (p. 102).

Furthermore, Jackson (1989) states, “The interruptions, contradictions, and state of ambivalence about self are the soul of motherhood” (p. 34). All of the studies indicate that caring is the primary task associated with women and that the primary task of caring can very much take over a woman’s total sense of self which leaves very little room for the development of a personal sense of self.. As Baine, Evans, and Neysmith (1991) note:

There is relative invisibility of women’s caring, the implicit assumption that it is natural for women to care, the lack of attention paid to the complexities involved in caring, and the contradictions caring poses for women...however, addressing the burden of women’s caring is complicated by the reality that caring is also a labor of love and involves relationships of profound importance to those who do the caring, as well as to those who are cared for. (p. 29-31)

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there continues to be a social devaluation of mothers caring for others and an ignorance of the negative impact it may have on the health and well-being of the woman in the caring relationship. To this end, women continue to struggle with this reality built by society (Hochschild & Maching, 1989). On aspect of society that continually and consistently perpetuates a woman’s role is that of primary caretaker to the determinant of her own personal health and well-being is that of conservative religious tradition. As such, the next section will briefly explore conservative religious beliefs and values towards women in general.

## Women and Religion

It is a common notion by feminists that women have often been excluded, marginalized, or silenced in the Christian tradition from its inception. As Blessing (2001) notes, "From St. Paul's first-century teaching that 'women are to remain silent in church' to the more recent Southern Baptist censure of female pastors, many women have found a less than welcoming presence in Christianity..." (p. 38). Furthermore, Castelli (1999) presents the thought that there is a continuous notion in the background which is a movement towards silence that insists on being taken when approaching the topic of women's rights in relation to the church. However, she also notes that feminist efforts will not allow the shadows and weak echoes of women's histories in the bible be silenced and she is working to historically reconstruct this history. Fortunately, there is a huge amount of recent work in Christian history being done by feminist scholars that is paving the way to uncover more varied roles for women in the Church and community besides that of the virgin, the martyr, and/or the domestic maiden (Ingersoll, 2003; Kraemer & D'Angelo, 1999; Lindley, 1996;). Ingersoll (1993) notes that recent theological studies are working to present a more precise view of Christ's teachings and treatment of women, and they are seeking to disconnect patriarchal cultural constraints and bringing to the forefront the vision of the Church for all genders and races which they feel is the true story told in the Gospel.

Griffith's (1997) study with Pentecostal women examined how these women took their position of submission and re-worked it as a means of power within their community. These women's narrative accounts reveal that they continue to be unhappy in a patriarchal environment that dominates and plans a good portion of their time,

however they have somehow come to find humor in this domination and they submit to it because in the end it makes their lives easier. Ingersoll (2003) questions Griffith's (1997) study with these women and asks the question, "How is it that women would choose to embrace a religious tradition that is predicated on their own loss of power and seemingly oppression" (p. 3). She notes that from her perspective, the women in this study sustain great loss to their identity by obeying husbands and other patriarchs within the community. However, Bartkowki and Read's (2003) study of how two groups of women in religiously conservative faiths negotiate gender in light of their commitments to their religious faiths reveal that women in the evangelical and Muslim traditions have learned to affirm traditional religious traditions while reforming their convictions to fit their daily living within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ingersoll (2003) brings to light that these fundamentalist traditions must be questioned in terms of women's identity and self concept. She notes that some women in the studies feel particularly limited and discounted by their marginalization within the religious tradition. She feels these stories must be further investigated and that current studies related to the topic indicate that women's lives are much more complicated among the shadows of patriarchy if the women's narratives are read from the impact to self and identity.

Lindley (1996) notes that a great majority of the conservative religious community perceives women attuned to feminist notions as threats to the values of family and to the cultural fabric of a stable society. In their book, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women*, Douglas and Michaels (2004) note that the revelation of the impact of feminism on the fabric of the American Christian family came to a head in 1984, when Regan's view of the "new morning in

America” questioned the state of family values which implied that, “Dad should be the boss again and Mom should make family heirlooms out of the lint from the clothes dryer” (p. 88). It was at this point, Douglas and Michaels (2004) note that the work of feminism in the 1960’s and 1970’s was set back on a course that would harm women’s rights and begin the re-questioning of where a woman’s place ultimately should be. It was the essentialist thinking of the Regan era that put working mothers and stay-at-home moms on a path of rivalry that continues to date to be at the forefront of the debate of upon whose shoulders the responsibility of children and the household should rest. These tensions among women exacerbate the growing religious debate among Christian patriarch’s notions about women’s roles and responsibilities within almost every facet of the global environment.

Paskow and Christ (1989) evaluated several key aspects of a multitude of studies on women’s participation in religion and spirituality completed from feminist perspectives and found the following common themes running through the conclusions of all of the studies: (a) all analyses recognized and critiqued patriarchal control and traditions; (b) powerful historical and cultural realities that were overpowering in most contexts to women; (c) major reconstruction within the Christian tradition system will need to be made for the context to be healthy for women; (d) alternative readings of scripture; looking through scripture for nurturing and positive characterizations of women need to be at the forefront of inquiries; (e) reinterpretation and reconstruction of many past stories within religious traditions need to be re-written to get a more rich and sophisticated picture of women’s contributions to family and society; and (f) “Human experience of the divine, of self, and of others has always shaped theology, even if its

influence was not acknowledged, but what was often presumed to be a ‘universal’ experience was, in fact, privileged white male experience” (p. 425). Therefore, Paskow and Christ’s (1989) conclusion was that studies focus on religion must address women’s experiences, which may in fact alter their experience and needs within the religious community. They suggest a beginning point of research would be to recognize women’s contributions, women’s perspectives, and women’s ways of being.

### Women’s Health and Well-being within the Rural Environment

Only in the past ten years, has there really been a true and recognizable interest in the health issues of women living within rural areas (Thorndyke, Davis, Vondracek, and Corbin, 2004). In October 2004, a National Rural Women’s Health Conference titled *Improving the Health of Women and Meeting the Challenges of the Rural Setting* was sponsored by The Pennsylvania State University. This conference drew speakers from all of the country and Canada. The conceptual pieces and research studies focused on all aspects of women’s health ranging from chronic illness to pregnancy and addressed the needs of women of all ages. The one missing component of the conference was research related to the preventative health and well-being of working and stay-at-home mothers.

A major study conducted by Mulder, et. al (2002) related to the behavioral health care needs of rural women was the first to actually attempt to define rural women and conclude that one out of every three women in American constitute this population. They noted that every state in the country has a rural population and yet the size of the population lacks voice in regards to their basic health needs. Additionally, they note that

despite the great amount of women living in rural areas, these women's behavioral health care needs have not been the topic of research. Mulder & McNamara (2002) note:

“The rural woman is absolutely the backbone of her community...the rural housewife is responsible for taking care of the home, taking care of the children, taking care of housewifely duties and frequently with very little help from her husband. And at the same time she may also have a significant amount of duty to farm working, to raising the garden, to doing the canning, to keeping books for an agriculturally related business. And then in order to provide supplemental income for her family, she's got a third full-time job, very often working outside the home, and we think of this as rural overload”. (p.2)

Their study concluded that rural women are at tremendous risk for depression and everyday added stress. They also concluded that it is the patriarchal traditionalism which expounds the attitude of women being all to everyone a great majority of the time. Within the future recommendations of their study they suggest that any researcher entering into a relationship with rural women must insist that the intersection of rural living, gender, and ethnicity be included in the inquiry. The conclusions of this research study lead to the a new curriculum being funded by the Committee on Rural Health for the rural health care professional entitled, *Caring for the Rural Community*. Although this study was specifically related to the behavioral health care needs of elderly women, adolescent females, unmarried mothers, lesbians, and women with disabilities living in rural communities it offers insight to the needs of personal health and well-being of mothers living with rural communities. The study concluded that the following were the primary barriers to women suffering from behavioral health issues within rural



communities: (a) cultural barriers of mistrust, stigma, and loss of independence; (b) lack of awareness of services and perceived value; (c) lack of services; (d) cost; (e) access, transportation, and communication barriers; and (f) lack of policy and procedures within the rural context.

Another study funded by the Department of Foods and Nutrition at the University of Georgia conducted a qualitative research study for the Georgia Office of Women's Health. The objective of the study was to determine the health needs and concerns of rural women ages 40 and older. The concerns raised in this study focused around the basic medical areas and work-related illness incurred by women within this age category. The study concluded that rural communities must offer environmental supports for physical activity and health education for women of all ages if a significant difference in the overall quality of life of these women wanted to become a reality.

It should be noted that research in the area of rural mother's personal and/or preventative health and well-being was not found. Although as noted above there have been studies conducted on the well-being of rural mothers while pregnant and related to the health and well-being of the infant and mother post pregnancy. Specific focus on a rural mothers' nurturance of self or care for self as an indicator of personal health and well-being was not found through multiple media searches.

### Overview of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

To add to this literature review, this section reviews studies related to caring, health and well-being, and narrative inquiry specifically within occupational science and occupational therapy. It confirms that minimal research within the field has focused on a

mother's health and well-being. It concludes with a discussion of the importance of conducting such research to more clearly understand the nature of learning about nurturing self by which mothers of school-aged children may engage in, negotiate, and navigate through within rural, religiously conservative, and historically patriarchal-driven environments.

The field of occupational science defines everyday activities of life as meaningful occupations. Yerxa, et. al. (1990), provides the following definition of occupational science, "The study of the human as an occupational being including the need for a capacity to engage in and orchestrate daily occupations in the environment over the life span" (p. 14). Occupational science seeks to understand the nature, function, and meaning of occupation and its centrality to the human experience. In addressing occupation, we must also take into consideration the person, the health status of the person, the environment, the values, and the culture(s) in which the occupation is taking place (Yerxa, 2000). Occupations call for the active involvement of an individual's personal values, beliefs, strengths, and needs. It is documented that engagement in meaningful occupations are essential for a woman's health and well-being (Clark, Carlson, & Polkinghorne, 1997). However, the one basic occupation that many women neglect or are unable to come to terms with for one reason or another is that of self-nurturance. More than ten years ago, Bateson (1990) offered the following words of wisdom about extreme self-care in her book *Composing a Life*:

It is not easy to learn to cherish oneself when one's life has been organized around cherishing others or when all the cherishing has been delegated to someone else. Today, those who begrudge themselves care, feeling that their role

in life is to care for others, can be persuaded to think about issues of health and stress reduction. As a result, a little cherishing of self is translated into responsible behavior, even a way of caring for others. But self-care is important for its own sake as well. It is intimately tied to self-esteem, with the implication that the one who is cherished is important and valuable for her sake. (pp. 144-145)

One may ask – “Why study the ways mothers learn about and come to know the importance of the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance? Why study the occupation of self-nurturance at all?” It appears that the compliment of women’s development of self and the conceptual notions of non-unitary self and constantly shifting identity alongside of occupational science may add a piece to the puzzle that has been missing when occupational therapists consider women’s learning and knowing about health and well-being. As Christiansen (1999) states, “Full and genuine appreciation of the power of occupation to enable health and well-being has not yet made its way across the landscape of the profession” (p.556). A deliberate connection of the theoretical perspectives of feminist poststructuralism, narrative inquiry, adult education, and occupational therapy may be a very productive combination to assist mothers in focusing on their learning around self-nurturance – it may be the link between thought and feeling, mind and body, body and spirit.

In the *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process* (2002), self-nurturance appropriately fits under the occupational performance areas of activities of daily living. It is a purposeful and meaningful occupation, that when engaged in promotes a balance in work, rest, sleep, and leisure. Furthermore, it leads to healthy interactions with oneself, other individuals, and the environment. Self-nurturance is one

of the most basic daily occupations overlooked by women, secondary to the multiple roles and demands placed on them within everyday living. Mothers must be afforded the opportunity to narrate their understanding and experience of nurturing self in order to learn, re-learn, and/or acknowledge its affects on their overall well-being. Every woman should be able to voice objectives that reflect the distinctiveness of everydayness which form the balance of her life. Most importantly, women should have a starting point for learning how to engage in and consequently celebrate the importance of taking care of self. As Flannery (2000) notes when *re-searching* women's learning, "It's about being conscious of learning as you go about the everyday activities of life"(p. 248). The following literature will address research that has been conducted within the field of occupational science and occupational therapy that implicitly relates to this inquiry on mother's self-nurturance. The research included looks at occupational therapy's relationship to caring, health and well-being, and narrative inquiry.

### *Occupational Therapy and Caring*

In the early eighties, the field of occupational therapy had a surge of pieces written around the topic of caring (Baum, 1980; Devereaux, 1984; Gilfoyle, 1980; Hightower & Vandamm, 1980; King, 1980; Yerxa, 1980). The theme of the *Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lectureships* in 1980 was "Caring is the Key" and many occupational therapists acknowledged the importance of caring as a component of the therapeutic relationship in practice. One important insight related to this inquiry was made by Devereaux (1984) when she pointed out that the capacity to care for others directly is

related to the ability to care for self and that this ability is shaped by all of an individual's life experiences.

In her review of literature related to caring within occupational therapy, Wright-St. Clair (2000) noted that "caring" is discussed more within the nursing profession than occupational therapy. She wondered if the profession's silence on "caring" from 1980 to the early 1990's was secondary to occupational therapy adopting "enabling" as its identifying feature. Wright-St. Clair (2000) notes that Gilligan (1982), Mayerhoff (1971), and Noddings (1984) were a stepping stone to write about caring within occupational therapy in four studies done on caring between 1993 and 2001. The literature was utilized to emphasize the caring nature of women which make up 95% of the occupational therapy professionals.

The earliest study was a meta-analysis inquiry focused on a therapist-relationship of care (Peloquin, 1993), while the later studies were all qualitative in nature and focused on caring dynamics and/or characteristics of occupational therapists working with individuals with disabilities (Dychawy-Rosner, Eklund & Isacson, 2001; Rahman, 2000; Sachs, 2000). This is the extent to which caring has been addressed in the field of occupational therapy and although it does provide a wealth of resources to the current study it leaves questions unanswered about how occupational therapist may empower women to self-nurture. Therefore, the next body of literature explored within the field of occupational therapy was health and well-being in an attempt to glean a better understanding of women's nurturance of self.

*Occupational Therapy and Health & Well-being*

Zemke & Clark (1996) describe occupational science as a theoretical basis that assists occupational therapists in making sense of the relationship between human occupation and general well-being. Law (2002) contends participation or involvement in meaningful occupation is vital for all individuals to maintain their health and well-being. A number of research studies have recently been conducted that address occupation as a modality for health and well-being of individuals with disabilities and well older adults. Eleven studies dating from 1996 to 2003 were found to provide insight to the nature of occupational therapy facilitating individuals with the meaningful occupation of health and well-being (Aublin, Hackey & Mercier, 1999; Bedell, 1998; Christiansen 2000; Hasselkus, 1998; Jackson, et. al., 1998; Lipschutz, 2000; Lo & Zemke, 1997; Lyons, Orozovic, Davis & Newman, 2002; Peirce, 2001; Reynolds, 2003; Sviden, Borell, 1998). The methodological nature of the studies included one correlational study, seven qualitative studies, one meta-analysis study and two narrative inquiries. Of the eleven studies, five studies focused on well older adults and the remaining six studies engaged individuals with disabilities. The purpose of the studies included finding the relationship between the meaning of daily activities and well-being, subjective happiness and its relationship to well-being, living with AIDS, cancer and/or chronic illness and the impact on well-being, and how to develop health and well-being through occupational expansion. The overarching theoretical perspective of all eleven studies was occupational performance, which addresses the relationship between the person, environment, and occupation.

In a unique conceptual piece related to the human spirit and occupation, Yerxa (1998) states, “Humans can influence the state of their own health, *provided* that they are given the opportunity to develop the skills to do so. The human spirit for occupation... actualized through daily learning, needs to be nurtured to contribute to the health and quality of life...” (p. 417). These studies have provided significant acknowledgement of the relationship between occupation and well-being, however information related to specific characteristics of individual occupations that are health promoting continues to be limited in the field of occupational science and occupational therapy (Wood, 1999; Fazio, 2001).

#### *Occupational Therapy and Narrative Inquiry*

The field of occupational therapy offers insights to the making of meaning, in relation to the interpretation of self through occupations and supports the notion of defining how individuals develop skills for occupational self-analysis (Clark, 1993; Zemke & Clark, 1996; Yerxa, 1998; Yerxa, 2000). Zemke and Clark (1996) convey that one of the most valuable assets of occupational science is, “This discipline of study can assist us in increasing our understanding of the relationship between human occupation and general well-being” (p. 446). The discipline provides a framework for understanding human dynamics within the realm of occupational behavior(s) and the interactions that occur within the environment. However, there is no indication that a focus on a woman’s learning and knowing generated during the engagement of meaningful occupations has been studied.

Since the field has become increasingly interested in the realm of narratives and narrative inquiry, Zeitlin (2003) was invited to speak at the American Occupational Therapy Association's Annual Conference as a distinguished scholar and to present his insights on folklore and storytelling. He spoke about the professions commitment to engage individuals in occupations across the lifespan and the role occupations play in "...creating memory, mastery and meaning in life" (p. 1). Although Mattingly (1989) first introduced occupational therapy to narrative in the late eighties the profession has minimally utilized her insights to conduct narrative inquiry. Throughout the years, she continues to provide insight and evidence that therapists hearing stories from clients can give many clues about how to proceed with intervention with each unique individual and/or cohort.

In a review of the literature on narrative and occupational therapy, sixteen studies were uncovered that implicitly or explicitly fit the criteria from 1996 to 2003 (Mallinson, Kielhofner, & Mattingly, 1996; Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000; Barrett, Beer & Kielhofner, 1999; Braveman & Helfrich, 2001; Chaudhury, 2003; Fanchiang, 1996; Gahnstrom-Strandqvist, Tham, Josephsson & Borell, 2000; Josephsson, Backman, Nygard & Borell, 2000; Larson, 1996; Lentin, 2002; Lyons, Tickle-Degnen, 2003; Mostert, Zacharkiewicz & Fossey, 1996; Neville-Jan, 2003; Price-Lackey & Cashman, 1996; Walsh, Crepeau, 1998; Wrights-St. Clair, 2003). Of the sixteen studies, seven studies cited the methodology as narrative inquiry. The remaining studies cited methodology as life history, ethnography, empirical phenomenological psychological method, case study design and autoethnography. The participants included psychiatric patients, African American families, injured workers, men with HIV, elderly men and women, persons



with learning disabilities, caregivers, mothers of children with disabilities, adolescents, and patients with Parkinson's disease, cancer, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis and/or a traumatic head injury. The narratives focused around living with and being an individual with disease or illness and the subsequent impact on daily and life occupations.

### *Summary of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy*

To date, the fields of occupational science and occupational therapy have not explored the facilitation of the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance as a means towards personal health and well-being. Given this fact, it can be postulated that no investigations have been completed on the most effective means by which women may come to know and/or learn of about the powerful contribution of self nurturance. It is felt that the methodology of narrative inquiry will allow women to engage in, reflect upon, and celebrate the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance. It will be the focus of this narrative inquiry to engage mothers in telling their stories about nurturing self within a specifically defined socio-cultural context via exploration of their constantly shifting identity.

### *Summary of Literature Review*

This literature review lends insight into women's development of self, women's caring as an extension of mothering, occupational science and occupational therapy as they relate to the learning of and engagement in self-nurturance by mothers of school-aged children within a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven community. The notions and conceptual foundations of feminist poststructuralism provided a

perspective for critiquing the literature. The results of the literature review related to women's development of self reveals that the research and conceptual literature related to women's caring are broad and implicit in its relation to this inquiry. The review of the literature on women's caring as an extension of mothering indicates that, though a great deal of work has been done in relation to women's care of others, there is no to minimal research and/or conceptual notions related to mothers' nurturance of self. Missing from the combined effort of the studies on women's development of self and caring is an understanding of the learning and knowing mothers embark upon during their journey of nurturing self among the constraining realities of power, discourse, and knowledge.

In light of the findings of this literature review it appeared justifiable to argue there was an absolute need to conduct this narrative analysis inquiry related to mothers' perspective of nurturing self guided by the theoretical framework of feminist poststructuralism. The explanation of nurturance by women has been primarily from the point that women are to be nurturers of others while neglecting the need to care for self. So much so, that the literature implicitly and explicitly states a woman's selfhood is defined by her sociological and psychological needs to fulfill this role. This long held perspective needed to be challenged. The emphasis on women's development of self being defined as such has lead to a preponderance of mothers neglecting their personal health and well-being.

Research has failed to consider that this role of the "constant nurturer of others" may be detrimental to a mother's overall health and well-being. Inadvertently, the role of caretaker of others has become the norm when considering a mother's development of self. There was a need for an inquiry of exploration initiating dialogue, in which women,

specifically mothers in this study, would be empowered by the ownership of their health and well-being via opportunities to actively narrate their stories of self-nurturance highlighting the negotiation and navigation of nurturing self around motherhood, rural living, conservative religious beliefs, and patriarchy.

It is important that occupational therapists glean how and why some mothers have overcome or are coming to know how to overcome contextual barriers to self-nurturance, thereby being more informed about how to assist mothers attain a more efficient and effective balance of health and well-being. The narratives of the mothers who participated in this study offer a better understanding of the many socio-cultural barriers some women may face in their daily living.

The feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework worked as a guide for this narrative inquiry because it takes into consideration the public and personal intersections of gender, power and knowledge within women's lives. It offered the four mothers engaged in the inquiry the opportunity to ask a multitude of questions while at the same time demanding a multiplicity of answers. Within the wings of feminist poststructuralism women's lives are not met to be watched over...women's lives are to be liberated from contextual constraints and moved outside the borders into full view. Within this full view, the hope is that the stories told by the four women provide a clearer picture of the meaningful occupation, yet challenging aspects of mothers nurturing self within their specifically defined socio-cultural environment.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The intention of this study was to employ qualitative research methodologies, specifically narrative inquiry to bring forth stories of four mothers' efforts to nurture self within a specific contextual environment. The foremost aspect of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of methodology; however, the chapter also includes the purpose of the study, a review of the guiding research questions, a brief description of the theoretical perspective of the study, research design, participants, data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness of the study.

#### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to glean insight from and illuminate the lived stories of four working mothers of school-aged children living in a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven community. The objective was to discern how the perceived realities of this cultural context influenced the mothers' understanding of and engagement in the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance as a facilitator of their personal health and well-being. Narrative analysis methodology was employed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and diversities that influenced these mothers' experiences of attempting to enhance and/or maintain the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance.

The inquiry focused around the experience of motherhood, rural community living, religious values/belief systems, and patriarchy within the culture. Narratives were gathered via two interviews, journaling, a creative synthesis project, and a process group.

The gathering of stories provided insights to how these mothers negotiated and navigated through these various cultural realities in order to establish self nurturance routines which directly impacted their personal health and well-being. It was important throughout this narrative analysis study to value the integration of reason, emotion, intuition, experience, and analytic thought processes of the women (Flannery, 2000). Consequently, while the women were involved in telling their stories about self-nurturance in relation to their socio-cultural context the insights gleaned contributed to further liberation of their health and well-being.

As stated in chapter one, the objective of this narrative analysis inquiry was to concentrate on the cultural contextual issues that influenced engagement in self-nurturance for the mothers who participated in this study. Specific questions that I was concerned with were:

1. How do these women explain their identity as a mother living within a rural, religiously conservative, and historically patriarchal-driven environment?
2. What positive and/or negative messages have these mothers received within their contextual environment about engaging in self-nurturance?
3. How have these mothers re-negotiated aspects of their identity over time in order to nurture self within their cultural environment?
4. What aspects of self-nurturance are these women still struggling with at this point in time, secondary to perspectives and notions of the cultural environment?
5. How has past and present engagement of self-nurturance been simple and/or complex in relation to gender within this cultural environment?

6. How has past and present engagement of self-nurturance been simple and/or complex in light of living in a rural environment of conservative religious beliefs/values and patriarchal-driven systems?

### Design Overview

This section explains the research methodologies that guided the study.

Specifically, it offers a justification for the use of narrative analysis within the qualitative research paradigm to gain an understanding of the lived experience of self nurturance via storytelling of the participants.

#### *Qualitative Research: Expectations, Potential, and Opportunities*

Eisner (1997) proposes that a great majority, if not all topics are appropriately suited for qualitative inquiry. The promise of the new frontier will originate from researchers asking ordinary questions about their current practice and everyday life. Crabtree and Miller (1992) suggest the most efficient means of deciding if a particular topic should be researched from a qualitative perspective is to ask if the topic has a story that needs to be investigated and shared with larger communities of people. Furthermore, Rossman & Rallis (1998) point out the researcher must consistently be aware of the voice utilized in sharing the research with others. This voice is appropriately described as the interaction between the researcher and participant(s). The researcher's biography and history, along with the topic of study, are seen as clear and obvious factors of qualitative research. As an occupational therapist who has worked in a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environment with mothers of school-aged children

for over a decade, I felt a qualitative inquiry focused on their self-nurturance within this cultural context was long overdue. Personal stories based on meaningful occupations, specifically self-nurturance within this study assisted in the promotion of the health and well-being of the mothers involved in the inquiry (Wicks & Whiteford, 2003). Furthermore, as the application and concepts of qualitative research continue to mature in the fields of social science and education; dedicated researchers will continue to explore the meaning in the everyday lives of their participants (Kleining & Witt, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This study established itself as a credible inquiry and the outcome further assists occupational therapists in having a better understanding of how to plan and facilitate educational programs focused on a mother's health & well-being within this particular context.

Within the health-related fields Law, et. al.(1998) offers the following criterion when a researcher is considering qualitative research as the method for their study. First, the beliefs and worldviews of the researcher must be taken into consideration. Secondly, the researcher must ask themselves what is the nature of the end result desired. They suggest a qualitative study should be utilized when a researcher is seeking meaning and understanding about individual/group experiences. Thirdly, they offer the thought that qualitative research requires a depth of understanding and description from participants. A moderate amount of emphasis is placed on the participant being able to tell the story of their lived experience.

This study of how mothers within a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environment negotiated and navigated the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance was appropriately guided by a qualitative methodology, given that the

mothers were engaged in in-depth sharing of how the cultural context impacted their nurturance of self, hence their health and well-being. More specifically narrative analysis, a particular form of qualitative inquiry was the most suitable methodology by which these mothers could represent and reflect upon their engagement in self-nurturance. As an occupational therapist, adult educator, and novice researcher I wanted to take this inquiry to the margins, by going deep within these mothers' stories and having them reflect beyond the ending of their stories of navigating and negotiating self-nurturance within their environment. Narrative analysis provided a means of doing this, however since narrative analysis is a specific form of qualitative inquiry, I first considered how three major themes of qualitative research as described by Patton (2002) were fundamental to this inquiry. Later in this chapter I will discuss in detail why narrative inquiry as a particular form of qualitative research was best suited for this research agenda.

Patton (2002) describes the first theme of qualitative research as involving the following design strategies – naturalistic inquiry; emergent design flexibility; and purposeful sampling. Within this study, naturalistic inquiry addressed the context simply as it existed, while the emergent design assisted in the flexibility and adaptability of the researcher. This allowed for the research to go outside of the boundaries of judgment. The definitive consideration in designing this study was the selection of a purposeful sample of participants that would amplify the phenomenon being studied. As noted above, this inquiry was well-suited to these design strategies. The inquiry took place within the mothers' communities, among the cultural constraints and supports that enhanced and/or hindered their nurturance of self. Narrative inquiry allowed for a great



deal of flexibility by both the researcher and participants involved in this narrative process. Furthermore, the purposeful sample of mothers assisted in gleaning as much as possible about the topic of nurturing self within the specified cultural paradigm.

The second theme involves data collection and fieldwork strategies – qualitative data; personal experience and engagement; empathy and mindfulness, and dynamic systems. Qualitative data is defined as observations, interviews or documents that offer rich, thick descriptions of the nature of an individual's perspectives of lived experience. Patton (2002) supports and encourages the researcher to become embedded in the environmental context of the study. In other words, the researcher's understanding of the lived experience is the starting point of the inquiry. I had a close and personal experience and a vested interest in this topic as a mother, a woman, and as an occupational therapist. I had long been embedded within the cultural context and I was mindful of the dynamics that go on within the environment. This did not hinder the study, but allowed me to more fully understand the cultural perspectives of the mothers who were engaged in this inquiry.

The third theme involves analysis of research strategies – unique case orientation; inductive analysis and creative synthesis; balanced perspective; context sensitivity; and voice, perspective, and reflexivity. I entered into the study feeling that each woman was unique and that every dimension of the research would flow from the details of each individual story. I employed inductive analysis and creative synthesis of their lived experience and it was of the utmost importance in discovering and confirming the patterns, themes, and relationships within their lives. I was the instrument that gathered the mothers' stories and I entered the study with personal experience surrounding the

topic of study along with sensitivity to the context. As Patton (2002) notes, without acknowledging or knowing about the context of the inquiry, a qualitative researcher has no eyes to see with or ears to hear the full meaning of a participant's personal story. The final and most discussed component in qualitative inquiry is that the researcher must own and reflect on her own voice and perspective, in relation to all aspects of the study. The ability of a researcher to be reflexive, addresses the credibility and authentic nature of qualitative research. It is this characteristic that continues to be unique and desired in the world of researching women lived experiences in rural communities. Therefore, it was determined that the most suitable research perspective for this inquiry was narrative analysis. The following section will discuss how narrative analysis was utilized to explore the lived experience of these four mothers.

### *Narrative Inquiry*

Bochner (2001) notes, "Narrative analysis honors individuals' stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience, worthy of narrative documentary of experience or analyzed for connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political, and dramatic dimensions of human experiences" (p. 116). Midway during the writing of the first three chapters of this inquiry, a wise woman asked me "How do stories you gather in a narrative analysis inquiry differ from the stories you gather in a phenomenological or ethnography inquiry?" I came to the understanding that it was not the stories, but rather the interpretation of the intact story offered by the participant which was at the heart of narrative analysis (Leiblich, Tival-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Patton, 2002). As noted previously, for over a decade as an occupational

therapist and adult educator I had been listening to and attempting to make sense of individuals' learned and lived experiences through their personal stories. I had consistently felt that it was important to elicit stories when trying to understand the point of view and personal experience of anyone that I had worked with in my occupational therapy practice and/or within higher education environment. As an occupational therapist and adult educator, I had come to know that storytelling was at the core of an individual's being (Wilcock, 1999).

Patton (2002) presents the following as foundational questions of narrative analysis: "1) What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? and 2) How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?" (p. 115). These foundational questions are in contrast to phenomenology where interviews may take the form of stories but the foundational question according to Patton (2002) is, "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people" (p. 104). From these foundational questions it was gleaned that in narrative analysis the focus is on the *texture* of story and the *culture* that shaped it. In comparison, the foundational question in phenomenology is focused on the *meaning* of the lived experience.

Within this study it was the interpretation of consequences and interplay between motherhood, conservative religious beliefs/value systems, rural living and patriarchy that served as the backdrop for the mothers' engagement in self-nurturance and where the analysis of the stories unfolded during a five month period. The narrative process enabled the mothers in this study the opportunity to recreate and reconstruct their self-

nurturance routines within the rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environment in which they found themselves embedded. It is the goal of narrative analysis inquiries to collect data which describes daily life (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Denzin (1989) offers the following description of a narrative:

A narrative is a *story* that tells a sequence of events that are significant for the *narrator* and his or her audience. A narrative as a story has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end. It has an internal logic that makes sense to the narrator. A narrative relates events in a temporal, causal sequence. Every narrative describes a sequence of events that have happened. (p. 37)

Within this and every narrative inquiry, it is through the systematic study of narratives (stories) which inform the researcher about the participants and the world they live in (Patton, 2002). Wilcock (1998) and Bloom (2002) suggest it is within the rich description of narratives where the participants truly come to know about their being and experience their becoming. Narrative research allows participants to speak for themselves. Consequently, it was via each mothers' story that meaning was not challenged, but heard for its true importance in relation to her life.

Narrative analysis was selected as the methodology for this study because it allowed for concentrated focus on and the telling of mothers' stories of engagement in self-nurturance within their cultural environment. Simply asking general questions and seeking general meaning could have been problematic secondary to the complex and contextual nature of the concept of self-nurturance.

As Bruner (1990) asserts, it is the forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary where the uniqueness of narrative inquiry blossoms. He states, "When you

encounter an exception to the ordinary, and ask somebody what is happening, the person you ask will virtually always tell a story that contains reasons” (p. 49). Reissman (1993) expands on the same notion by stating, “Respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between the ideal and real, self and society” (p. 3). The motivation for conducting a narrative inquiry was to actively put into text the tensions, solutions, and the creation of new ways for these mothers of school-aged children living within rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environment to consider personal stories of nurturing self.

*Narrative Feminist Inquiry: The Voice within a Story*

This narrative study was very much situated in the premises of feminist methodology. The following principles are offered by Kirsh (1999) and represented my commitment to exploring a mother’s life, while at the same time acknowledging inequities that may come up between me and participants:

- Construct research questions which acknowledge and validate women’s experiences;
- Collaborate with participants wherever possible so that growth and learning can be mutually beneficial, interactive, and cooperative;
- Analyze how social, historical and cultural factors shape research site as well as the participants’ goals, values and experiences;
- Analyze how the researcher’s identity, experiences, training and theoretical framework shapes the research agenda, data analysis and findings;
- Correct androcentric norms by calling into question what has been considered *normal* and what has been regarded as *deviant* (p. 5).

According to Bloom (1998) the content and structure of narrative is critical to feminist narrative research. She states, “What is most important is how each narrative offers a means for the narrator to construct herself through the act of narrating stories” (p. 310). The researcher’s responsibility is to make sense of the process by which the story unfolds. According to Bloom (1998) the content and structure of narrative is critical to feminist narrative research. She states, “What is most important is how each narrative offers a means for the narrator to construct herself through the act of narrating stories” (p. 310). Brooks (2000) contends that more inquiries about women’s stories within specifically defined contexts need to be conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of women’s learning and knowing. As Bloom (2002) asserts, focusing on *self* for data collection and analysis is the purpose of narrative research and when guided by feminist poststructuralist notions it is concerned with the following three goals: (a) generating social critique and advocacy by using narratives of self; (b) the primary source of data is an individual's life; and (c) utilizing the concepts of non-unitary self to deconstruct the humanist concept of rational linear self.

Within this study the women’s’ narratives were searched for insights as to how to better assist other mothers engage in the meaningful occupation of self-nurturance. This was viewed by the researcher as the primary path towards enhancing many more women’s overall health and well-being (Wilcock, 2002).

#### Bounds of the Study: Data Collection and Analysis

This section outlines the participant selection process, data collection, and data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness of the study.

### *Participant Selection*

Merriam (1997) states, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore, must select from a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 6). This narrative analysis inquiry engaged and explored four mothers’ lived stories. All of the women in this study were working mothers of school-aged children living in the already defined environment. These women self-identified that they understood the core concepts of nurturing self (i.e. personally identified enrichment for mind, body and spirit); however, they also acknowledged being consistently disillusioned and frustrated with their inconsistent participation in nurturing self. Specifically the selection of the participants was based on the following criteria:

1. Have at least two school-aged children;
2. Over the age of 35;
3. Currently living in and have lived for 80% of her life in a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven community;
4. Work 20 or more hours outside of the home;
5. Identify self as the primary caretaker of children and household management;
6. Identify that motherhood has had an impact on learning about and/or the engagement in self-nurturance;
7. Identify that current and/or past religious affiliation has had an impact on learning about and/or the engagement in self-nurturance;
8. Identify that living in a rural community has had an impact on learning about and/or the engagement in self-nurturance;
9. Identify that issues of patriarchy in their family and/or community has had an impact on learning about and/or the engagement in self-nurturance;

10. Identify that within the past year they have attempted a routine, course and/or program related to self-nurturance for their mind, body and/or spirit.

I identified these characteristics for several reasons. I specified the age since research has indicated different tendencies between different ages/generations of women. According to Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996), at some point women reach a maturity level that allows them to be more reflective and these are the stories I wanted to present within this research. I wanted to present the stories of women who typically have reached a stage in their lives in which the multitude of responsibilities make it particularly complicated to engage in self-nurturance. In addition, I selected women who lived in rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environment; because it appeared the collective forces of this environment may have made it even more difficult for these women to justify taking and making time to nurture self. It is from these voices that adult educators and occupational therapists have a great deal to learn so that they may offer more accessible and appropriate opportunities for women's wellness education given defined contextual constraints. I chose to hear the stories of women who had actively engaged in a recent self-nurturance routine because, since they had the experience, they may have had a perspective on what may help and/or hinder their future engagement in nurturing self.

The participants were mothers living in communities within a Northeastern rural community. All participants were recruited through personal and professional contacts. Potential participants were contacted by phone and a meeting was set-up to discuss the details of the narrative inquiry to determine interest and to verify a match to the above required characteristics. In addition, I wanted to ensure that the women understood the



purpose of the study and exactly what would be required of them by participating in this narrative analysis inquiry.

### *Data Collection*

The data collection consisted of two semi-structured interviews, participant journaling, a creative synthesis project, and a dinner gathering post all other data collection. The first interview utilized an interview guide and the second interview was lead by questions gleaned by the reading of the first interview and journal. Both interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The women who participated in the study were to originally keep a self-nurturance journal for two weeks in regards to their thoughts and feelings related to self-nurturance focusing on the cultural components of motherhood, conservative religious beliefs/values, patriarchal-driven implicit and explicit dynamics, and rural community living. Consequently, all of the women ended up keeping a journal for at least one month secondary to wanting to give more time to time to the inquiry. In addition, to completing two interviews and journals each woman completed a creative synthesis project focused around the following questions: (a) How does it feel when you are not engaged in self-nurturance?; (b) What are the obstacles to self-nurturance?; and (c) How do you feel when you are engaged in self-nurturance? The creative synthesis projects were completed after the second interview and were brought to the dinner gathering where the women met one another for the first time. Following the completion of their creative synthesis projects three of the four women came together for the *research process dinner* to discuss their overall participation in the project and to share their creative synthesis projects with one another. The interview

transcripts, journal entries, creative synthesis projects, and the *research process dinner* provided the data for which the findings of this study were based and are explained in more detail in the following sections.

*Interviews.* The women in this study participated in two taped semi-structured interviews which were conducted approximately six weeks apart. Each interview took approximately two and one half hours to complete with each participant. As Riessman (1993) suggests, semi-structured interviews provide increased control on the part of the participant which is most conducive to narrative inquiries. The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to elicit participants' personal narratives of self-nurturing experiences within their cultural context.

Personal narrative as described by Langellier (1989) is, "Part of the study of everyday life, particularly performance in everyday life and the culture of everyday life" (p. 243). Furthermore, Riessman (1993) offers the notion that locating narratives for analysis is not difficult. She notes, "Personal narratives are a recapitulation of every nuance of a moment that had special meaning" (p. 2). These mothers had identified during the participant selection stage that they had lived through positive and/or negative accounts of nurturing self. It was these stories that I wanted to gather and deconstruct. Most importantly, I am hopeful that I succeeded in assisting the women in reconstructing their stories into meaningful and active forces of learning more about their health and well-being.

During the initial interview, narratives focused on the cultural topics of motherhood, rural community living, religious values/belief systems, and patriarchy in

relation to learning about and engaging in self-nurturance. Once these interviews were transcribed, they were given back to the participants and a follow-up interview was completed approximately six weeks later. This time period was needed in order to give the women enough time to read and reflect upon the stories they told during the initial interview and to conduct journaling. During this time, the participant could choose to add or delete information to her initial narrative and the primary investigator read through the initial narrative to glean additional questions to which required further exploration during the second interview. None of the women selected to delete anything from their initial interviews; however, all of the women had additional stories they wanted to share during the second interview through the process of reading stories told during the first interview.

*Documents and artifacts.* In addition to the interviews, the participants were asked to maintain a journal of reflective thoughts and questions related to their story of self-nurturance. Initially, the women were asked to keep a journal for two consecutive weeks, but this was not doable for three of them, so we altered the journal writing to be fifteen journal entries within a six week period. This proved to be much more flexible and less stressful for the women. Journaling is deemed by Janesick (1999) as a rigorous documentary tool that adds an additional dimension of depth and breadth to research inquiries. Journaling in this study focused around past, present, and future engagement of self-nurturance from the aspect of being a mother living within the specific socio-cultural context. The women were guided by the researcher to simply write about the images, thoughts, and/or symbols within their environment as they arose in relation to nurturing self. They were also informed that during the second interview the participant and

researcher would go through the journal and the participant would be asked to share stories around the various journal entries.

When the interviews and journaling are completed, the women were asked to consider designing a creative project which encompasses their story of past, present, and future engagement in self-nurturance within this socio-cultural environment. Note that this creative synthesis piece was initially presented during the participant selection sessions. This project was described as anything that encompasses the true meaning of self-nurturance for the participant. The creative synthesis projects were presented and shared with one another during the dinner gathering and stories were shared with one another as to the creative thinking and processes completed to make the project a reality. The creative projects were scanned and are part of each mothers' narrative in chapters 4 through 7.

Additionally, I maintained field notes and a journal. My insights, thoughts, and reflections will be shared as the epilogue of this inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to field notes as "ongoing, daily notes, full of details and moments of our inquiry lives within the field" (p. 105). I made field notes during and after the interviews and at anytime I found myself coming back to the generosity of these mothers to share their busy lives with me to think about, explore, and describe of all things – self nurturance. As I suspected, prior to engaging in this research process, my journal is filled with reflective and subconscious pieces of information which arose during my daily interaction with this inquiry.

*Data Analysis*

The above data was collected, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher. It is noted that the researcher can gain invaluable connections, especially during a course of narrative analysis, within the stories if they trudge through the transcription process independently (Riessman, 1993). Although initial coding ran parallel with the transcription process, I sought guidance from members of my dissertation committee and the participants to verify the accuracy of my perspective(s) of the stories. As Mishler (1995) notes, “How we arrange and rearrange the [interview] text in light of our discoveries is a process of testing, clarifying, and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse” (p. 27). In addition to forming stories throughout each interview, there were a myriad of themes spanning across these four mothers’ stories. I anticipated that these themes would naturally emerge related to the cultural paradigms of motherhood, rural community living, religious values/belief systems, and patriarchy as they impacted and/or related to self-nurturance. The themes did arise in this manner and they are presented and analyzed in chapter 8 and 9, respectively.

Although a great deal of insight was gleaned and recorded during the actual process of data collection the time arose to pull together narratives. This process was initiated by making two copies of the interviews and journals for different types of coding. The creative synthesis projects were deeply looked upon for stories beyond that told by the participant. Once I totally immersed myself in the vast amount of data I constructed an integrated story with a plot for each of the women.

Wolcott (2001) describes the narrative analysis process as, “Not derived from rigorous, agreed upon, carefully selected procedures, but rather a pondering of the data”

(p. 33). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) it is the responsibility of the researcher to identify, “Storylines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear...as we engage with research participants, live and tell stories with them, the plotlines under composition are re-storied, that is they are relived and retold” (p. 131/165).

I took my lead from Reissman (1993) who suggests beginning with the structure of the narrative by asking the following questions, “How is it organized? Why does an informant develop her talk this way in conversation with the listener? How open is the text to other readings?” (p. 31). Once the structures of the stories were gleaned and I set up the basic outlines, I began the process of interpretation for themes. Mishler (1986) offers a rationale and a narrative framework which assists in focusing on the core narrative. First, the researcher needs to focus on the *orientation* or the setting and characters in the story. Secondly, consideration should be given to the *abstract* or a summary of the events and incidents in the story. Thirdly, the researcher should look for the *complicating action* or a commentary on events, conflicts and themes. Lastly, the researcher should identify the *resolution* or the outcome of the story or conflict (Mishler, pp. 236-237). In using this framework to analyze stories Mishler notes, “It will answer the question – what is the point of this story” (p. 236).

In addition, I found the following guidelines for the development of a narrative offered by Polkinghorne (1995) useful for the purpose of this study:

1. Gather a description of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place. The researcher needs to take cognizance of the contextual feature of generating the story.
2. Identify the nature of the protagonist (chief person in the plot of the story), both physical and cognitive.
3. Identify important significant others in affecting actions and goals for the protagonist. An explanation of the relationships between the main character and other people is required in the development of the plot.
4. Concentrate on the choices and actions of the main character and movement towards an outcome.
5. Pay attention to previous experiences as these manifest themselves in the present.
6. Make sure the production of a story is within 'a bounded temporal period; that is, a beginning, middle and end'. The story needs to focus on the context, presenting the characters as unique individuals.
7. Lastly, as a researcher you need to 'provide a story line or plot that serves to configure or compose the disparate data elements into a meaningful explanation of the protagonist's responses and actions'. (p. 355)

By taking into consideration the above wisdom from experts in narrative inquiry and after many months of immersion in the data, it became certain, that to provide an honest and comprehensive picture of these mothers' narratives it would be most practical to offer individual narratives with story-lines which are defined as *narratives in motion*. Additionally, from these individual narratives a collective narrative, which is an

interweaving of the four mothers' stories, was composed as *intersecting narratives in motion* which allows the reader to glean the shared nature of the stories of nurturing self by the mothers within this cultural context.

Furthermore, I was so thankful for Bloom's (1998) insight that Sartre's progressive-regressive method is particularly helpful when looking through the lens of non-unitary self, because it assisted in addressing how the women formed and reformed their subjective being via their "Resistance to and subversion of the limitations imposed on them *as women*" (p. 65). During the progressive phase, I looked at each mothers' most recent experiences, emphasizing "a journey of becoming" (Bloom, 1998, p. 65). During the regressive phase I looked back upon the mothers' journey of exploration among the objects, people, places, and events which made up the background of their being (Jackson, 1989). Furthermore, Bloom (2002) states, "Sartre's method is a powerful heuristic for not only locating positive praxis, but also for locating places on a life's spiral where subjectivity fragments due to personal conflicts" (p. 297). This narrative analysis inquiry offered me with the ideal opportunity for the exploration of the past concerning these mothers' personal stories and their framework of being, while it also looked at the present for their process of becoming on their journey towards nurturing self within the cultural context.

To locate the voice in the mothers' stories even more deeply, I developed and utilized story maps (Richmond, 2002). By utilizing the following rubric I was able to organize the mothers' recounting of past, present and future experiences of self-nurturance. Figure 1 represents an outline of the story map that I utilized in the analysis



of each of the mothers' stories, taking into consideration that narrative inquiry involves analysis and reflection on the experiences people recall (Grbich, 1999).

<b>Self Nurturance</b>	Motherhood	Rural Living	Religious Background Beliefs Value Systems	Patriarchal-driven Environment
Past Experiences				
Present Experiences				
Future Intentions				

*Figure 1.* Outline of mothers' story maps as related to self-nurturance.

After each mothers' individual narrative was written, the individual story maps were looked upon inductively for the emergence of themes across the collection of stories among the mothers. The inductive analysis or relationship of experiences of the women within the defined cultural environment supported the development of an overarching narrative of the culture which brought the research back to Patton's (2002) interpretation of what narrative analysis inquiries attempt to bring to light, "What does the narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?" (p. 115).

In summary, through the analysis of the individual stories and the synthesis of themes across the mothers' stories of self-nurturance, amidst the cultural paradigms of rural living, conservative religious backgrounds, beliefs and values systems, and patriarchy; a broad understanding of personal, socio-cultural, historical, and political

influences on women's health and well-being was illuminated within this a particular narrative inquiry.

### *Trustworthiness of Study*

To honor the stories of the mothers who gave generously give of their time and share intimate stories of their lived experience, every effort was made to insure the trustworthiness of this inquiry. Patton (2002) states, "It all depends on criteria. Judging quality requires criteria" (p. 542). He suggests to the researcher that different philosophical underpinnings, and/or theoretical orientations will demand and create different criteria for judging qualitative research. Mishler (1990) notes, "In a word, traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply to narrative studies and validity must be radically reconceptualized" (p. 45). In relation to this study, trustworthiness was a combination of the combined qualities of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Erlandson et al., 1993). In the following paragraphs these four criteria will be briefly described. It is with these criteria that the researcher of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be most concerned with understanding and adhering to during a narrative analysis inquiry.

Credibility ensures the quality of the research. Credibility of the researcher enhances the acceptability and confidence of the participant and consumer of the research (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Trochum, 2002). Halldorsson & Aastrup (2001) define credibility as, "Matching constructed realities of respondents to those represented by the evaluator" (p. 8). As noted before, I am an experienced occupational therapist who has worked with women and their children in similar environments as this study took place. I

felt that my work as an occupational therapist, an adult educator, and doctoral student had very much prepared me to engage in this inquiry. As such, an additional enhancement to credibility added to my worthiness as a researcher was that of triangulation.

Triangulation is a group of strategies that can improve the credibility of the research. Triangulation is possible through an array of methods (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Trochum, 2002). Law, et. al. (1998), identify the following four types of triangulation: (a) source - data can be collected from multiple sources; (b) method - different data collection strategies can be utilized, such as, focus groups, individual interviews, journaling and participant observation; (c) researcher - more than one researcher can be utilized to analyze the data or develop and test the coding scheme; and (d) theories – multiple theories and/or perspectives may be considered during data analysis or interpretation. I utilized data via collection of information from eight in-depth interviews, journals, creative synthesis projects, a collective dinner of process and synthesis of the inquiry by the women involved in the study, and finally by my own field journal. These multiple sources allowed for cross-referencing within each woman's narrative and facilitated a comparison among their stories. In addition, I sought guidance from my advisor and most importantly I employed participant checking of stories to insure that I maintained the original intent of the stories.

Transferability is defined as the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts. It is important to point out that transferability is primarily the task of the individual generalizing the research to another context. The researcher must support transferability by offering rich narratives and thick descriptions of the context,

participant(s), and stating the purpose of the study (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Trochum, 2002). Since this was a narrative inquiry, thick deeply rooted stories of these mothers' lives are offered in chapters 4 to 8 within this dissertation. I suspect that another individual reading the narratives may be capable to determine if this study is transferable to their research and/or others' lived experience. It is important to note that Richmond (2002) feels the causality of the stories revealed during narrative inquiries and the significance of repeated patterns, possibilities and potentialities of transferability must not be underestimated by skeptical researchers looking in on the project.

Dependability establishes an emphasis on the need for the researcher to report changes or alterations in the context, the participant, and/or themselves during the research process. If changes occur the researcher must account for and state the affect the changes had on the outcomes of the study (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Trochum, 2002). As previously described, I maintained a journal throughout the study and the epilogue is a reflection of the contents of this journal. I asked each participant to review their transcripts for clarification and/or correction of any pieces of any information that they felt needed further illumination. Additionally, I requested them to critique, change and/or add to my understanding of their creative synthesis project. I wanted to ensure that the focus of the study remained on the truest form of each story of self-nurturance felt and lived out by the women participating in this study.

Conformability is understood as the degree to which the findings of the research can be confirmed or by others. To increase conformability, the researcher can go through several processes. These processes include triangulation techniques, reflective journaling, keeping field notes, and/or completing a data audit (Creswell, 1998; Patton,

2002; Trochum, 2002). As noted above, all of which have been done by the researcher during the course of this inquiry.

Before closing the discussion about trustworthiness it should be noted that one of most widely raised issues in relation to narrative analysis is that of objectivity.

Namenwirth (1986) most eloquently speaks to objectivity with the following words:

The scientific mind and the scientific method are thought to ensure the neutrality and objectivity of scientific research, and of the scientist's pronouncements...Yet, science has not been neutral...Slavery, colonialism, laissez faire capitalism, communism, patriarchy, sexism, and racism have all been supported, at one time or another, by the work of scientists, a pattern that continues unabated into the present (p.29).

It is within this moment that researchers and participants are calling for a different type of research relationship (Pillow, 2002). They are calling for a relationship that is collaborative and offers some an alternative to past research designs (Patton, 2002). The primary data for this inquiry were the narratives found within the hearts and spirits of the four mothers involved in this story. For their collective voices to be heard, I was the person who was responsible to put the written stories together and bring to light the issues, strengths and needs of these women nurturing self with a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarch-driven environment. I did not have the desire or need to change their stories, I walked alongside of them in the struggles and successes of managing personal health and well-being...I was merely the instrument to make the stories available to a larger audience.

### Summary

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as, “A way of understanding experience by walking in the midst of stories and trying to make sense of the lives lived” (p. 63). Narrative analysis inquiry is embedded in the meaning-making of individuals’ everyday life and it acknowledges and explores the complexities of individuals’ stories. It has been described as one the most appropriate methodologies for feminist research (Bloom & Munro, 1995; Personal Narratives Group, 1989) since feminist theory is grounded in women’s lives and it makes every effort to observe the role and meaning of gender in the everyday lived stories of women. This narrative inquiry aim was to provide an opportunity for mothers of school-aged children living in rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven environments to develop relevant and meaningful narratives related to self-nurturance.

## **PART II**

### **PROLOGUE TO FINDINGS**

#### **Background Context**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to obtain four mothers of school-aged children stories of self-nurturance. The intention was to discern how their stories of engagement in self-nurturance unfold within their particular socio-cultural environment. The principle of narrative analysis research is to present as much of the participant's story as possible, hence the presentation of findings for this narrative inquiry reflect the course of the mothers' engagement and consideration of nurturing self throughout a five month period. The narratives naturally took on a flow of movement that represented the mother's first notions when asked about self-nurturance to the last collective discussion about self-nurturance as they came together to synthesize and reflect upon their past, present, and future engagement in nurturing self within their cultural surroundings.

First, a collective introduction to the four mothers engaged in this inquiry will be presented as a means to better understand the every day lives of the mothers: Laci, Roxy, Victoria, and Grace. This section will briefly highlight noteworthy information related to their mothering context, engagement in religion traditions, rural community living, and patriarchal influence in their lives.

*Mothering Context*

The mothers who participated in this narrative inquiry ranged in age from 35 to 40. Actually, two of the mothers were 35 and two of the mothers were 40 years of age. Between the four women they have eleven children ranging in ages 7 to 17 years. Except for Roxy who has two sons, the mothers have a mix of daughters and sons. All of the children attend public school and are in one or more extracurricular activities (i.e. band, karate, drama club, chorus, baseball, basketball, swimming, soccer and dance).

*Conservative Religious Context*

All of the women regularly attended conservative Christian churches during their childhood. Grace is the only woman who continues to actively attend church although Laci, Victoria, and Roxy continue to practice some of the spiritual routines they learned as children. Presently, all of the children are involved in various religious events (i.e. bible study, vacation bible school, church basketball, and/or youth retreats), but the family as a whole only attends church for significant holidays/celebrations.

*Rural Community Living Context*

Laci, Victoria, and Grace all live in remote rural areas of the community. For perspective the closest Wal-mart and/or major grocery store is 20 miles one way from their homes. Roxy lives in a rural development, which is approximately 5 miles from a major grocery store. All of the women were born and raised in the community and none of the women have lived outside of the community. None of the women are avid



travelers. As a family, on the average they take a one week vacation per year, which is usually within 300 miles of the community.

### *Patriarchal Influence in the Women's Lives*

Roxy, Victoria and Grace are currently involved in their second significant life relationship with men. Grace and Roxy are married while Victoria is in a committed relationship. Laci has been married to the same man for the past fifteen years. All were married by age 20 having one or more children by age 23. None of the women remember being strongly encouraged to attend college, but all reflected on being encouraged to marry and have children at an early age. All remember their first work supervisors being men and they remembered that it was a rare exception and still is a rare exception to see women of power within their environment.

Another distinguishing feature of this community is that about five male physicians also have the dual identification of being ministers/pastors within conservative churches throughout the community. This is noted to allow the circumstance of thought that many of the women in the community who go to their local doctor's office are effectively visiting their minister at a more emotional and physical level, which further closes the gap if a woman has a very personal health care issue.

### Presentation of Narratives

The women's individual stories are captured unfolding across time as *narratives in motion*, which best allowed the demonstration that these mothers were "telling their stories beyond the ending of their participation in this study" (DuPlessis, 1985).

Consequently, each woman indicated at the second interview or by calling/e-mailing me prior to the second interview that they were talking to their husbands, mothers, fathers, children, and friends about the importance of self-nurturance, not only for themselves, but for other women within the community. Although these mothers identified that they engaged in some form of self-nurturing behavior prior to this study, it became apparent at each subsequent point of the study that these women were spiraling back within their own stories to positively impact their health and well-being. Additionally, they noted that they were feeling a passion or a need to talk to other women about self-nurturance as they gleaned insight from journaling and completing the creative synthesis project. Therefore, the decision was made to present the narratives in a holistic natural progression while pointing out critical points within the narratives.

It will come to light by reading through the narratives that this method of presentation complements Bloom's (2002) notion that, "Researchers working on personal experience narratives must make a project of examining the conflicts of peoples lives writing against closure and unitary representation of self" (p. 304). As will be highlighted in Chapter 9 these women's notion of self as a facilitator of self nurturance and as a facilitator of other women's health and well-being in the community became more and more apparent as the phases of the study progressed during a five month period.

#### *Narratives in Motion: Chapters 4 through 7*

Within chapters 4 through 7, a background on each woman will be given as to allow a more informed understanding of how the social contextual forces may have influenced these mothers understanding and engagement in self nurturance. Each chapter

will present the unfolding of each woman's narrative of self-nurturance beginning with her first interview and ending with the creative synthesis project which will be termed *narratives in motion*. It is through these storylines that the reader may observe how the juncture of motherhood, conservative religious beliefs/values, patriarchal control and rural living consistently impacted these four mothers' engagement and consideration of the meaningful occupation of self nurturance. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the four mothers, the many individuals who were mentioned throughout their stories, the socio-cultural context, and the many opportunities of hearing the texture of their story from a feminist poststructuralist perspective.

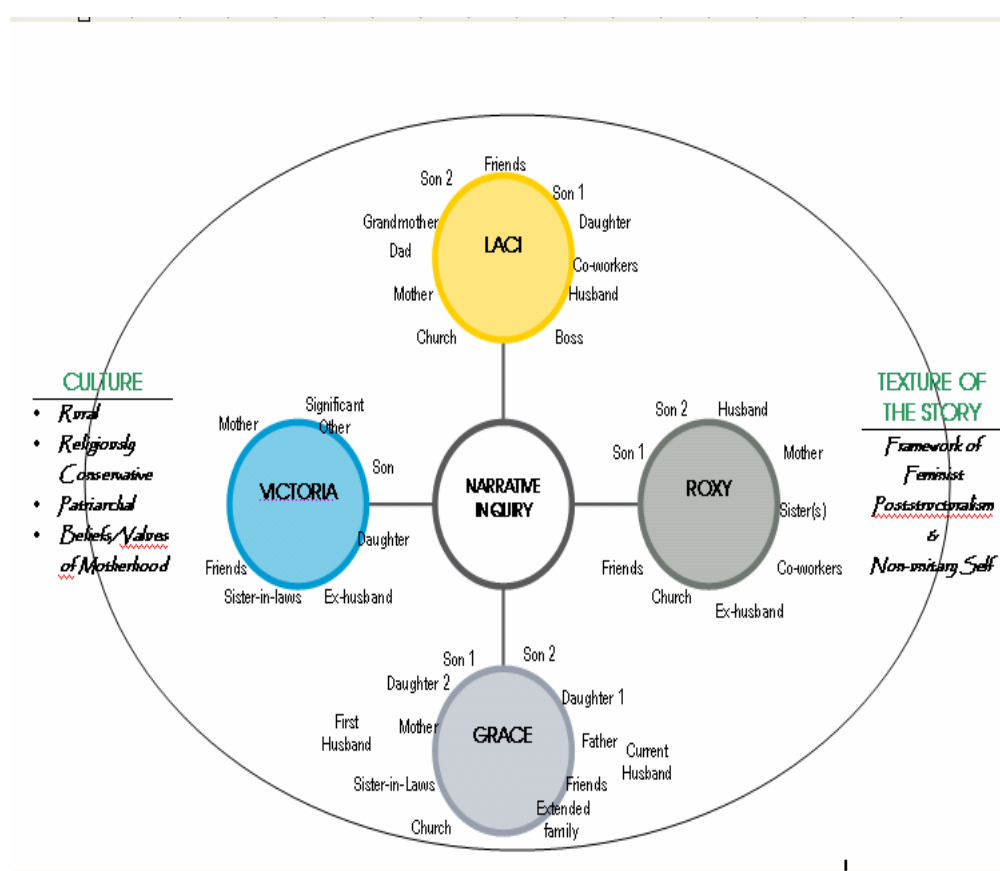


Figure 2. Representation of the four mothers engaged in this narrative analysis inquiry.

*Interpretation: Intersecting Narratives in Motion - Chapter 8*

Chapter 8 will offer an interpretation of the intersecting and collective themes that emerged from the four women's narratives and the research process dinner that occurred after all the women had completed their creative synthesis projects. It was a challenge to get four women (Laci, Roxy, Victoria and myself) together for an evening during November with thirteen children between us going in all different directions, but we managed to come together to share insights, laughter, and tears of joy in relation to the reality that we could find time to engage in self nurturance. This chapter will highlight the intersecting and emerging themes of all data collect during a five month period.

Additionally, the women shared their creative synthesis projects with one another and I shared Grace's project with the women since she could not be in attendance. Note that each mother selected her own research name, provided the heading for her *narrative in motion*, and for her creative synthesis project.

## CHAPTER 4

### LACI

#### Background

Laci is a 35 year old mother of two sons age's twelve and nine; and one daughter age five. Her husband owns a construction company and works 60 or more hours a week. She works an average of 32 hours a week as a medical transcriptionist. Her religious background is diverse. She grew up in the midst of German Baptist, Mennonite and Black Baptist communities. Although her mother is Caucasian, she grew up in a Black Baptist community. Her current religious tradition is worshipping at home because she was discontent and unhappy with local conservative churches. She notes that the family has attempted to go to church regularly several times, but they have found the atmosphere to be stifling instead of uplifting. She feels that the conservative churches in the area want everything (i.e. money, time, and commitment) leaving little room for personal spiritual growth.

Laci describes the community as being:

*Very religiously organized, very political, sheltered from larger world issues, conservative in thoughts and beliefs and extremely close-minded to new thoughts and ideas.*

She describes the patriarchal driven tone and reality of the community in the following ways:

*At 35 I am still looking for my father's approval; pretty much all males in the community have more authority than women; it seems like women are always trying to please men within this community – whether it be little league baseball, commerce or the local government; finally, I find myself always having to account for my time whereas I see Dave [husband] not having to do that – if he has off work for a day he does whatever he wants, if I have off work a day, I'd better be doing something around the house.*

The above questions were asked of each woman in the study and it will be noted in chapter 9 that their responses when put side by side are nearly identical. From this point, the conversation turned to the semi-structured questions about nurturing self from the perspective of a mother living within this community.

#### *Interview One: Self-Nurturance No Where to be Found*

This first question was asked as a warm-up moment, in order to take the focus off of Laci and allow her to find a comfort zone by beginning with describing a mom in the community that she feels may have difficulty being a self-nurturer. Laci offers following details about a friend:

*I see one woman I know driven to satisfy the needs of her husband even when she knows he is cheating on her. She worries all the time about what she needs to be doing for him and her kids and she actually has described herself as a “flounder in deep water”. She recently decided to go to a Christian counselor which I thought may be a good idea, but this so-called Christian counselor, who is a man, told her that her husband was cheating on her because she was not*

*meeting his sexual needs. He told her to go out and buy something sexy to seduce her husband – to win him back! She is so confused and distraught she doesn't know what to do, but guess what – she went out and bought lingerie – I about flipped when she told me this – this is the extreme of not being able to self-nurture or think for yourself – I don't know how else to help her now.*

Laci naturally moves from this question into defining herself as a mother by saying:

*I am a hands-on mom, I really care what others think and see in my life. Right now I am trying to work and when you work a full day you are more a employee than a mother – 8 to 5:30PM is not spending time with your kids. The ciao's, yeah, I can't stand leaving when somebody is unhappy – it is even hard when they are happy, but when they are unhappy – the extreme guilt, you think of every excuse as to why you shouldn't be going to work.*

*Money – money – definitely that is the only reason – money for the family...it takes two working - ah if it was sanity – which sanity is in there, but not for those kind of hours – the sanity time would be 8 to 12, that is enough time to get out and make yourself happy and the kids wouldn't be hurt if you are not there for four hours. I should have planned more – I looked back and I did not plan it out – I wanted kids right away and I jumped into it.*

*There are several things I would have changed – I jumped into it right away and I was never good at planning – even when we got married – I did not plan finances – if I would have I could have gone back and got an education. You can't take a break from the motherhood because you need to work for the family.*

*You can't move forward – you are sort of stopped in your tracks...there isn't time to do much else because culture tells you this is what you are suppose to be doing – how do you change that? (sigh)*

When talking about religious conservative perspectives of nurturing self within this community the conversation lead right into a commentary about homeschooling children:

*If you are not a homeschooler mom within this area you are looked at in a different light. You are looked down on – um – there are certain days that you may feel guilty for not homeschooling your children and the next day I'm glad I'm not them (laughter). This is a good example because all mothers are looking at other moms and they are looking for better answers or they are looking to make themselves feel better. The ones that are looking for better answers I can talk to them more, but when the ones that are trying to make themselves feel better by saying what all they do – they are NOT listening – they are talking that you know – I feel like walking away/walking right by not even blink. When I worked at the doctor's office where all the wives homeschooled - they wanted you to know that parenting/motherhood was their priority – OK – where they put self-nurturing to the side and their sole focus is teaching and the children. It is almost like they get a high off of it. They get off on it – that is how they function – it feeds their needs.*

*I had a friend who teaches Sunday school and one of the children told her that she was not a good as teacher as she could be because she sent her children to public school and her mom homeschooled them. The child was seven years old. It was a prime example of how even the children are taught that*



*homeschooling is what mom should be doing...It was right in her face. Even the kids are wearing the attitude on their sleeve...just like the whole breast-feeding thing – don't you darn give that baby a bottle – these women will breast feed until 5 years of age – that is OK, but a bottle isn't!*

*I try very hard not to push my ideas and thoughts on people, but I'd like the same in return. I have no respect for people who push their feelings on me – I don't do that to people and it really gets annoying to me when other women do that to me.*

*To add another piece, when we tried to attend a Brethren church we, I had this overwhelming feeling that I could not continue being a working mother and keep up the commitment they wanted from women in that church. I felt I had to choose either work or the church they wanted so much from you. There would have been absolutely no room in my life for me (sigh) within this church. My free time would have gone to doing things within the church. Actually, I see that they would have taken more time away from me than work actually is taking now. It would have been them, them and them! I look at Tracy and she just had her third child and she looks exhausted and I'm sure part of the exhaustion is from doing too much with/for the church.*

From here the interview lead right into bringing the patriarchal concept into her immediate environment and this is what she said in relation to receiving positive and/or negative messages from immediate family about nurturing self:

*Well, right away I must say I receive mostly negative feedback from Dave. As much as you love the man, he definitely has given me negative feedback about*

*taking care of myself. He sees taking a bath and shaving my legs as nurturing self – NO, it is a job. (laughter) I don't look at it as quality time for me. He also sees planting flowers and mulching as relaxing – NO, it is work! I like to do it, but it is a chore to keep the outside of the house looking nice. I think of music, candles, and someone else giving me a pedicure as self-nurturance not getting dinner ready for him as self-nurturance. Dave would definitely see a pedicure as me wasting time and that I am spoiled.*

*I must say though that ever since 1996 when I was depressed for 9 months because I had a 2 & 5 year old and all the sudden I was trying to be super mom – I was doing everything for the kids Dave realized that I needed space/time. I do think that he realizes that I need time for myself. He knows that I feel I can't live up to his expectations and I'm living proof that if you don't nurture yourself crashing is a possibility.*

The interview expanded now into the culturally defined role as a mother and asked Laci to think a bit deeper about how being the primary caretaker impacted and/or influenced to nurture self – she offers the following notions:

*My kids are always in the back of my mind....Just yesterday, mom was keeping the kids and I when I was talking with her I made up my mind that her and Dave could communicate about when he needed to pick them up, etc. I told her to call him and make arrangements – any other time I'd be in the middle, which takes up my time! I told mom to take care of it – I don't want any part of it...because I can say one thing and it is always the opposite of what happens...then I turned around and called on my lunch break. My mom said, if*

*we were to take care of it – why are you calling...so, I didn't stick to my guns – that ole' guilt feeling of needing to take care of everyone else!*

*Sometimes I feel guilty for not thinking about everything that is happening to everyone else, but I do give myself a bit more credit than my mother...boy I hope mom never listens to this...I look back at mom and I don't look at her at using too much energy towards self. She was always home and actually still is at home if my dad needed her to do something. She got his food on the table as he walked in the door – that was just the times...in contrast, I look at everything I do now – everything that I do and then I have to explain to her why I'm tired and grouchy! I'm doing a great deal more than she ever did. Maybe she knew that she had to compensate for not working by doing everything for dad, but that isn't an option for me in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*I have to be working to help with the needs of the family and still do everything else. I constantly compare myself to her and that is still why I am working, because I don't want to wind up home and worrying all the time – obsessing on things and not having time for anything.*

When asked about how Laci sees herself making and/or taking time to nurture self within her cultural environment she sits up straight in her chair and notes:

*I don't - I don't have this self-nurturance thing going on right now – I did have it, but I have slipped back into the old ways...Dave used to watch the kids when I went for a walk. Before Katelyn was born I walked with friends – he knew that I needed to take walks with the other women. After Katelyn came along we got out of the habit of Dave watching the kids while I walked and now I have the*

*exercise equipment in the house – he thinks that is something I can do with the kids or while the kids are around. Yeah right – it is really self-nurturing to be using the Bow-Flex with two kids hanging off of either side! It is a bit stressful when you are trying to count and the kids are “mom, mom...mom”. You think OK, I’ll get them involved BUT then you are concentrating on the kids and not you – Dave just doesn’t seem to get it.*

*There may be perfect moms out there that can exercise with their kids or while their kids are in the house, but I can’t do it – I think of exercise as my time – I don’t want to be a mom while I’m exercising (laughter) – I need that separate time for myself, but I can’t seem to get it.*

Transitioning into her current and prior religious beliefs and values brought about the thoughts and tensions of guilt in relation to nurturing self:

*I feel so guilty if I stop to buy myself a soda without buying the kids something. I hear my mom saying, My mom saying, “You know better – you need to do more for others – stop being so selfish”. I’m sure that she still lives with this feeling too – it just isn’t something we ever talk about...it is something that was passed down. You feel guilty – I know I need to let go of the guilt – I had/have no self confidence so I am always trying to do better – pleasing others – this is the way God wants me to live...when it comes down to it I still feel that watching TV is wrong when I could be doing something for someone else.*

*I see Amish people know what they are doing – I can’t do it, but they don’t have the outside world pressing down in on them – they just ignore it! Where is the line – it is difficult to figure out – the Amish just don’t do any of it so they*

*don't have to deal with it – even in their clothing – they have purple, black, royal blue and they cover their hair. The women serve their men – it is bred in me and I was told all the time that the woman should serve the man....women should satisfy and keep there men first and foremost. Sex was misconstrued throughout the years – typical 21<sup>st</sup> century society has sex being a dirty thing – it is much more than what God has meant it to be...the Amish people keep to themselves about all of that...I guess with dad being German Baptist it is engrained in me that women should serve men first...there isn't suppose to be time for me. Yeah...I always am feeling selfish when I want to do something for me.*

At this point the conversation turns to talking about the notion that if we look at the Amish women from a cultural perspective they are not expected to work outside of the home. These women have quilting groups, canning days, and shopping days where they get together as a group of women and support one another in some of their daily task whereas, we (women involved in this research) are expected to keep the house organized, the children organized, our husbands organized – where does that leave time for our spirits, bodies and minds? Laci states:

*I know – we are running kids to baseball and basketball games and the guilt is right there all the time...this is what I should be doing. If we even allow ourselves to think about some time for ourselves – I get that selfish feeling – it is all about the guilt or selfish feeling! Guilt or selfish! Where is the balance – how do I get that balance without the guilt for selfish feeling?*

This lead into asking the question, “How do you feel your self-nurturance story will change secondary to participating in this research study?” Laci states:

*In order for me to self-nurture I am going to have to cut back my working hours – I just can’t see it and this is even with the kids being out of school and activities – once that starts up again – everything breaks loose. I am working the same schedule as everyone else because they just slipped me in there and I felt guilty about asking them to cut it back with people being on vacation and not feeling well, but the other ones take off when they want to – I worked more to be nice, but even after the first week the doctor is going on vacation and he needs you to be here – so I worked to satisfy HIM, a MAN – HIM. I could care less what the girls think – I can deal with them, but I just work and take time away from myself and my family so he doesn’t get himself in an uproar! (laughter) – definitely!*

We then explored if the scenario was changed and she worked for a woman would it change Laci’s behavior/thoughts about putting herself first:

*Good point – I would have probably quit by now (laughter). You know, I would have confronted a woman earlier and I would not put up with the crap that I have been putting up with from him (doctor). Interesting! He makes me so stressed. I can’t go to him and tell him how I feel...I told him that I only wanted to work three days and it is like it went right over his head and here I am working all the time. The guilt of not pleasing him was there, because I just didn’t stop at telling him I wanted to only work three days, I said, if you need me to work a*

*4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> day to keep you from being totally shorthanded I'd be willing to help you out.*

*I didn't know it was going to be as if I never talked with him and I'd still be stuck working all the time. That last piece of the phrase did me in. I felt it when I said it...it has been 6 months and I'm still in the same boat. Since he told me you have showed me your commitment he has talked down to me and been a real jerk. It comes down to a male figure again that you are trying to please. I don't know why his criticism it just runs through like a knife.*

Next, the interview took a more global turn and we talked about mothers generally having a difficult time saying no to doing things that are not in the best interest of their health and well-being. Laci notes:

*Absolutely...it is that whole guilt & selfishness sign that pops into my head every time! Today – I'd say I have no time or that I even deserve to take care of myself yet. I haven't seen my kids yet today. But after sitting her talking with you about self-nurturance I'd say I deserve to have time to nurture myself...well in one way yes and in one way no because Dave doesn't feel that he needs it so I am thinking if he doesn't need it then why should I need it.*

*I guess the bottom-line is I feel guilty for needing to take time for myself. Here again – it is difficult to get that routine. There are no good models in the community that describe, show and/or encourage women to take time for themselves – we are suppose to be on-task 24/7. There isn't anything encouraging us to take care of ourselves – it just isn't talked about period! You are put here to take care of your family and everything else – how dare you take*

*time for you! (laughter) If you miss one ball game – you are not a good mom, if you missed one ball game out of 35 because you wanted to get a pedicure the moms would take you down – oh my lands! You would be talked about big time – you are still talked about anyhow even if you miss 5 because you have other things to do – it is expected as a mom to be everywhere all the time!*

When probed a bit more about why she feels her husband and/or other men feel like they don't need to take time for themselves she replies:

*I could just smack them because they feel they get it when they are driving to work or working only because they are not thinking about the kids' schedules or what needs to be done next. I am just confused as a woman, because I feel there are so many women in the same boat as me and we just don't talk about these issues we all want to keep up the perfect front like the Stepford Wives!! (Just went to see the re-make of the Stepford Wives 2 weeks ago). Other women keep up this front. Sometimes you are dying to see how their life isn't perfect so your guilt is lessened.*

At this point this point the initial interview had proceeded for approximately 2 ½ hours and Laci shared the following story:

*You have really things stirred up now and I'm thinking. You know my dad was raised without a mother and she was alive but she was put in the state hospital because she was a plain lady (German Baptist) that was pretty assertive and not compliant to all of the church's rules. Honestly, if it wasn't a German Baptist family I don't think grandma would have gone to the state hospital. My grandmother was not born in the right time frame either. I met her and she came*



*back as a perfect German Baptist wife. She cooked and cleaned for granddad and never talked. She was the sweetest old lady you ever met.*

*If I had an opportunity to go back in time, I'd want to go back and meet my grandmother before she was in the state hospital. She was just a woman with an attitude and an opinion, but after the 15 years in the hospital they beat her down and took everything from her. She was a Stepford Wife without the glamour! I think because of this experience my dad intentionally married someone he thought he could control. He did search for a sucker, someone to take care of him. He took my mom from the city and brought her back to the country so she could take care of him. My grandfather was raised without a mother too and he had all the male influence. There was no nurturing from a mother, so he didn't have a model and in turn he had three children and he took the mother from them, put in a quiet mother figure – what he wanted. So my dad got the strict guide to dealing with women - no wonder I am trying to please my man (men!).*

Next I asked if her mother ever was able to show her anything or give her advice about taking care of herself she notes in a very shallow and soft voice:

*If she would have given me anything it would have been a pack of cigarettes – her choice of stress relief or she would have told me to have a glass of wine. She did do that every once in a while. My aunts did look down on my mom because she did have this stress reliever and they didn't feel it was proper – they looked down on her – she was a joke to them. They offered the illusion of*

*being better than her because they could do it all as German Baptist women, but I know their lives weren't as perfect as they seemed.*

During the first interview Laci talked candidly about a history of patriarchy in her life that have kept her from exploring many healthy avenues. She feels consistently constricted by this reality, however begins to see herself functioning outside of the demands of men and the conservative religious traditions of the community by the end of the first interview. It will become evident in her journaling that she is beginning to realize a different story line for engaging herself in the meaningful occupation of self nurturance.

#### Journaling: Tales from the Crip

Laci's chose to use the journal that was provided as part of this research project. When I received the journal back from Laci, it was obvious that it had went everywhere with her during the past month. Pages were worn, turned down and there were water marks on a few pages. Her actual handwriting varied from being very legible to crossed out notes herself and to me. In total, Laci scribed fifteen journal entries in a month. The following journal entries were selected to show Laci's state of mind in relation to her ongoing reflection about self-nurturance:

*I woke up and feel the need to take the kids swimming, regardless if I get the housework done. Dave would want me to stay home and do the housework – oh well! I called Dave and asked him if he would mind if we went swimming and if I helped him mow tonight. I felt the need to check with him because I felt bad*

*for having a day off (3 kids in tow) and he is working. Why do I feel this way?*

*I know it isn't good for my health and well-being.*

*I came across this today and the story relates so much to self nurturance – this is how I am seeing self-nurturance these days, so I thought I would enter it into my journal.*

*The Mayonnaise Jar and Coffee. When things in your life seem almost to much to handle, when 24 hours in a day are not enough, remember the mayonnaise jar and the coffee. A professor stood before his philosophy class and hand some items in front of him when the class began, wordlessly, he picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls.*

*He then asked the students if the jar was full. They all agreed that it was. So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly, the pebbles rooled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They all agreed that yes, now it was full.*

*The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course the sand filled up the small spaces within the jar. He asked once more if the jar was now full. The students responded unanimously “yes”.*

*The professor than produced two cups of coffee from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling all the empty remaining space. The students laughed.*

*“Now”, said the professor, as the laughter subsided, I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important*

*things...God, your family, your children, your health, your friends, and your favorite passions...the things that if everything else was lost and only remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter to you, like your job, your house, and your car. The sand is everything else...the small stuff.*

*If you put the sand into the jar first, he continued, there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical check-ups. Take your spouse out to eat. Maybe play another 18 holes of golf. Sit down and read a book. There will always be time to clean the house or fix that disposal.*

*Take care of the golf balls first, the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand. One of the students then raised their hand and inquired what the coffee represented. The professor smiled, "I am glad you asked". It just goes to show you that no matter how full your life may seem, there is always room for a couple cups of coffee with a friend!*

*This poem really reflects what I am feeling - I am feeling much more confident that I really do need to take care of myself or there just isn't going to be anything I can offer my kids, my husband, and friends.*

*I am finding so difficult to work and be a mom. The perfect schedule would be 3 days a week from 9-2. Here is my "Dream Mom Schedule": Work Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 9-2; Exercise regularly; Eat healthier, but*

*still have treats (can't forget the chocolate); Drink plenty of water; Be able to run kids to activities and still have plenty of time for quiet time with husband.*

Giving into her husband's wishes instead of taking care of self she mows the lawn, watches three young children, and cooks dinner. She writes:

*I am so tired of being nice, but I broke down again and mowed with Dave this afternoon. I could just pass out!*

*Went away for Jake's baseball tournament. We had a blast! While I allowed myself time to PLAY games with the adults in the lobby I thought – I am never like this, but I was having so much fun and it had been so long since I let myself go and enjoy the moment!*

*On vacation this whole week – what a different life I lead when I have less to worry about and I'm not in such a negative environment all day long! I am very much enjoyed having the whole week off – I see what I am missing and how my work life is really affecting my total being!*

*We had a reunion today. I love watching the kids be so carefree without a care in the world – it is nurturing for me! I wish we could bottle up these good moods and save them for rainy days!*

Laci noted that the journaling provided her with a space to vent and put in writing the strengths and needs of her current self nurturance routine. For the most part the journal was maintained as revelations to self that her health and well-being was important enough to plan for in the present and in the future.

## Interview Two: A More Self-Nurtured Me

The second interview was initiated by Laci offering additional thoughts that she had from reading her first interview transcript:

*I still feel guilty about the church thing. I just felt I could not continue being the working mother I was and live up to the commitment they needed for the church. I felt I had to choose because I couldn't be both. So I'm still working and we are not going to church right now. We are just doing spiritual things at home. Even if I quit work I realized that my free time would have gone from work to, probably, more time with the church. It would have been them, them and them.*

*I've thought about self-nurturing too as a mother and again you've got to have a routine, schedule, organization to keep everyone else going so at the end of the day there is just no time for you. Can you imagine telling one of the ball moms that you missed a game because you were getting a massage? Oh my land! You'd be talked about big time. It's just expected that you can do it all with a smile on your face! I just learned that I can't carry any more because I can't keep up with it, you know. If the dishes are in the sink dirty and I need to take a walk – then that is what I am going to have to do. I'm going to start making the better choice for me. I don't care what the other parents think. I don't owe them an explanation because they're not in my shoes. I just, you know ... I guess because you know when you are totally drained, you can only do so much and then that's it. I've gotta say, it's got a lot of things stirred up and it's like, I can't quite put my finger on it.*

During Laci's first interview, consistently rising themes included guilt for taking time to care for self, finding a balance within the constraints of motherhood, and patriarchal control of her time. At our meeting for the second interview Laci went into the following narrative spontaneously:

*Oh yeah, I've been thinking a lot about the whole asking permission deal...why am I asking permission to take care of myself? Maybe it is because women in this community are split between either being supportive or extremely condemning of taking time for themselves. That's where I'm still lost. I definitely feel that I have more of an internal acknowledgement that I need time to nurture my own body and spirit. Boy, you've got to take care of your temple. And then, you've got to be able to stand up for yourself because you cannot go without it. You've got to be strong and stand up for yourself. I really feel like I've seen my mom fall and stay down and I want to still be standing. I mean, everyone's going to throw things at you, no matter where you go, but you have to get back up. It's my time now!.*

*You know, the other night ... it was last night, Dave just said little things and the other day when I went to the grocery store and forgot things and he left me know it...All day long, it was just little things. And I said to my boys, "I don't ever want you to treat your women this way. Remember to compliment your wives and be proud of what they get accomplished". I try to teach them, also, how to treat their wives because he's not doing it. And my oldest brother treats his wife, well, treats his whole family with disregard, down right degrading. He talks down to her, rude, sarcastic. And I won't put up with it anymore. It wouldn't*

kill Dave to say, “Laci, you’re doing a great job being a mom and that’s my biggest concern when. I’m afraid my self esteem is going to go so down because I’m not going to have anywhere to fall...I’ll already be on the ground!”

Laci had also thought more about how the cultural expectations impacting her children have been indirectly affecting her role as a mother:

*The schools are just pushing so hard. They are just pushing, pushing, and pushing. And that is the piece where the motherhood piece, I think, is different now from what it was for our moms were in the 60s. The definition of motherhood is not standing at the stove with an apron on, cooking anymore.*

*It’s not there anymore. I mean, this whole environment has become so fast paced for children that mothers have an extra duty to help the kids stay organized. The other night between the three kids I had 19 papers to look at, fill in, sign and send back to school. That is what I have to do on an average day when they come home. Sometimes it takes me 3 hours to help them with their homework and then get everything signed and put back in the book bags. I talked with friends at work and this is the norm. How are we supposed to keep up this pace, work and get some me time in?*

The interview pauses for a moment and then it turns to how working less would impact her ability to nurture self:

*Bottom-line, I’d have more time to get all the essentials done while the kids were at work and then maybe I could be relaxed when the 19 papers came home each night. Because, I’ll tell you what, and that’s in my journal too, this whole baseball season really ate into time I had to take care of the essential of*



*exercising. That is my nurturing time because it helps me feel better.*

*Basically I do it to definitely help my body. My body is a sore and aches if I don't exercise. I will have to exercise the rest of my life because I know that it makes me feel better. And I didn't do that this baseball season with everything else going on with the kids. It showed - I had lower self esteem, lower feelings of just caring for myself. And it all came from less time for me. I mean, I don't ever want to go through another season like that. You get tired of trying so hard to make it work for everyone else. I am tired of being the main motivator, the cheerleader for everyone else – where is my cheerleader?*

Then we turned to talking about how her husband consistently ignores her sexual needs and sometimes almost uses sex as a tool to punish her:

*You know, the whole sex thing irritates me too. It seems like an easy concept if you do more for me and give me time for myself, you're gonna get more from me sexually – even thirty/seventy in doing the housework and taking care of the kids would be better than the five/ninety-five split we have now...it is just so unbalanced. I have no energy at the end of the day to have sex. If you give me more attention and do more things for me, of course I'm going to feel better about myself because I'm good enough for somebody to take time to think about me. But I'm suppose to do it all and he still wants to have sex to please himself, but sometimes forgets about my needs.*

*The other morning we laid down after the kids went to school and he was in a hurry to get to work, so he got satisfied and there I was with nothing. I usually wouldn't have told him this, but I told him that when the kids went to sleep*

*that night, he was going to give me some time so I can have my stress relief. I was surprised he came to bed and it was all about me – miracles do happen!*  
*(laughter)*

Laci then transitioned into discussing how looking back in her past allowed her to realize where the guilt of asking for things that are rightfully hers come from:

*My grandfather would have a cow if he saw my grandmother take any time for herself. I mean, there again, we are going back to, my grandmother was locked up. Oh, he still lost patience with her for all the little things. And it's like, my grandmother was the sweetest person I know. They were both German Baptists before they got married. Now she had sisters and her sisters seemed to be fine. But you can't tell me, this one sister freaks out and, you know, something was wrong there. I think the other sisters just hid it better. They were more compliant. My grandfather was definitely the authority figure of the whole bunch.*

I then noted that the last time we spoke about how stressful her work environment was and how she related this to patriarchal control being more obvious to her on a daily basis. I asked her if she had any more insights and if her position had changed at all at work in relation to her boss:

*I now see just how bad it really is - I want to leave now. I don't even want to work threes days a week – I know I need to leave the environment – it is too toxic. But you have to understand, this is probably job #5 since Katlyn was born. It's been hard for me. I should never have even tried to go back to work after she was born.*

*I kept trying and failing and trying and failing and I told myself not to go back. Now I know my parents and Dave will be embarrassed that I quit another job. But I need to quit regardless of what people are expecting me to. It isn't healthy for me to stay there. It is not helping me. I don't belong there. It's the atmosphere.*

*I have been able to focus on the journaling and you know what I've enjoyed since our last visit, and I don't just mean, I'm not just saying this to be nice .... My foot cream!! (laughing) I just love my foot cream...Oh yeah, and I've learned to lock the bathroom door more. With only one bathroom in our house, it's pretty bad when you are sitting there shaving your legs and your daughter is dispensing the shaving cream and giving it to you. There's no peace, but I am taking up for myself a bit more these days!*

*Dave always locks the bathroom door. Always. And I thought, dog-gone-it, I'm going to start locking the bathroom door. I still feel a bit guilty. My next move is to put a towel over the key hole.*

Seeing some light at the end of the motherhood tunnel Laci talks about her youngest child finally being in kindergarten and the freedom that is going to give her to finally take some time for herself:

*I'm looking forward to the kids going back to school. Katelyn will be in kindergarten 3 hours - 3 hours I'm so excited. And I want these 3 hours to myself. This is the first time in thirteen years that my kids are going to be 3 hours away and I don't have to pay a sitter and feel guilty about leaving them and doing something for me. I plan to quit my job the Friday they go back to school and I*

*know that Dave is not sold on the idea, but I'll deal with things as they come.*

*It's not all going to work perfect in the beginning but it is such a rush to know that I am going to have time for myself!*

During this interview Laci's affect was much brighter and she most definitely talked with more self confidence and insight in regards to her needs as a busy mother of three. She not only expanded on reflecting upon the areas of guilt, balance of health and well-being, motherhood, and the patriarchal control of time and space in relation to self nurturance; she voiced solutions and plant to make her engagement in taking care of self a reality.

As interview two came to a close, Laci became very excited to share ideas about her creative synthesis project. She is very eager about this piece of the study and reveals that she even has her mother and father involved in designing the final project.

#### Creative Synthesis Project: Self Nurturance through Sights, Scents and Textures

Laci, like all of the women in the study, put considerable thought into the creative synthesis project. She noted that she is a very visual person and she thought a lot about how to make this project three dimensional, in order to show the many layers, bumps, and textures that reflect her daily life.

Therefore, using different food items Laci made two outlines of a body. One picture being a representation of self without nurturance and the other a representation of being engaged in self nurturance. On the pictorial without self nurturance she describes herself as going nuts (walnuts), tears from overdrive (onions), feeling hot anger (red peppers), sour conversation (lemon), stomach in knots (Roloids), coarse-rough hard

worker (sea salt), cracked up (saltines) and always walking on shells/not a smooth path (egg shells).

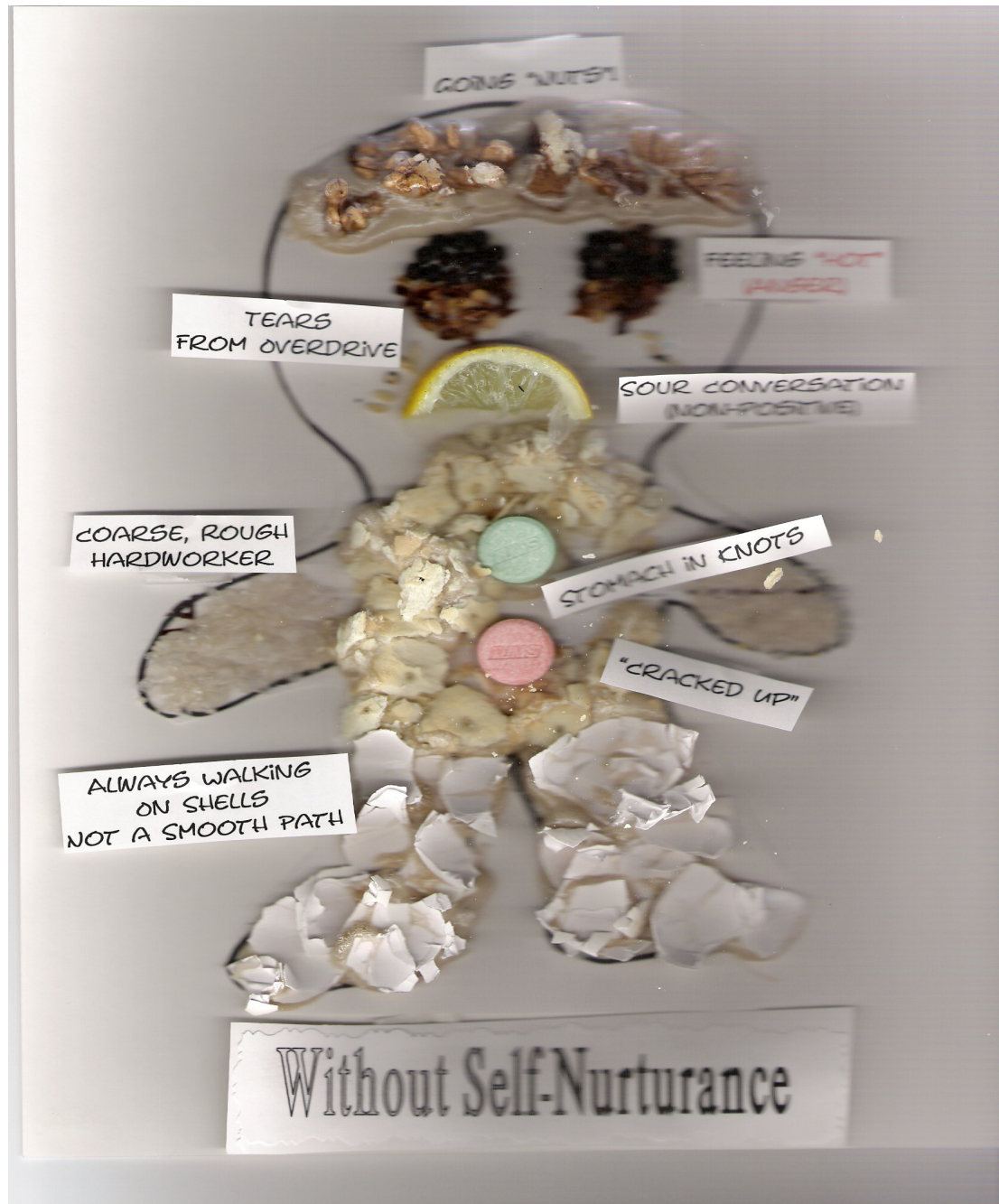


Figure 3. Laci's creative synthesis presentation of self without self nurturance.

On the pictorial labeled “Self Nurturance Engaged” she paints this picture of self – sweet thoughts (chocolate chips, brown sugar and sprinkles), light weight (lettuce), refreshing (kiwi), smooth – time for you, give yourself a pat! (butter), warm all over (herbal teabag), feeling kinky (twisted noodles), and soothing/healing (oatmeal).



Figure 4. Laci creative synthesis presentation of self when engaged in self nurturance.

Laci also provided a description or a prescription of how it is that she sees herself making the transformation to being a self-nurturer. She feels she needs to concentrate on the following: 1) Prayer/Meditation; 2) Exercise; 3) Quiet time; 4) Laughter; 5) Positive thinking; 6) Sharing positive thoughts with self and others; and 7) Helping other if needed. She feels she needs to put these on her refrigerator to look at on a daily basis as a reminder to take care of self until it becomes routine. She believes that this will also assist her in passing down her self nurturing beliefs/patterns to her family and this has become a passion for her.

She enlisted her mother in helping her figure out which textures and food best represented her thoughts and feelings about being without self nurturance and being engaged in self nurturance. She noted that her father told her it was one of the most creative things he has ever seen her complete and even hugged her when she showed him the final product. This display of emotion by her father was very surprising to Laci and she noted, "I wasn't expecting his emotion, actually I was expecting the opposite because the project had nothing to do with him and everything to do with me." Although she was not looking for his approval on this project, she was surprised by how good it felt to demonstrate to her father that she needs to take care of herself. She notes this is the first time in fifteen years that she feels her father may have realized just how much she puts into being a wife and mother.

Laci noted that she used to do creative things like this on a weekly, if not daily basis before she had the children and before their lives became the definition of her daily routine. This creative synthesis project was quite an emotional journey for Laci and visually, it tells all in relation to how she is feels with and without self-nurturance. It

speaks to where she has been and where she is going in terms of taking control of her own health and well-being.



## CHAPTER 5

### ROXY

#### Background

Roxy is a 35 year old mother of two sons who are eleven and seven. Her husband is an independent flooring contractor and works 60 or more hours a week. She works an average of 40 hours a week as a collections agent for a credit card company. Her religious background is Pentecostal. Her current religious tradition is worshipping at home because she was discontent and unhappy with local conservative churches.

She notes:

*Doing a bible study for myself is a good thing and I read books on spirituality all the time. The boys attend a local church pretty regularly. It sends out a bus for Sunday school and Wednesday night kid's programming, so we encourage them to go to these, but for us – well it's just best if Rod and I stay at home and watch a service on TV.*

She describes the community as follows:

*People in this area are very stuck up about religion – you have to go the “right” church to be in the “in-group” within this community. The county as a whole is very retro – needs upgraded in thinking to come into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. People in this community are not willing to think about alternative lifestyles. Very little cultural diversity...for the most part people around here do not like/want change. There is no to minimal understanding/use or even willingness*

*to learn more about complementary medicine – a lot of the people in the community believe and practice divine healing – which is scary to me.*

She describes her feeling of the environment being patriarchal in nature by the description:

*The churches have no female pastors and very few women on the board of directors. My mom has always been very submissive to the church and all other men secondary to her Christian teachings. The area is just so male dominated. Just last week, Rod [husband] had to go into the emergency room and a female physician came to the room. He totally freaked out because he wanted a male physician – he automatically thought that a female would be less qualified to take care of him – I couldn't believe it!*

At this point the interview turned to talking about Roxy's engagement in self nurturance within this community. She noted that she was very much looking forward to being part of the study and women in this community need to be encouraged to take care of themselves. She noted that just from the little we had spoken that she had been thinking about things she wanted to share during this first interview.

#### Interview One: If you lie to your Mom you can Self-Nurture

Roxy's first and second interview took place at the researcher's home. Roxy felt this would be a more conducive environment than her home or anywhere else in the community. Since Roxy does work during the day the interviews took place around 6 o'clock in the evening after she had been home and got things "in-line" for her husband and organized prior to the interview.

As with Laci, I initiated the interview by asking Roxy to describe another mom in the community that she felt may have difficulty being a self-nurturer she gave the following details:

*One friend of mine has absolutely no time for herself and it shows – big time. She plans her entire day around preparing for her husband and children to come home – it drives me crazy! She is extremely stressed, but by the time she is done doing things for everyone else she doesn't have the energy to do anything for herself. I see her physical and mental health being seriously affected by her not being able to get beyond step one. I know I will get some information from being part of this study that I can take back to her.*

The interview then flowed into Roxy describing her role and identity as a mother living in this rural, religiously conservative, male-driven community.

*I know that my mother and other family members don't feel I spend as much time as I should with my kids because I work. Also, I come home and Rod is the kind that I'm the one to cook supper and he'll sit down and read the paper while I take care of everything. He is the male, you know, if I ever ask him to do it, he would do it but then I feel guilty because in honesty, I learned growing up that everything in the house is my responsibility.*

*In this area a lot of women are working outside the home now, but I still think that men still think it's a woman's place to do everything and women are not saying a word about it. Since I have boys I think Rod spends more quality time with them than I do because while I am doing the housework, he is playing ball or watching a show with them.*

*Having children really does impact my relationship and role...if I would sit down every night and play a game with the kids I would sit and think, I've got laundry to do, I've got to clean, I've got this and that. But I think that's all of us [women in this community]....you don't see many women outside playing ball with the kids in the front yard. It's usually a man. It is kind of fed to us from a religious standpoint. I'd love to go to church with a woman preacher. I just think a woman preacher would relate different than a man because I think of lot of these men preachers preach down at women. I think that they put their values down and it's either you accept the way of the church or you're not going to be in the clique within the church.*

*You don't think about it because that's just the way you were raised. That's just the way it is. And I don't know, maybe cities are different. Being within a rural area, everybody knows everybody else and their business – same old story – this area just hasn't moved on. These people really aren't willing to look outside their box. Which brings back a thought, when Rod and I did go to church for a while when we first got married the Bible studies were always husband and wife. It drove me crazy because the men would all speak and the women were suppose to sit there and not put forth any opinions. I would try to say something and they would just plow right over me – I hated it!*

*Oh yeah, and what's up with the woman always playing the piano or singing and the man preaches the gospel – please! Heaven forbid the roles would be reversed - I don't think the men would allow a woman to preach because, again, a woman would speak her mind and that's not the way it should be. You*

*know, the woman has to abide by what the man says...that's the way it is around here – drives me crazy!*

Talking more about the social cliques within the conservative churches in the area Roxy adds:

*The social cliques within the church run the entire community and if you aren't in it your kids aren't in it either. I always felt a little bit condemned when we went to church because I wasn't the traditional housewife role, teacher, nurse...I don't think I ever told anybody what I did because I felt it wouldn't be an accepted job. Not many, if any women in the church had their own professional careers – they considered selfish if you did a 9 to 5 – you were to be home when the kids left and home your husband and kids came home with dinner on the table waiting...that is why we ultimately left the church – I couldn't take the pressure from the other women.*

Since Roxy disclosed that her mother was a very conservative and traditional Christian wife I asked her to tell me more about positive and/or negative messages she received from her immediate family about nurturing self:

*Oh, my mom wears no makeup, never gets her hair done, doesn't have her ears pierced, nothing. I mean, and I can't say that I rebelled against her but as soon as I got married I felt like I was free and I got tattoos and, honestly, I don't even know if I really wanted them. I did it because I thought I could do it because I was free. But my mom has always been the one that works non-stop in/out of the house because I think that is what she feels God expects of her. Her house is always spotless. She can baby-sit, clean her house, and cook all at the same time.*

*She is always telling me, “You guys eat out too much. You spend too much money eating out. You wear too much makeup. Why do you want your nails done?” Basically, anything that makes my life easier my mom is against. She sees it as fruitless and self-indulging. (laughter)*

Roxy goes on to say that this reminds her of her mother’s reaction every time Rod and she go out to nurture their relationship:

*If we want to go out on the weekends, she is like, “We never had babysitters when we were your age.” And she’ll watch them but, you know, I always feel bad asking her and then if I get a babysitter, she’s like “Why are you paying somebody to watch your kids? I would have watched them.” And like I said with cleaning, mom thinks that everything has to be perfect. Mom says my problem is that when I get something out, I should put it away. When I take my clothes off, put them away right then, instead of letting them lay. If I even am sitting on a sofa or reading a book because I worked a long day and I’m tired. I just want to relax. If my mom walks in, I hide my book and act like I’m cleaning up because she’ll say, “Well, what are you doing? You should be cleaning”. I can’t believe I moved right next door to her – what was I thinking? So, I really have to watch myself.*

*Once a year we have a big party. We don’t have picnics all year we just do one real big one and we have a DJ come in and it’s ... we have beer and stuff. Well, I always plan it around my mom’s vacation so that, you know, because we have a DJ, we have alcohol and stuff. That’s another thing, if Rod gets beer, we have to hide it. When we put it away we have put it in the trash and stick it down*

*in the bottom because if, the Lord forbid, she'd open it up while she's over her and see it. Because she doesn't believe in drinking...absolutely no alcohol. The thing is she knows that Rod and I might have one beer a week at the most. But you would think that we were alcoholics because mom will say, "Well, I don't know why these people drink. That's just terrible" and I know she knows that she's seen it and she's trying to be nice about letting me know that she saw it but she won't come right out and say it. I always feel like I can never relax and be myself because I don't live up to my mom's expectations.*

*At 37, I still have to lie if I am going to go get my hair colored. She thinks it's terrible that I've gotten my hair colored, you know. And I have no clue what my original color is because it's been colored so many times. And she just thinks that's terrible to do that and buying vehicles.... she thinks you should buy a vehicle and pay it off and keep it until it dies. We buy a new vehicle every two years. She has a fit – she sees it as a total waste of money.*

*I'm very impulsive about buying things, but I don't buy unless I can pay for it...mom's gospel is you have to save. And I always tell her, I've never seen a funeral procession with a U-Haul behind it. I could walk out and die tomorrow. Well, I'm going to live and be happy today. My sister is very different. My mom doesn't ever condemn her. In fact, my mom always ... I think because Ann [sister] has a more conservative job and they're harder up for money and they struggle with things mom is easier on her. Actually, my mom thinks it is better that way – life should be full of trials – trials make you stronger. Plus Ann's house is always neat. I'm the one with peanut butter prints on my refrigerator door...(laughter)*

*And I've always been the one to be in trouble. I've been the impulsive one.*

*I'm the one who got married, got divorced, got pregnant before I got married to Rod.*

The conversation revisited how Roxy's mom does not nurture self and what Roxy may have learned along the way about the self-nurturance being a selfish indulgence:

*She really doesn't take care of herself at all. She's busy taking care of her house and everyone else. My mom can be sick and throwing up and she'll be up working. If I get sick, I want to crawl in bed, I don't care. And that's what mom says, "You can't. You're going to let yourself go...if you think you're sick you're going to make yourself sick. Don't think you're sick and you can keep going".*

*When I was younger I never had anything new. My mom made all our clothes. So now, I buy all the time. If I buy something for myself and go home my mom is out, I leave my bag in the car so she can't see it and then I'll take a laundry basket out like I'm doing laundry and I'll stick it underneath the laundry basket. Or else, I'll pop the tags off and I'll stick it in the laundry basket and take it back and hang it up and no one knows I bought it.*

*When she comes over to the house, I know she looks around. Everywhere. Every room. This is terrible and I probably shouldn't say it, but Rod and I are very sexually active. We buy toys and that kind of stuff like that. Well, one day I thought I'm going to cook your goose – I put all of our toys in the drawer just so, so whenever it would open one of the gels would fall. I came home one day after she was watching the boys and sure enough the gel was all over everything else.*



*That was three years ago and she has never said a word, never goes into my bedroom anymore either.*

Transitioning into another topic related to the rural conservative environment  
 Roxy talks about alcohol, women's clubs, and alternative lifestyles:

*You know there is no where to just go, relax and let lose. You have to drive 50 miles one way into Maryland before you hit anything fun! Did you know that the township even has 3 liquor licenses, but Mr. Walk who owns Country Side Restaurant has it and will never sell it because he is another conservative Christian that doesn't believe in drinking? It is worth \$500,000 and he refuses to sell it – it is crazy! So people like us that want to have wine with dinner have to drive 50 miles to get a glass of wine with our meal!*

*And the women's club, it tickles me, in Williamstown Women's Club, all of their activities support the men. The men are going to go hunting, so the Women's Club makes breakfast at 4AM and then dinner at 6PM when the men come in from hunting. When they asked me to join I knew the kinds of things they did and I said, "Do you ever go on trips to New York City or Williamsburg or have a women's day health party or something?" Julie said, "Oh no, but that would be a good idea." You know, it was all stuff for the men. They make more money so the men have a bigger VFW to stop and drink at on their way home from work – it is like we are stuck in the 1950's*

*It's like I said a while ago, people in this community do not accept alternative lifestyles. The older generation and most in our generation would not accept them...we are the exception to the norm. I honestly think that. I think the*

*majority of our neighbors are so closed off to the rest of the universe. Remind me why we want to live here again?*

Dovetailing on these thoughts the interview again turned back to Roxy and the following question was revisited. Within this environment, how does your culturally defined role as a mother and as a primary care taker, impact and/or influence your decision to nurture yourself?

*Well, here's a good example. Next weekend we have a girl's weekend planned. We are going to the Poconos for the weekend. Yeah, it's just me and my girlfriend and my other girlfriend usually goes but she's going on another trip this year. And my mom's like, "Well, why you would go away and leave your kids is beyond me?" You know, and I'm like, "Mom"... you know because the guys have their weekend to go to Pittsburgh to go to a ballgame and its okay for me to get away too. It is OK for Rod to go for two weeks up at our cabin. That's fine. That's expected. But God forbid if I go anywhere. In fact, I lied to her this year and just told her that I'm going on a business trip. I had to. And then I had to hide my suitcases and my stuff and when I come home I leave the car like it is until its dark so I can unpack it.*

*Yep, I feel so guilty. And I feel guilty when I go up there and buy candles and go to a spa. You know ... I mean, we come home and the car is loaded. We always have a blast. I mean we go up and we have so much fun. You know, we just sit out on the porch and drink wine – this will be our fifth year. We get a bungalow at a Bed and Breakfast and we just pamper ourselves all weekend. I*

*should have started this twenty years ago. I don't feel guilty all the time because it feels so good to just think about myself for a few days.*

*Every year I get mom to baby sit and then I feel so guilty because the night before I start easing her into it. You know, "Now mom, we're having our annual trip" ... and every week I try a little ... you know, I ease her into it and then the day we're leaving I feel so guilty and then when we're up there I'll call home to make sure she's okay, make sure she's not stressed out and then I buy her all kinds of popcorn and all kinds of soaps. I give it to her and she's like "Why'd you buy this for? Why are you wasting money for this?" And I felt so guilty about it, but keep doing it every year – the relaxation for three days is worth the hassle! (laughter)*

Building further from Roxy's above thoughts the following question was posed.

Did you ever receive any advice from any women (or men) in your life about self nurturance?

*Never. My mom, no. My mom never even talked wearing make-up, buying a nice dress. Sex was taboo. Never. I mean, growing up all I knew was that women were to be at home, help at church, and always do stuff for the church before you got your own stuff done. I never saw any woman take time to do her nails, get her hair done or even take a hot bath...you know, I don't even remember my mom taking a bath (laughter). She must have always waited until we were in bed before she even took a bath. Oh my, the thoughts you've stirred up today!*

During this first interview Roxy was very open and honest about her battle with self and the environment in regards to her personal health and well-being. She deeply reflected upon and discerned that this dilemma stemmed from her mother's identity as a conservative Christian woman in the community. These cultural roots run very deep in Roxy's identity and framework of self. Additionally, the community's conservative position on what a mother should be and how mothers should act play a role in Roxy not engaging in or hiding some activities that she sees as being very nurturing to her mind, body, and spirit. In the next piece of her self nurturance journey as part of this inquiry, it becomes apparent in her journaling that the first interview positively influenced her present engagement in self nurturing behaviors.

#### Journaling: It is Every where if you Look for It!

Roxy also chose to use the journal that was provided as part of this research project. Roxy stated, "This journal has been my sanctuary for the past month. I used to keep a journal when I was younger. I forgot how soothing it was to write down my feelings, frustrations, and fears." In total, Roxy scribed twenty journal entries in a month.

The following ten journal entries were selected as a reflection of Roxy's evolving thoughts and understanding as related to self-nurturance:

*I really enjoyed the first interview. It is amazing how much insight you can gain by opening up and comparing stories. As I sit writing in this journal I look around the house and there is so much I should be doing, but all I can think about is reading some of the new self-nurturance books I got today... How can I relax with so much to do? Well find out – I'm going to sit and read a while.*

*I bought a few books that I think Angie would like. I am reading “Simple Abundance” right now and it is giving me really good tidbits about nurturing self.*

*I thought this poem by Margaret Young really states what busy moms need to think more about: Often people attempt to live their lives backwards. They try to have more things or more money, in order to do more of what they want so they will be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse. You must first be who you really are, then do what you need to do, in order to have what you really want. As I am writing this I am thinking about everything that needs to be done while the boys and Rod sit on the couch watching wrestling. In a few minutes I’ll be taken away from this solitude into laundry, dishes left in the sink, cleaning bathrooms – what’s wrong with this picture?*

*You know, the reason we haven’t gone back to church is because I always feel I am being preached down to. I am so tired of hearing that the woman should be submissive and be the help-mate...we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for heaven’s sake...wake up and smell the roses.*

*We leave for the Poconos this weekend – I realize I really do need some time away...just to relax, shop and get away from this reality!*

*Wow – what a weekend. We shopped...talked...drank wine...visited...we had no cares or concerns. Then boom back to reality last night – dirty house, laundry, kids fighting, bills – but you know what – it was worth the time to self-nurture. To be away for a few days to forget everything – I think every woman needs that!*

*Had a Simple Tasteful party tonight – it was great to see a group of women enjoying themselves so much – I wondered how many of them worked, cleaned and/or took care of kids all day...they all looked happy and relaxed – that is the way it should be.*

*Guess what – I called in sick today...I just needed a day off and then I felt guilty about, but you know what – they can love without me! I'm going to sit around in my pj's all day and watch tv!*

*It's Saturday morning. We slept in, but Rod was gone by the time the boys and I got up. Seems like he just always expects me to always be here – I have to wonder what would happen if someday I just wasn't – would all hell break loose? I have so much to do and he is golfing...same old story – different day!*

*Today I give you another poem – “Take off your Blinders” I just keep seeing all of these poems that reflect why women struggle so to nurture self!*

Perspective is a powerful force. From a young age we are taught to hold certain expectations, and those expectations influence how we see the world. Stereotypes inculcated in you when you were a child may be affecting how you evaluate other people, and even how you evaluate yourself. Nobody rationally chooses to limit their aspirations, deny themselves opportunity, and misjudge other people's talents based on a set of stereotypes, but that is just what we do without even thinking about it because stereotypes alter our view of the world.

*This poem makes you think and I think the stereotype of the submissive housewife very much needs to be shaken up in this community – we love our children, family and husbands, but we need room to breathe!*

Roxy's journal entries were full of positive notions about her and other women needing to engage in taking care of self. She reflected on the constraints of the environment and then just walked right through them to the other side where she could breathe and feel lighter. Roxy's expansion of engagement and overall awareness of her right and need to self nurture was dramatically apparent in all of her journal entries.

### Interview Two: Learning to Nurture Self

This interview was initiated by inquiring how Roxy found the journaling and how the past six weeks have been as she focused more on nurturing self within her environment:

*It went real good. In fact, I was real diligent with the journal and thoughts, signs of self-nurturance were everywhere – the good, the bad, the ugly. I tell you what - I knew that this area [cultural environment] took mothers for granted, but that became crystal clear these past couple of weeks as I did the interview with you and kept the journal. Each and every day I saw a whole bunch of women being expected to do more, plus more without any help from their husbands or boyfriends.*

*I watched things. It's funny because, yeah, just the whole thing of the way things are preconceived and the way things are. I have just always been okay with things, you know I just thought, I'm here and that is the way it is, but now I know I need to encourage myself and friends to take time for our health!*

*I mean, it's so funny because I watch a lot of things now like, other women, you know, to see what all they are responsible for and how it may affect*

*their life. I take care of everything around the house while Rod plays golf at the drop of a hat and works...don't get me wrong he works hard, but I work hard too and I'm still responsible for everything involving the house and boys. It is definitely a 90/10 responsibility load and wonder why do men in this area expect their wives to do it all? My girlfriend and I talked a bit about it and she's exactly opposite of me. She doesn't take any crap from anyone. She runs her house and her husband doesn't have a clue either, but she will tell him if she needs help with something where if I ask for help, I feel guilty about it. I'm going to have to start being more nonchalant like her and ask for help from Rod and the boys when I need it.*

Leading into the discussion about feeling guilty, Roxy offers the following:

*It's weird because I know that if Rod does a guy's get-away, he never feels guilty. He packs up his stuff, leaves and doesn't look back, where I worry before I leave, I worry while I'm there and I start getting anxious about everything there is to do when I get home...I make meals ahead of time for them, I write notes, I am a total basket case by the time I finally get into the car to leave. I relax for the time I away and then on the way home it hits me again. So I mean I can relax but the before and after are about enough to kill you! I mean, it is that guilty feeling no matter what you do, even if it's just one thing for yourself. I really feel the need to read more and figure out how to be better to myself so I am not constantly stressed!*

These thoughts transition her into thinking about her having primary responsibility for her sons while working forty hours a week:



*You know Rod takes off every Tuesday night for his golf league and usually golfs at least two more times during the week. That leaves me to tend to the boys and have them at karate Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays. I'm always rushing. I'm the one coming home making sure supper is ready and then, if we do eat out, I feel guilty because I didn't cook, you know. Tonight I called him and said remember that I need to go to Angie's so be home on time. He said he would be home at 5 o'clock and I left to come here at 6 o'clock and he still wasn't home. The boys are okay alone, but it is just the principal of it all. I was expecting him to get dinner for them and I had to make PB & J on the run...it happens over and over. I hear the same thing from women at work – men go away on hunting trips, golfing trips for weeks at a time, we try to take a few hours one evening and you'd think we were asking them to cut off their left hand!*

The above thoughts lead into her attempting to answer her own question in terms of finding a balance in her life among unlikely odds she notes:

*It's just awful. Mothers in this day and age seem to always be struggling for a balance to relax. It is just whenever 99% of your life is theirs [children and husband] and only about 1% of your life is yours where do you find the energy or time? A 50/50 balance sure would be a great start! I watched that new show "Wife Swap" and one of the women had two sons and she did everything – she was even tying the one boy's shoes and he was old enough to do it himself. The woman she swapped went to exercise class, shopped, and had someone else to clean and cook for her. I'm not sure I'd want to do nothing at all, but a few hours*

*a week designated for me only with the boys and Rod not asking me to do something during that time would be a blessing!*

*When your whole life revolves taking care of everybody else and making sure everything's okay you are just whipped at the end of a day. I do know by being part of this study and just forcing myself to think about myself everyday has been really helpful. I actually do have a plan to stop feeling so damn guilty when I take time for myself. I have post-it notes on my bathroom mirror, in the car, and at work that say "Nurture You". The women at work are really curious about this whole study – a lot of them would be good for you to talk to.*

In relation to sharing with other women in the community Roxy shares:

*We have been talking at work and all of us are around forty and we know what we need to get a hold of this whole health and well-being thing right now! We talked about it the other day and we all agree we have to start thinking more about ourselves, putting ourselves first sometimes will make us better equipped to take care of everything else on our list – right? (laughter) We started talking about how the men and kids would be without us – oh my, can you imagine the house, the dog would starve for sure!*

*All of us agreed that we have just become accustomed to the social standard of being the wife who does it all. We agreed that working gives us more self confidence and that we don't want to quit work to stay home so we have more time to take care of everything – that isn't the answer. We feel we are just going to have to put our foot down and say, "I'm going to go do this for myself and not worry about the house, the husband, the kids, the dog – they will be okay when we*

*return. I think it's all about perception right now. Not only how other people think about you but what you think about yourself and how you're going to nurture yourself...we just have to keep working towards finding a balance.*

The following is an insight Roxy had in relation to how one man at her place of employment changes the whole workplace environment that which is comprised of 85% women who are mostly working moms:

*We are always careful around him. We sit and joke together, but as soon as he is around, it's like a completely different...their whole attitude changes...his office is right across from mine and he's very condescending...it's funny how I can hear him talk to a male one way and as soon as a woman comes in he starts that tone of his again...you can just tell by the tone of his voice who he's talking to...he is a very arrogant man. It is like he knows he is the rooster and expects his hens to take care of him – not going to happen! There used to be one girl who would get him coffee – we told her to stop it – it took some talking, but she finally stopped doing things for him.*

Reflecting back on her first marriage twelve years ago, Roxy does feel she has much more control over her life than if she would have stayed within this patriarchal-driven relationship:

*You know, if that was a relationship I had today, I'd be at home with the kids twenty-four hours a day and he would control everything. Steve was very domineering and I just sort of sat back and let him do everything...he just drove me deeper and deeper into the ground and I think that's sometimes why I feel like I am being controlled or why I have such an issue when Rod doesn't follow*

*through on something he said he would do. When I have take up extra slack, it drains me maybe more than if I wouldn't have been in such a domineering relationship for three years.*

At the end of second interview when I asked Roxy if there was anything else she wanted to share with me she handed me a paper and said:

*You've got to read this because it is the most interesting thing. I thought of you and the other women in this study when I came across this the other day. The following is a poem she found at her office on the bulletin board. The author is unknown.*

#### Living

Too many people put off something that brings them joy just because they haven't thought about it, don't have it on their schedule, didn't know it was coming or are too rigid to depart from their routine. I got to thinking one day about all those women on the Titanic who passed up dessert at dinner that fateful night in an effort to cut back. From then on, I've tried to be a little more flexible.

How many women out there will eat at home because their husband didn't suggest going out to dinner until after something had been thawed? Does the word "refrigeration" mean nothing to you? How often have your kids dropped in to talk and sat in silence while you watched 'Jeopardy' on television? I cannot count the times I called my sister and said, "How about going to lunch in a half hour?" She would stammer, "I can't. I have clothes on the line. My hair is dirty.

I wish I had known yesterday, I had a late breakfast, it looks like rain."

And my personal favorite: "It's Monday." ...She died a few years ago.

We never did have lunch together.

Because Americans cram so much into their lives, we tend to schedule our headaches.. We live on a sparse diet of promises we make to ourselves when all the conditions are perfect! We'll go back and visit the grandparents when we get Stevie toilet-trained. We'll entertain when we replace the living-room carpet. We'll go on a second honeymoon when we get two more kids out of college. Life has a way of accelerating as we get older. The days get shorter, and the list of promises to ourselves gets longer. One morning, we awaken, and all we have to show for our lives is a litany of "I'm going to," "I plan on," and "Someday, when things are settled down a bit."

When anyone calls my 'seize the moment' friend, she is open to adventure and available for trips. She keeps an open mind on new ideas. Her enthusiasm for life is contagious. You talk with her for five minutes, and you're ready to trade your bad feet for a pair of Rollerblades and skip an elevator for a bungee cord. My lips have not touched ice cream in 10 years. I love ice cream. It's just that I might as well apply it directly to my stomach with a spatula and eliminate the digestive process. The other day, I stopped the car and bought a triple-decker. If my car had hit an iceberg on the way home, I would have died happy. Now...go on and have a nice day. Do something you want to.....not something on your should do list.

Have you ever watched kids playing on a merry go round or listened to the rain lapping on the ground? Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight or gazed at the sun into the fading night? Do you run through each day on the fly? When you ask "How are you?" Do you hear the reply? When the day is done, do you lie in your bed with the next hundred chores running through your head? Ever told your child, "We'll do it tomorrow." And in your haste, not see his sorrow? Ever lost touch? Let a good friendship die? Just call to say "Hi"? When you worry and hurry through your day, it is like an unopened gift....Thrown away.

Life is not a race. Take it slower. Life may not be the party we hoped for... but while we are here we might as well dance!

When I finished reading the poem....tearfully I looked up at Roxy and with tears in her eyes she said "Turn it over", she had scribed these words on the back, *"Live for yourself, dream your own dreams, be happy when you wake up tomorrow!"*

During this second interview Roxy retraced her memories and told continued her story-line. This life she was talking about is truly non-fiction – it is her day-to-day...reality within the structure of motherhood, guilt, male dominance, and a culture that does not highly regard women's health and well-being. This reality becomes ever so clear in the next piece of Roxy's journey as she offers a story book of her daily living as a mother struggling to for some space and time for self.

### Creative Synthesis Project: Self Nurturance Storybook

Roxy's creative synthesis project is a compilation of collages. It is entitled, "My Self Nurturance Storybook". Roxy indicated that this was one of the most creative and fun things she has done for herself in a long time. She said it took her back to her earlier days when she would sit down and cross-stitch or make a home-made birthday card. She felt it was a way to shock her back into the reality that her mind, body, and spirit do need refueling. She noted that it was during her journaling time that she began to come up with the idea for this project and it is when she started to collect ideas, pictures and phrases to include on the collages.

The first section is entitled "Without Self Nurturance" and it is a collage of the following pictures and phrases: "For every woman growing anxious"; "Stress"; "He grabs the remote, you head for the phone, Men and women cope with stress differently"; "Stress can damage almost every part of your body, from your brain to your bones. It can make you fat and even take years off of your life" – beside this picture she has a picture of a woman crying as she stands at the scales; "She didn't feel appreciated"; "I want to be cherished and nurtured"; and a picture of a laundry basket.



*Figure 5. Roxy's creative synthesis presentation of self without self nurturance.*

The next section is entitled “What I need to Overcome in order to Engage in Self Nurturance” and it is a collage of the following phrases and pictures: “How to please all the people all the time”; “My family comes first...”; “One cannot consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar”; “Initially you might feel guilty having time to yourself”; “9-to-5 job”; “Studies say successful multi-tasking is a myth. (And by the way, so is having a clean kitchen floor when you have kids” and “Our mothers saw limits after kids...we see only possibilities”; “Mothers: Who else will ever know us better, or love us more? Even as grown-ups, we crave their applause, their compassion and their unending devotion” along with three cartoons related to the day in the life of a mother.





Figure 6. Roxy's creative synthesis presentation of general obstacles to navigate and negotiate in order to self nurture.



Figure 7. Roxy's creative synthesis presentation of motherwork that is navigated in order to self nurture.

The final section of her self nurturance booklet is entitled, "How I feel when I do Engage in Self Nurturance": "More time – just for you"; "HAPPY"; "Bliss and

relaxation”; “Some people like to talk about their dreams, others prefer to show them off”; and “Pamper Mom” along with several pictures of relaxed moms.



*Figure 8.* Roxy’s creative synthesis presentation of being engaged in self nurturance.

Roxy’s creative synthesis project is an extension of her everyday thoughts and feelings in relation to her personal health and well-being. She acknowledges the conflicts with self, the cultural environment, motherhood, and patriarchs through the visions and sayings that weave through her daily walk. It is through these pages that she gives herself permission to take off the guilt and move on to find a balance that will soothe and nurture her mind, body, and spirit.

## CHAPTER 6

### VICTORIA

#### Background

Victoria is a 40 year old mother of two. She has a sixteen year old daughter and a thirteen year old son. Victoria spends fifty plus hours a week being a spiritual advisor to individuals all over the country. Her ex-husband, Chester, of fourteen years owned his own general contracting business. Chester is not financially supporting Victoria, nor does he have a current relationship with her and/or the children. She has been separated for two years and officially divorced for six months from Chester. Her very significant other, John, is a school teacher. John currently provides love and care to her and the children. Both men are being introduced at this time, secondary to them both playing a role in Victoria's story of nurturing self.

Her father left the family when she was young and since that time she has had minimal contact with him. Her mother was the primary caretaker for the girls. Although Victoria said her mother went out with other men on occasion, she never remarried. Her mother worked two jobs to support the girls and Victoria noted the church they attended did help out from time to time. Victoria's religious background is United Brethren in Christ and she did not officially become a member of Chester's religious affiliation. She regularly attended church on Sunday and Wednesday evenings with her mom and sister until she married Chester, at that time she began to attend church meetings with him and his family.

When she started dating Chester [first husband] she was introduced to the Old Order German Baptist religious faith. This is an extremely conservative faith of which many individuals in the community practice. Being embedded within this religious faith for sixteen years had a significant impact on Victoria. Victoria's current religious tradition is eclectic. Currently, she is not practicing either faith of her childhood or recent years and mostly connects with the Unity Church and feels strongly about her spirituality, but does not want to be joined to any organized religious denomination.

As with Laci and Roxy, I asked Victoria to describe the community she lives in. She notes the following:

*I would say, small town, very class oriented, not only by economics but also by religion. Secretive. Close minded with an underlying weight of spirituality coming in. In regards men being in control, As a child the figures within the church, deacons and pastor were all men. So within the church it was always male figures. The pastor and the deacons were all male figures so in that seemed to me to be positions of authority.*

*When I was growing up, women weren't on an equal stance with men and when I was a child, men had higher paying jobs and I was raised solely by my mother from 3 on and so we were one of the first families that was divorced and also not to have a male figure to make the income, and that was different and so it was looked upon with a negative eye...*

*There were men in the church that helped us though. Like older men that helped with things with my mother. Like helped when we built a house, an older man dug the foundation and one gave us a car and so there some things like that.*

*I could see some, like ... like they were taking responsibility for our family, which is a positive.*

Next, I asked Victoria to describe her identity as a mother living within a rural, religiously conservative, historically patriarchal community:

*Because of my ex-husband's family being very conservative, hats and bonnets ... They have one set of ideas on how to raise children and, coming from that set where you had both parents in every home and mine not having a father figure, their acceptance of me was never really there. My mother worked all the time; my grandmother and grandfather participated a lot in my upbringing and lived beside us and I did garden with them and did some canning type things with them. And she [mother] had a very traditional way of parenting, but a much explorative way than I've seen other people within the United Brethren Church of Christ bring up their children...other people were much more conservative than my mom. So stepping into that community, I learned how to can and how to grow your own vegetables and how to be what they saw as a better mom...That religion really promoted the stay-at-home mom, and how to, you know, how that was important in family rearing and the male made the decisions about everything. I never joined that church, but yet those traditional standards of being a mom stood, plus I was not allowed to work outside of the home then entire time I was married to Chester. So my mothering role when the children were small is that I was always home for everyone's needs. In the past two to three years my mothering role has sort of reverted back to how my mother raised my sister and I*

– more open, free to talk about things, and the kids help me out because I am working.

*So they have a more male controlled dominating society and so as a mother, it was going back to the hands on, staying home with the children ... I did get to stay home with my children. And so that was a change from what I saw my mom do...that was actually a good thing for me at the time, but now I see I should have went to work or back to school before this...For me, that part of motherhood I enjoyed .. That part of motherhood, but what was difficult for me was to...to feel like I was required to do it all. Not only helping in his business but then raising the children, cooking, cleaning, canning and gardening. And it was okay within their community because they all pulled together and helped each other. And in some ways I pulled together and helped with his family. Their community is very closed but they don't have any of the frills like no tv, no radio, you know, and very plain living and so to be pulled between two worlds and be expected to live with some of that plainness and yet have some of these other things and have these activities with your kids that wouldn't do with their kids, but yet still keep some of that. There was just too much to do.*

*But I did do a lot of fun things with my children. I was very much into education and within their community, most of the kids only go to like 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but their dad went to 12<sup>th</sup> and graduated and he was into education too, but not as much as me. And I promoted, did pre-school. I helped with pre-school. I did reading to them when they were in my stomach. I played games with them when they were in the car seat. I did alphabet letters. I just learned and learned and*

*made a game of it. They are both excellent ... straight A students. And so it was a part of ... a part of, you know, what I did. Looking back it went against the Old Order German Baptist ways, but I am so glad I went with my gut instinct!*

Victoria spontaneously offered her story of living as a mother within this community. Her story was full of attempts to balance two worlds as a young mother and wife. Her energy and determination to not be swallowed by the conservative religious tradition of her husband was a daily challenge for fourteen years of her life. Next, Victoria's story transitions into narration around the semi-structured questions of this inquiry. As we got deeper into the first interview Victoria offered much more detail about her search for the opportunity and the right to nurture her mind, body, and spirit.

#### Interview One: Romancing the Idea of Self Nurturance

This represents the point where the first interview officially was initiated and the discussion went on further to explore how Victoria was able to oppose the religious community she was embedded in for sixteen years:

*Well, it was kind of like being caught between two worlds. I was trying to maintain some of what he was raised with and that "plain mentality" of the woman being part of the man's business, having his own business, plus taking care of the children and doing a lot of the education, plus doing canning and freezing and gardening and we had dairy goats and I milked dairy goats ...And you know, we had chickens, hens and rabbits that you butchered. It was just .... it was just all that and then him putting all the hours into the business too and gone a lot. You just did it, but I knew that I needed/wanted more for my children. With*

*me not being brought up in such a conservative religious culture, I knew there was more out in the world that the children could explore. I didn't sleep...I would do everything with that was expected of me during the day, plus read or do something extra with the children...once Chester went to bed I would read mainstream books and I would get some of the business stuff done so I would have more time for the children during the day. His mother and sisters kind of knew that I wasn't ever going to be a "true" GB [German Baptist], but I kept them happy too, so they didn't ask too much of me.*

The interview naturally flowed into the following question, "As you look back at it, I know you said you enjoyed motherhood but did you find, as you look back on it, did you have time at all for yourself?" Victoria responds:

*When I hit about 27...Donia was born when I was 25...Maybe 28 ... well, somewhere around 29, I remember waking up and thinking what are you doing? Because I remember thinking you've lost yourself in all of this. And it really wasn't the children so much as the expectations. Being raised in that environment for him, he has so many expectations on how the house should look and how everything should be done. And you could do that and live in that plain community but you couldn't do that and then have all these other things added to it.*

*They didn't take their kids to Little League. No pre-school. Didn't go on family vacations. Didn't go and do the things that we did plus this. You couldn't do it both. And I woke up and thought, the expectations of this male dominated community and bringing that in just are unreal because you can't do it all. You*



*can't live in two worlds and do that. And so I sort of woke up and said, you know, I've lost myself in this and that's when I began a spiritual journey to say I have to ... I went back to my roots and it wasn't the religion, it was my spirituality, my personal relationship with God. And part of loving God is realizing that within you have to love yourself. Take care of yourself. So I went back to that and I think in some way I think that it felt like to Chester that I was rebelling against the grain. But, you know...I am so glad that I kept with the journey – it took me another twelve years to get out, but I feel so free – so much lighter – more myself now.*

Victoria goes on to reveal that Chester was not taking care of Victoria or children since he was in an addictive pattern with alcohol, which his religious faith not only did not agree with, but when it did happen they ignored the behaviors and the wife was forced to deal with it on her own:

*Well, and he had already stepped into the abuse...and I was parenting him too, so I was parenting two children and an adult who was in an addictive, depressive pattern and you can't parent an adult. And so that made it very difficult because they have the freedom to do and you don't have control over their behavior and their behavior affects yours. So it was sort of like he had the freedom of choice to go do this job, which gave him freedom because he designed it and I was stuck at home taking care of the children, running the house, the animals and everything else. And he would come and go as he wanted...this is what most of the wives put up with...not the addictive part so much, but the men just doing what they please.*

The above dialogue naturally led into talking about other positive and/or negative messages Victoria received within her immediate environment about engaging in self nurturance:

*I don't think that I saw a good example of self nurturing from my mother because she was a single parent. Her whole life was focused around making ends meet...So she didn't self nurture as much as she should have because of the circumstances. But, she would let the house go to play with us...we always went on a family trip...every year. She would make sure we got to do things within the church. The church took teen trips and things. But I didn't see her take trips by herself or go with women to do things by herself, but yet she enjoyed playing with us and I really enjoyed playing with my children. A lot of play. So, where I thought I didn't see it, I'm taking another look at it and I can see some of that and so, that's a positive.*

*And the negative, Chester's [ex-husband] family owned a business and they worked in the business all the time from little up. They would go on some family trips but to throw a baseball to play like that, they didn't play and so he saw my playing and other things weren't done and the dishes weren't done and me playing with the children as being lacking ambition and not accomplishing and so there was always this, "you're not accomplishing enough. You're not getting enough done. You can't keep up" And looking back, I was looking like a mad woman and it was this ... that always, I'm not accomplishing enough and so I think when I got to my mid 20s, late 20s ... when I got to my late 20s I said, I don't care. I don't care if I don't accomplish what your expectations are because I'm*

*tired of trying to fall within your expectations because they're unrealistic. So, there wasn't, in that relationship, encouragement to nurture self. There wasn't encouragement to nourish ... for me to nourish myself and to go do things.*

My first and only interaction with Victoria was three years ago. Since that time, I had thought about her often, but I had not had a chance to be in her presence again. When I called her and she agreed to be a participant in the study, I put on my schedule to go to her home the following week. When I went to her house and she opened the door I thought I was at the wrong address. Victoria had lost fifty pounds, got her hair cut and lightened and she just looked so much brighter, alive, and so happy. After we were into the first interview a bit, I had to ask her what brought about the positive changes that I saw just from the physical aspect of her life:

*It has been recent just in the past six months and it was more or less finally getting out of that relationship. Because even though I made some of those decisions to go ahead and nurture myself, I'm not going to care what you think about this because it is good for me. It had always happened, but the last 2 years he was running around doing the nurturing and playing that he never got as a child. The more time he took away from the children, the madder I got, plus I was not getting any support from his side of the family – I was just suppose to deal with it.*

*It wasn't just about the work. He was doing things that he wanted to go that he didn't get to do as a child and so, you know ... I was kind of left with the home front. And so ... but of my because of my religious and spiritual perspective, I kept giving him chances to change...To make changes...I allowed him to take up*

*way too much of my time. And there was some intimidation, some fear, some threats, some emotional abuse and threats of physical that kept me locked in that. Finally one day, I just thought, “Victoria, you need to do this for yourself and the children. Your life can’t go on this way” – so I called a lawyer and my butterfly transformation started.*

Victoria has been in a very nurturing relationship for about eighteen months now and she talks a bit about how this relationship has afforded her the freedom and opportunity to nurture self:

*The relationship that I’m in now...the difference is that there is a lot of encouragement to be yourself. I’m not trying to change you. I want you to be yourself. I would not try to make you something different. I want you to nurture yourself. I encourage you to be you. I’ve been with John long enough too to know that it isn’t an act...he is great with my children and such a gentle, giving spirit.*

*Before I could never do anything good enough...and then, so to come to this other relationship where I’m really encouraged be myself, to nurture yourself is a true gift. John is very earth oriented...he’s very to take care of earth and of how things work, how time works, how organization works, how money works, how people work. He’s very aware of the earth and I am the spiritual. He sees my gift with the angels as a gift. He sees it that he’s the earth and I’m the heaven component in the relationship...it is a give and take, not all taking and leaving the other one empty. Where it wasn’t looked like that before. It’s a lot different and a lot more freedom. For instance, when we talked about getting*

*married, he said, you take whatever name that you want. You don't have take my name...you can make your name whatever you want to make it, because to me, that's your freedom. It feels good to be given the freedom to keep my identify...I didn't have that before...maybe that is why I just took care of Chester and everything else...I lost myself. It's a lot different now.*

Victoria's above story unsurprisingly built upon my next question. I asked her to tell me more about how she has re-worked aspects of her identify over time in order to nurture self within this same cultural environment. Note that although Victoria, like two of the other women in this study are in their second relationship, they continued to reside in their childhood community:

*Well, I maintain my same religious beliefs. I still believe in Christ. I still believe in the Creator but I believe that people call the Creator by many names. I don't have the negative influence now that I once had about you believing this way and that one's right and one's wrong. So, I 've learned about seeing the bigger picture and in our community, there is no bigger picture.*

*I think a lot of us in this community deceive ourselves to think that the Mennonites are going to be the only people in heaven or that this group is going to be the only ones in heaven, I never have seen it that way, but I wasn't free to talk about it. I find that to be stifling and smothering to one's identity in this community. A lot of people are just so damn judgmental and I made up my mind that I was going to stay within this community and yet let my light shine and be accepting and understanding and see the bigger picture. It's something we won't*

*change overnight, but you even doing this study is impacting four women in the community.*

*Change comes one person at a time, so if I show that I nurture myself and make the changes that say, okay, I'm choosing to nurture myself...I'm choosing to nurture myself by getting a group of ladies together and doing something fun together, you make the changes in yourself and others observe it. I still have some friends that are in that confining, stifling, religious ... those belief systems ... women particularly, that feel like they can't step out of that, and I've lost some friends to that. But then I have some others that are saying, wow, you know ... it's a different time right now and so it's about taking the power. It's about seeing the Creator in us, recognizing our identity, self love. It's about seeing God's breath as he breathes in and out in us and if we have that breath, what are we going to do about it. We have the ability to create and what are we going to do with that. So it's a sense of taking responsibility. I like to think of God as, the feminine and the masculine and we've too often taken all the feminine views out of it within this community. ..*

Victoria talks more specifically about the patriarchal control in the community and how she sees education with/by women as the changing force for the future:

*For too long it's been the male dominated view. Now we need to see the feminine side. So, I think learning how to nurture yourself and this community and one person at a time, could make a contribution to the changes. We need to start gathering women together to build strength. I'd like to see education in the community that talks to women about power positions. I'd like to see girls talked*

*and asked deep questions like - What do you stand for? Girls in this community are brought up to think they have to get married and have a family first and foremost. I'm not saying that is a bad idea, but what about their needs as a woman first? I want them to get a whole and complete feeling of themselves before they choose a relationship. I hate that this community still has a negative view of a single woman ... a single man being a bachelor is kind of like an honor thing ... but being a single woman ... it's an old maid.*

During this first interview, Victoria's story of the obstacles and facilitators of caring for self come to life. She explains how living under a conservative religious tradition smothered her identity as a mother and wife; about the realization of the need to care for self; the limited assistance from family to deal with their son/her husband's alcoholism; not having a good role model of how to nurture self within the conservative religion she married into; and how the transition from an unsupportive to a supportive life partner has changed her ability to nurture her own mind, body, and spirit.

#### Journaling: A Good Time to Nurture Self

Victoria felt the most efficient and effective means for her to keep her journal was on the computer. Victoria put an entry in her journal every day during the month long period. She did not find this difficult since she has a long history of keeping a daily journal. Her entries included single words, poem entries, and personal commentary. The following is a sampling of Victoria's journal entries (Note: Each new paragraph represents a different journal entry):

*Today it seemed as if nothing could be done without me – the children needed me, the dogs needed me, John needed me. When I finally sat down to think about the day – I realized they would have been just fine doing things without me, but they all know I'll drop what I am doing to make their lives easier – this has got to change...*

*Peace – where is it to be found among the dishes, the carpooling, the responsibilities of work – does not one person see that this mother is worn out?*

*I watched a young mother of two preschoolers today while I was out for lunch. The children who were probably two and four were just so demanding and she was staying so calm, but looked exhausted...I wondered how much help she gets at home and does she feel like they are totally her responsibility? I remember being in her shoes when the children were younger – I was expected and I guess I still am expected to be their most important point of reference. It feels good to be needed and I wouldn't change that, but it is just so exhausting sometimes to feel like you are doing it all on your own...*

*Exhausted, angry, wondering why the men in my life expect so much from me – can't they see I need a break? I think I am going to have to sit down with the family and just explain that I really need some space and time to myself every day...I need to be an example for RuthAnn [daughter] too. I don't want her to go through the same things I did. I think I have been a good example to this point, but she needs to know to carve time out for herself from the beginning – this will make her more able to deal with the role and responsibilities of being a mother, wife, and friend.*



Victoria's journal entries were very specific and to the point of what she was feeling that day. She tells her story very clearly and it feels as if are right in the room with her when she is writing down her feelings. It appears to be very important to her to be a role model of health and well-being for her daughter and son. Her journal entries give the feeling that she knows how to write her own story of self nurturance.

### Interview Two: The Necessities of a Mother's Life

Since Victoria had provided so many eloquent and detailed stories during the first interview, this second interview went in slightly different direction than the second interviews with the three other women engaged in this inquiry. The interview started by recapping the insight Victoria had gleaned from her own mother in regards to nurturing self.

*My mother taught us how to play and she did appear to take time for herself even though she didn't have much help. She talked so much about relationships. She talked about what you were looking for in a relationship. My mother was so open about sexuality, which is very strange for someone that went to a plainer church, but she was very open in speaking about sexuality and how it was one of God's greatest gifts to women as well as men, in the right setting.*

*She talked about purity ... she talked about all those things and I can remember as a child, a preteen, saying, I don't want to hear this, I don't want to hear this! But, you know, she gave so much good advice and wisdom. I think that has always helped me to be a passionate person and did not see sexuality for a*

*woman as something dirty, something negative, or something that is just about fulfilling a man's needs.*

The conversation then turned towards the fact that she married a man who came from a very conservative religious tradition who was not at all intoned her emotional or physical needs during their marriage:

*Yes, within this religious culture, it is all about the man...sex is all about the man's needs and it's all about producing children. I just don't think that I quite understood what I was getting myself in to...I remember thinking to myself, "Do you want this for yourself?"*

*The sexuality in this community has been thought of in the past, particularly in the plain religions, as something dirty or something you don't talk about or as something that, for women. It has always been about fulfilling a man's needs or about your duty or about producing children. I'm a very passionate person and sex was a part of the marriage that was a positive experience for fourteen years of the marriage, but now that I think about it - it was about fulfilling on my partner, it was not about fulfilling the my needs first...it was about satisfying Chester and then hoping that I enjoyed it along the way.*

*I've learned a lot more about sex in the last 2 years since Chester and I separated. Right after we officially separated I went on a journey about learning how to take care of my mind, body, and spirit. It was my own journey to research this and to come to an understanding because with my first marriage, I was married at 19, it was the only partner and the first partner I ever had sexually*

*which is historic for this community. Although, I did give him [Chester] a book to read about sex early in our marriage detailing what it should be like to make love to a woman...it was always about fulfilling his needs before my needs. Honestly, I think some of that was about selfishness on his part and some of that was about non-education on what a woman needs within his religious tradition. From his perspective sex was about the man being in control. It was about; I won't give you physical affection and sex if you don't do what I want you to do as my wife...a control.*

*He often told me that we couldn't have sex because I wasn't doing what I needed to do during the day with the house or the children. And within these plainer religions, there is a lot of control issues and within our community...there's still that mind set and it needs to change. Anyhow, when he finally left the house I went on a journey to research more about loving myself and on how I could be satisfied as a sexual being...*

*I talked to women about it and discussed it with them. We talked about what it was like to be single because I had never been single before. I talked to some widows. I talked to some women who were divorced and some women who weren't married. I prayed.*

Victoria went on to talk about how this community still does not want to talk about the basics in regards to sexuality secondary to the very conservative religious beliefs:

*It is even viewed in this community that a women is being brass to talk about sex even when she is married...the other thing that I discovered was that,*

*it's socially accepted for men to satisfy their selves while it is not socially accepted for women. It just blows my mind on how dated the whole community is in regards to talking about something that we all do, but could probably be doing a lot better if we opened up about it...*

*I had this conversation with my friend who is a Christian psychiatrist and I said, you know...as a male I want to talk about this...I asked him where in the bible does it state that it is okay for a man to sexually satisfy himself, but it is not okay for a woman to sexually satisfy herself? He said, "No where...it is the ancient, worn out beliefs in this community that stifle the sexual needs of both men and women." He went on to say that he believes that a woman, who knows how to satisfy herself sexually, knows how to explain to her partner what she needs in a sexual relationship.*

*However, as I started to talk about this whole sex thing with girlfriends I found out more and more there are these "hushed toy parties" going on within the community, but I'd never know if I wasn't bold enough to bring it up to someone...only because I talked to one of my girlfriends about sex she told someone else and they invited me to this toy party for women. It was very tastefully done and I learned more about how to get my sexual needs satisfied in that one hour than I had in twenty years of marriage!*

The conversation turns to the relationship Victoria has been in for the past eighteen months. John comes from a very open spiritual perspective and moved into this community from an urban area in his mid thirties. His perspectives of women, religion,

and relationships are very different than that of Chester [Victoria's ex-husband] and of the majority of men living within the community:

*I've learned a lot from John...and all the sudden I've thought, I've missed so much that I didn't know I was missing...not just from a sexual standpoint, but in regards to how a man can treat woman with true respect. It's in the consideration he gives to me all the time.*

*And I think in self nurturing, you have to learn to tell your partner that you need time and certain things for yourself to be the best you can be. I've talked with John about things I need from him to feel loved and he has told me things that make his day better. We did this activity where I wrote down 10 things and he wrote down 10 things that we needed from each other...we traded lists and for a month three times a week will did something for one another on the list. It was amazing and I just felt so free to be me...I could have never done this with Chester. Now I see that his background and mindset were just so closed that he will always be in a different time and place than I will be.*

At this point Victoria was ask to reflect on anything else in her life and/or within this community that she sees as being a barrier to mother's engaging in self-nurturance. She offered these final thoughts:

*I see that in this community so often the male handles all the money and it's not a joint thing and women have to ask for money and are expected to work at home and then ask for money. You know, it's sad. It's so sad, because I've had a couple of friends divorced with nothing to survive on because they didn't know that the man was just squandering the money away on gambling, alcohol, and*

*other women...there's the woman at home taking care of the children not allowed to ask questions and the next thing she knows the IRS is literally banging on the door.*

*I am a bit ashamed to say this, but just two years ago, I didn't even know how to balance a checkbook. I had no idea how deep in debt we were...I just thought if I keep taking care of the children and the house everything will work itself out – I was so naïve and I see other women in the community doing the same thing – it has to stop!*

*Men have such control over the business and private sectors of this community it just makes me sick. It is insane. The whole attitude is that men must control the money and the sex and put the fear of God in them [women]. It is just so deeming and I don't want this for my daughter any of the young women in this community – I don't want them to feel like possessions. Within this community, still right now, we need to teach these young women and the men that everyone has the right to think and act freely – it is just so liberating – I wish I would have figured it out before I turned forty! I've talked a lot to my daughter and her friends about your study – maybe you can talk with them sometime soon too!*

Victoria's second interview very much extended her thinking and exploration of nurturing self within her environment. She initiated the story-line by talking about the disconnect of her mother being a good role model of a woman who cared for self and the constraints of caring for self within a religiously conservative marriage. Next, she talked openly about her first real exploration of sexuality at the age of forty with a man who values and honors her needs as a woman. Finally, she reflected upon the overall

conservatism that is weaved throughout the immediate environment and how in the past and present it is so stifling to her and to the majority of women who are mothers, wives, and daughters. She is hopeful that this will change in the very near future.

### Creative Synthesis Project: Process of Nurturing Self

Victoria's creative synthesis project is a collection of clipart that she feels visually depicts how she feels when she is not self-nurturing, the obstacles she faces to care for self and how her mind, body, and spirit feels when engaged in nurturing self. Victoria noted that she has engaged more in the past five years in creative exploration with her daughter and with woman friends.

The first panel is entitled "Without Self-Nurturance" and includes a woman balancing on a man and horse in a circus arena; a woman balancing on a clock, money, and computer; and finally a woman screaming and holding her hands to her head.

Victoria noted that these images were true reflections of how she has felt in the past when not being true to her need for rest and play. She particularly connected with the woman screaming and holding her hands to her head by noting, "There were just so many days that I felt incapable of taking care of my husband and children let alone setting any time aside for myself!"

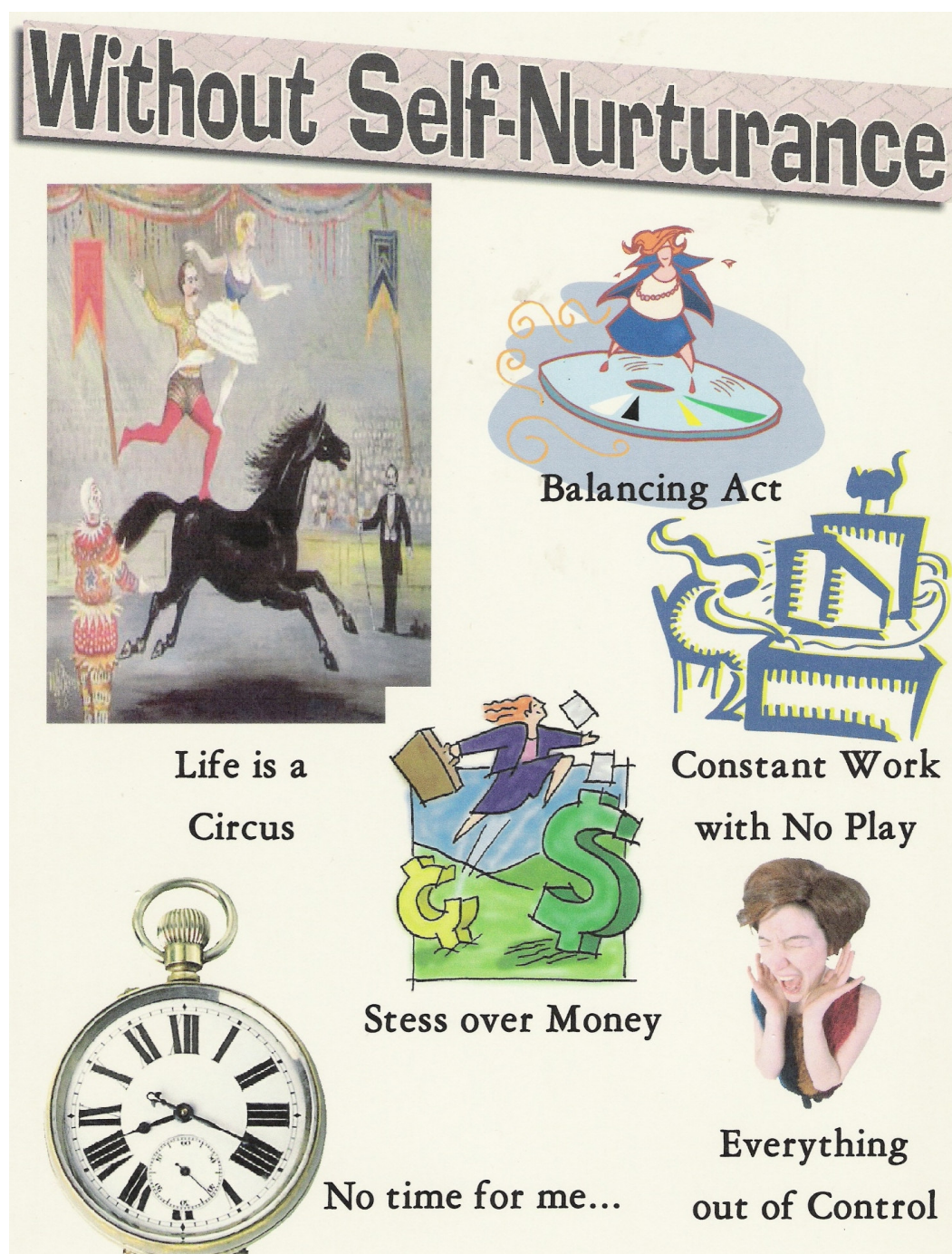


Figure 9. Victoria's creative synthesis presentation of self without self nurturance.

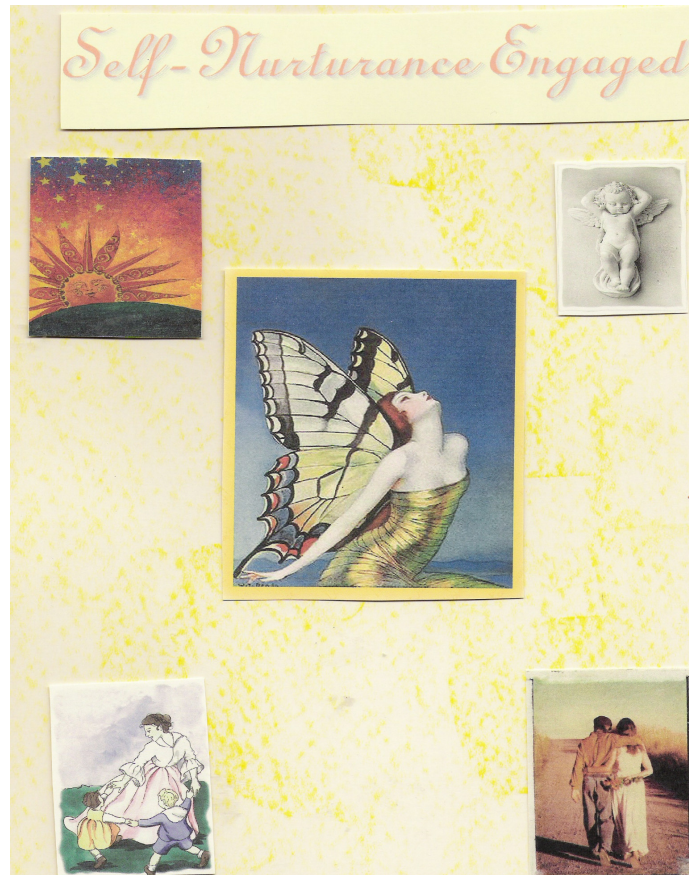


The second panel is titled, “Obstacles to Self-Nurturance” and includes pictures that represent the microscope of a small rural community, guilt of doing things perfectly for others, male as figure head, conservative religious beliefs and teachings, and the need to remember/learn from the amazing women in her life. Victoria stated, “This is what the community looks like and it is really sad. There are few men within this community that value the talents and experiences of the women around them. There are fewer who will give women credit in public...”



Figure 9. Victora's creative synthesis presentation of obstacles to nurturing self.

The final panel is entitled, “Self-Nurturance Engaged” and has a background with the words “peace-joy-love”. The center picture is a beautiful woman with butterfly wings lying back with head to a blue sky, a couple walking down a dirt road hand in hand, a mother playing ring around the rosie with her children, a sun rising against the blue sky and a peaceful cherub wrapped in white linen. Victoria notes, “This is how I feel now – like a butterfly who has finally found her wings. I feel confident and secure that my future and my daughter’s future will be brighter by knowing that it is a must to care for ourselves.”



*Figure 10.* Victoria’s creative synthesis presentation of being engaged in self nurturance.

Victoria's creative synthesis project was an explosion of detailed visual and written expressions related to the barriers and facilitators of her health and well-being in the past, present, and future. Victoria shared that this activities was one of the most enlightening tasks that she has done for herself as an acknowledgment that she is worth her own effort. She feels that her participation in this research experience has validated her commitment to having her life be a positive representation of self nurturance to other women in her presence.

## CHAPTER 7

### GRACE

#### Background

Grace is a mother of four children, two girls ages seventeen and twelve and two boys ages fifteen and nine. She has been a preschool teacher for 3 years, prior to that she was a full-time housewife. She returned to school four years ago to get a certificate in early childhood education. Her first husband passed away three years ago at the age of forty two. He was a dairy farmer and for the eighteen years they were married she stayed at home on the farm to take care of the children and do various farm-related tasks. She remarried a man 10 years her junior and has been married for two years. Her second husband is a cabinetry draftsman.

Her past religious orientation was First Church of God. She now actively practices the Mennonite religion attending church on a regular basis. The Mennonite is a fairly conservative tradition, as was that of the First Church of God where Grace attended as a child. For the most part Grace stated that she likes the church she attends, although she would appreciate a more contemporary service with more singing and the use of multiple instruments instead of just a piano. Like all the women before her, I asked Grace to describe her community surroundings:

*Very conservative, set in their ways, close knit, and very expressive in terms of their religious beliefs. Many of my friends as women practice their religious faith to the letter when it comes to “submitting unto thy husband”. I feel that that many women in the community, including myself, spend a great deal of*

*time attempting to gain approval of the men in our lives (i.e. bosses, fathers, and husbands).*

At midpoint of this first question, it should be noted that Grace's husband knew that she was participating in this study and knew that we were meeting for the first interview on a morning she did not have to go in to the preschool. Gaven [husband] called while the interview was taking place and wanted to know how much longer we would be. He wanted to come home for lunch and expected Grace to have lunch ready for him. Grace stopped the interview, went out to warm lunch for Gaven, but he did not come home. Grace received another thirty minute phone call from Gaven while I was conducting the interview. She stated that her participating in the study was bothering him a bit, but she wanted to be a part of this study and stood her ground.

I then ask Grace to describe the way in which she feels and/or witnesses the environment being lead mostly by patriarch models:

*Well, both of my husbands were brought up thinking they are the head of the house and what they say goes. Also, in the church it is mainly men on the board and women in the nurturing roles (i.e. Sunday school, VBS [Vacation Bible School] and leading the social events. Most of the businesses, except for the hair salons in the area are owned by men. Also, I find my self seeking the approval of men more often than women. With women there is a back and forth, with men it is kind of a one way street and they are always in the lead. I still find myself seeking my dad's approval!*

When Grace is describing the above she did not make eye contact with me and it was as if at the same time she is talking she is gleaning an understanding that all may not

be right with this story. Grace appears to be less at ease with herself and her understanding of the community than the other three women at this early point in the interview. It felt as if I needed to probe a bit more into her seeking her father's approval before we moved into other parts of the interview, hence the inquiry flowed into the following pattern.

#### Interview One: What is Self Nurturance?

The interview then was initiated by taking some time to expand on Grace describing her relationship with her father from a patriarchal control standpoint. When we had talked about her participating in the study she indicated that having her father's approval even at forty years of age continues to be a major concern:

*I have always sought my father's approval for some reason. I guess because I really don't know that I've ever had his full understanding of who I am as a person. Maybe not necessarily believing that I ever really became the person that he desired me to be. I never quite learned how to use the right words to say and I'm not sure why it's so difficult to have a relationship with him.*

Grace had a difficult time talking about seeking her father's approval and she kept her head down as she relived the somewhat forgotten or suppressed history of losing parts of herself because she is trying so hard to live out what she feels her father wanted. She paused for a moment and then describes another mom in the community that she feels struggles to self nurturance in the same manner as herself:

*I have this friend, Rachel, she is in her late thirties and has 3 young children. She desperately is trying to college to go to be an elementary school*

*teacher, but she is struggling with balancing her mother and wife obligations with doing something for herself. She is struggling with how much time she gives to her school work vs her marriage and her family. She is a very godly woman and there is a lot of conflict in her mind as to if this is what God wants her to be doing. I see myself in her when I went back to get my preschool teacher certificate – I enjoyed the education so much, but there was always this feeling that I should be home with my husband and children instead of taking time for myself.*

From this point the interview lead into Grace describing her identity as a mother:

*As a mother I feel like I am a taxi driver, a provider of meals, a laundry and meal service. I am here when my children want to talk about something exciting they are doing or if they need prayer, I listen and pray for/with them. I was put here to make sure that all of their needs are met before my own.*

Grace's perspective of her identity as a mother was to be everything to her children all the time regardless of the cost to her own well-being. The next point addressed was those positive and/or negative messages received within her immediate about engaging in self nurturance and taking time for herself:

*I'd never really thought about this much, but there are women in the church that encourage you to come to a bible study or mom's morning out. As for negative messages I would have to say that my dad and first husband thought taking time for self was a bit frivolous. Growing up on a farm and marrying a farmer is a different way of life. There are lots of things to take care of on the farm and there really isn't much time left for you at the end of the day. Also,*

*when you watch your father and your husband put in sixteen hour and sometimes twenty-four hour days you feel pretty guilty taking time for yourself. My mom has always encouraged me to spend quiet time alone each day for devotions...that has gotten much easier as the children get older.*

*Thinking back as a kid, growing up, you just worked...we never really saw our parents take time for themselves. You didn't necessarily need it. That was how you got your identity, was the things that you did, the person that you were. There really was no need...There really wasn't any time to give to yourself.*

*In the church, I think it's there sort of, when they talk about self nurturing. I guess that's probably more from a Biblical point of view. When I think about self nurturance, it's that one-on-one with the Lord, one-on-one with Bible time. Right now I'm reading a message which I'm actually reading it more like a novel than I would even a Bible because it is in such contemporary language. So, I guess that would be the kind of self nurturance that church families would be encouraging and prayer time with the Lord is a super must because when I'm not connected with Him I'm not connected period.*

From this point, Grace's story reflected on witnessing how her grandmother's health was negatively affected by her always working and never resting:

*You know, one of the people I think that I really admired the most is my grandmother Hammon and I think, you know, she gave so much of her time to her family which I find a tremendous quality and yet at the same time, I'm thinking, where she is now, I realize that she is a somewhat happy individual. Actually very happy individual, but yet she is so hurt. It's like all of her investment in her*



*family was wasted...it's almost fallen flat before her. Physically she is just a mess, she now has Parkinson's disease and it is exacerbated by all the stress that her body has felt along the way. I think of all that she gave and it is just totally frustrating to me that her sons and daughter do not appreciate the years that she spent taking care of them to her own detriment. I see her and know that is not where I want to be in forty years.*

Moving on from this storyline, Grace moves onto how her past and/or present engagement in self nurturance has been affected secondary to motherhood and in relation to her religious values:

*Whenever the children were younger, I didn't find it very easy to nurture myself because of their immediate needs. As they are getting older, and needing me in different areas, I don't feel as guilty going to work three days a week. In relation to my religious beliefs and so on, I'm not really sure that I really ever thought about that per se. I guess in the Mennonite culture we believe that women should focus on taking care of our children and husband. As far as our own nurturing it's not really something that women talk about as being important. Selfnurturing isn't something that we've ever had a sermon on so I would have to say it's just not ever been brought up...I think that, in general, that perspective comes from the Biblical teaching that you to do for others rather than for yourself and I would have to say that's what I have always been encouraged to do within the church...I get the vibes that it's not something that you are suppose need or do.*

Grace sat quietly for a moment and then I had to ask if she felt guilty sometimes whenever she does take time for herself, because she had indicated to me when I ask her to participate in the study that within the last year that she had joined a gym and was going three times a week:

*Oh sure I feel guilty, especially...well, like yesterday I put the needs of Nate [oldest son] first because I needed to be prepared for his oral surgery. Now, yeah, I could have gone and worked out and still been home but in the back of my mind I was thinking well, the other kids are getting ready to, you know, to go do something and I need to be there for them. Molly [oldest daughter] was getting ready to go to camp for the day, you know, I wanted to be there for her too. There are lots of times when I feel I must put myself at the end of the line.*

*This second marriage is a bit different. I know sometimes, like with Vince [current husband], he thinks that I give too much of myself to everyone else and tells me that I have to stop so I have enough left over for myself and my needs. And yet, that's who I am. That's my identity and if I can't nurture other people, my life won't necessarily be valuable. If that makes any sense.*

When Grace was asked to identify facilitators or barriers to nurturing self within the environment she offered the following thoughts in relationship to her religious convictions and her role as a mother:

*I would definitely have to say that, when I began a women's Bible study, ten years ago... I remember thinking at that time that the Lord was leading me into a position that I really didn't feel capable of doing. Facilitating a Bible study is totally different from being part of a Bible study and that actually became self*

*nurturing in itself because it really made me accountable to the Word, because it made me accountable to the women I was serving. And I would have to say that that probably was, not just a self esteem issue because it was so much more than that, but a trust issue and I was given a job and that it was above what I felt was my comfort zone but He was going to give me the wisdom I needed to do that.*

*I would definitely say that the women in my life that have impacted me long range has been the women that, and in some ways this is going to sound kind of strange, but the women that I nurtured or mentored in their walk with the Lord and they have actually in turn mentored me. I know that sounds like of strange but what happens there is when you give of yourself you actually receive so much more back and then you see their strength becoming your strength. This may be totally off the subject, but I remember with each of children as I held them, even though I felt that I was their supplier of nurturing, as I was holding them, I felt strength being poured from them to me. I know that sounds totally ironic but it's much of who I am as a woman. And I would have to say that had I not had that mothering ability, I really don't know that I would be half the person that I am today.*

At this point the interview probes a bit more on the barriers that have hindered Grace's engagement in taking care of self and she goes into a rather lengthy commentary about her walk from being single, to being a wife, having four children and then being a wife again:

*I would have to say that probably that would stem more from who I was prior to motherhood and really stems back to that because I can remember wanting to reach out and wanting to feel needed and wanted. I always wanted to be a mom with lots of children to take care of – that is what I knew from being one of four siblings...I guess I would have to say that prior to my being a mother, it was really hard to identify who I really was because I stepped from being with my brothers to being Tim's [first husband] wife to being a mom...to being Vince's wife [current husband], so maybe I really didn't ... maybe I haven't focused on Grace.*

*But on the other hand, I think in all honesty, even now, I feel more like I know who I am because of many of my past experiences. So time has really helped me to focus on and maybe have more strength and more determination, and the fact that I went through my first husband's death helped me to become stronger. Not necessarily with the people around me, but in who I was. I'm no longer afraid of anything being taken from me because I know I'm a survivor. I know I can do this.*

Grace moves on to reflecting back on her childhood up to the present time and how and how relationships with men have negatively impacted her personal journal of health and well-being:

*I think, in honesty, as a child, I felt I needed to conform and be maybe the certain Grace that everybody expected me to be. I don't know why, but it still goes back to maybe where I didn't feel that I measured up to my dad. And I'm not sure why because it's not that he did .... Well, he didn't say anything. It wasn't*

*that there was anything negative that he said, it was that he didn't say anything. And really, I would have to say that until I worked for the doctors in Culberstown, that I really didn't feel that I was valued by men. I didn't really even realize that I wasn't valued by men. They helped me to identify my strengths and they appreciated me. They told me what I did well for them and I guess I wasn't used to hearing that from a man.*

*Men in general in my life were not encouragers. Now, they talked to me but it was not to me it was over me. You know, and I'm thinking, even the pastors that I was involved with, you know, they really never brought me into a relationship where I felt like I was valued. Also, right now I'm still somebody's wife. You know, and there are still certain criteria that maybe, I don't know if I want to say inhibit, but maybe kind of in some ways squelch who I may be if I was on my own if that makes any sense.*

*And yet I know this is where God wants me to be and not that I would even want to get out of that situation because this is exactly where God needs me to me. I just ... I would have to say that there are times there are people around me don't see.*

Again, the interview just paused for a while and then we moved back over why Grace finds it difficult to nurture self within her current environment. She offers the following thoughts:

*Probably for me, it would be the guilt thing because I want to make sure I take care of everybody else's needs before I take time for myself. And I know that's probably not the way that it should be because I know, deep in my heart,*

*that if I don't take care of me I can't take care of my family better. But for some reason, until my family is taken care of, I don't feel that I can allot my time especially for me. I'm not sure why...I guess it was just engrained in me from little up. You are the girl and you are to take care of the men [father and three brothers] in your life before you can take time to do something for yourself. I remember cleaning the house and cooking and wishing I could be at the farm with them having fun. If I did go up to the farm I had fun, but it was in the house with my grandmother baking pies or getting breakfast ready for all the men who would come in from milking. Wow, this is a lot of going back and thinking isn't it? I just never thought about how my life could have or could be different – I am on autopilot.*

Grace's first interview was longer than the other three, not because of things said, but because of the many long pauses and phone calls from her husband that took her attention away from the interview. Grace talked a great deal about the patriarchal control of her time and space; about her strong convictions to be a mother and wife first and foremost to the negligence of her own well-being; of having a role model [grandmother] who take care of everyone else's needs and who encouraged/taught Grace to do the same for a large farm family made up mostly of men; being told that being single in this environment was not purposeful – a woman should be with a man to take care of his needs; feeling that men in her life were negative and not at all encouraging her to do anything for herself; and finally coming to realize that being a mom in the extreme sense has taken its toll on her health and well-being.

The interview questions and answers did not come easy to Grace. Although she did indicate that she was exercising more in the past year and taking time to explore books on her days off, it appeared she was uneasy on this first structured exploration of self nurturance. Next, the reader will witness Grace open up a bit and begin to question herself about why she does not value her health and well-being more on a daily basis.

### Journaling: Women are Truly Amazing Creatures

Grace chose to complete her journal on her computer and indicated that she decided to this to ensure that none of her family members would accidentally pick up her journal and read it. She indicated she was unsure about how her children and husband would react to her journal entries. Over a one month period Grace entered twelve journal entries which totaled ten typed double-spaced pages. The following are samples of Grace's journal entries:

*My bedroom door must be closed and the children's/Vince's needs met before I sit down to write, although this has been easier in the past month. Why do you suppose I do not allow myself to experience quiet time until everyone's needs are met?*

*Remembering my early adulthood, before children, I have fond memories of my mom, grandmother, and myself spending Saturdays shopping. It was refueling for each of us to spend time together just laughter and having lunch.*

*Today, I called a friend and we had lunch her at the house...nothing was really pressing so I just called her to spend some one-to-one time with her. It was great to just listen and be heard without interruptions. It was good to sit and*

*munch on yummy amaretto cookies with fudge icing (a real splurge) and enjoy a specialty coffee. It was good to concentrate on being a woman with another woman. Today, I also enjoyed a drive in the car! I enjoyed turning the music up way loud and sang without hesitation! I also found today that I needed to remind my daughter that Mom needed a few quiet moments to sit and type, alone. I felt a twinge of guilt after she left the room, but then had to remind myself that it is really okay to nurture me.*

*I'm not sure exactly where to place my reflections of today, I suppose it would be under the religious teachings. My day did not turn out at all the way I anticipated it to be. I gave up doing something very important with Tim's [first husband] family to do something for Vince's friend. Believing that I had enough time to make the family picnic after I was finished helping Vince's friend I raced over to my parent-in-law's house, but they were done cutting off corn and with the picnic. I missed the laughter, possible tears of joy/sadness, memories of yet another "corn day" because I felt I needed to be available to a friend. I should have said no.*

*It's kind of neat when I think about the topic of nurturing one's self, because I am seeing it all around me now...I need to nurture my soul, mind, and body on a daily basis if I am to face life's storms.*

*I went shopping with my daughter today for the first time in a long time. It was so cool to enjoy time together. The very unexpected part of the day was when I splurged and actually purchased for myself. I most likely would never have made the purchases if I had been by myself, but the encouragement that I received*



*from my mom and Kate helped me realize I did need new “school” clothes too. I look forward to see how God will provide a nurturing experience for me tomorrow.*

*I find when it’s quiet; Vince is home and wants my attention, so “Grace-time” is nearly non-existent. I am going to talk with him about this sooner or later. I did go shopping alone today and I even had lunch and read in a fast food restaurant all by myself. And the fun will continue because I have scheduled myself to go out to dinner with friends tonight. I do understand the need to refuel and encourage nurturance of self. It can be the difference between “just making it” or being a better wife, mom and friend!*

*As I reflect over the past couple of months, I realize that during the summer I do have quiet time as often as I have them during the school year. I am so blessed to have amazing friends that do support my growth and participate in nurturing self. I don’t want to take these women or the time I spend with them for granted. I ended the summer by hosting a tea for a few close friends...I suppose not all women would enjoy such a time, but it was a true delight for me. It was good to hear how other women refuel themselves. Also it confirms that God doesn’t call the gifted, but He does gift the call. Women are truly amazing creatures!*

Grace’s journal was in a tone of action. She actively reflected on self nurturance within the constraints and facilitation of being a mother, wife, daughter, and friend. As Grace’s story continues it is apparent that she is giving a great deal of thought to her need

and right to care for self. Not that this active and engaged tone is carried over and quite evident in our second interview together.

### Second Interview: I do Deserve Time Alone

During the first interview Grace was a bit uncomfortable talking about her father from a respect standpoint and about the community. However, after reading her journal it became apparent that Grace was feeling more at ease with the inquiry process and that she was gleaned insight from her environment about nurturing self. This second interview naturally flowed by beginning with her sharing about journaling and what she gleaned from that process:

*I think part of the reason why I really liked journaling is it gave me a time to reflect on me and to reflect on what helped me to be me. What has helped me to be a better me and the journaling was really good in that area. I found it fairly easy to just close the door for 30 minutes and reflect on myself each day.*

Reflecting back on Grace's very conservative religious tradition, she talked a bit about what she would and would not engage in to self nurture because it feels out of norm with her church culture:

*Well, a lot of the new age things like tai chi, yoga, and belly dancing would be things I wouldn't try. Before I would begin anything outside of what the church may recommend, I would have to really investigate it. I think if you're honoring God in what you're doing it doesn't really matter how you begin it or what helps you to begin it. I guess I would have to say that I would do a yoga class if I knew that it was all within line of Scripture. I know though that in the*

*past few weeks I have sat down and thought about a few things and said,*

*“Well, wait a minute.” Are we doing things with the wrong thoughts in mind, maybe there is a place in the church for women to be talking about their own needs outside of spirituality?*

*I guess in the past maybe I haven’t concerned myself too much with this...just because I know the women that I’m closest to understand and support why I need my time. If I really talked women older than I am within the church, maybe they would have something to say against the fact that I need my quiet time, you know, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I just don’t even answer the phone on Tuesdays and Thursdays anymore – that is my time to rejuvenate!*

Grace had shared at the last interview that she is in a much different situation now in her second marriage. She was married for fourteen years to her first husband and they lived on the family farm. Although it was very difficult for her to share this next piece, she shared a bit more about how being off the farm has impacted her personal well.

*Being off of the farm has impacted me tremendously...just tremendously. When we were on the farm people coming in and out all the time and they not only took my husband’s time but they took my time – I was open to being at their beck and call 24/7. And that’s why I especially feel that women that are married to doctors or, let’s say, men that are married to doctors, I think or even ministers for that matter. Farmer’s, minister’s, doctor’s wives are on call just like they are 24/7...your time is not your own. It really isn’t. It’s not your own. And looking back over as I have, as a farm wife, I really can honestly say that I did not do nearly as many things just for me as I probably should have...I did not nurture*

*myself and part of that is because I felt that I wanted to be a really good wife to Tim. Not only did I want to be a devoted farm wife, but there really wasn't a whole lot of extra time...you are kind of consumed with your own little world.*

*It was very much a secure world. It was a world that you kind that you could almost predict what your future was going to be...but then again, my future has changed dramatically in the past few years. My world is not at all predictable now. And part of that may be is helping me because I am no longer insistent on allowing my husband to be the full leader. And I guess maybe that would be very disruptive to some of the church leaders because yes, Vince is the leader of my house, but because he is not the children's father, there are some areas that I take leadership in and I would not have done that, whenever Tim was here.*

Taking Grace from this thought into the present where life is very different, she notes the following:

*And to be very honest I like my Tuesdays and Thursdays now because it's just me and God. I don't have to take care of, you know, packing lunches or answering the telephone. That drives me crazy because, even though I feel very important, as being a mother and a wife, there are times that I feel I just need to be me and unless I have those times to refuel I am not a good mother or wife. I can say that honestly. Summertime is different too because the kids are out of school and I'm not canning or doing chickens like I used to...there is much more time to sit and enjoy the summer breezes. Plus, there is no homework. You want your kids to excel so therefore you become an integral part of their study habits*

*or, you know, their work habits or whatever and during the summer there are no spelling tests or science projects to complete!*

The conversation turns to women within Grace's environment that she feels do consistently find time to self nurture. She notes:

*I think they are happier women. They give themselves the authority and the time to refuel and they are not near as frazzled as I am on a regular basis! They don't appear to feel guilty about it either and probably are better moms and wives with more joy in their lives...the guilt can run you down! I guess they probably see the bigger picture and they know ... because even five years ago I would not have been able to do this study in the light that I'm doing it. I could have done the study but I would not have had the same view point. I can honestly say that they got to that part where they didn't feel guilty because they saw the bigger picture and they knew what was more important than taking care of all of the little things that wives and moms take care of. They realized that it's okay...*

*I do think that I've shown my kids that I can do things that maybe I didn't know I could do in my previous life just because I'm taking time and taking risks...having faith that nobody is going to get hurt/be hurt if I try something new. And probably, in honesty, if I look over my past and where I am now, there would probably have been times in my life that I felt somewhat envious that other women in my life have been able to get out and do their own thing. Now, I don't have that sense of, I guess you would say envy, because I now know why it's so important to do things for yourself. Why it's important to walk the path that I'm supposed to walk. Not because everybody thinks I should or shouldn't but because I need to do things for me...I decide what's best for me, along with God's hand I'm going to*

*do it and I'm sorry if it isn't something that somebody else feels is something I should or shouldn't be doing.*

*I have seen just by being part of this study that I need to build up my self confidence up so that I actually feel I am good enough to spend time on...that sounds odd at forty-one, but I need to know that I am special enough. You know, I guess that's where the religion piece comes in too. I've understood that God does think I'm a special person and He does think I'm special enough to take the time instead of reading in Scripture why you should submit, why you should ... you know, do this, you should do that and .... I'm kind of hearing Him talk directly to me instead of hearing negative stuff I'm finding in the world. I'm kinda listening to that and that's been kinda where I've landed at this point.*

*It's not a performance thing though. When it comes right down to it, it really doesn't matter if I clean my floors or if I, you know ... am good at jobs that I perform. It's more that my relationship is intact and I am free from condemnation. So, I guess I find that in Scripture that nobody else can give me, honestly, there are times that I really struggle with my environment. Not even just outside of my home, but inside of my home. I just can't always meet the needs of my family or my husband. It's not all about them all the time...I'm responsible for Grace and I can guide and direct my four children and I can direct my husband, but I have to stop feeling responsible beyond that direction.*

Grace had thought a bit beyond this point in relation to her two daughters who she feels very much feel more responsible than they need to for other's behavior. She noted that in this respect she feels guilty and somewhat responsible for their perspective of what a woman's role is and states:

*Now, it's taken me a long time to figure out that my girls and boys have really watched how I handle this area and I'm still learning that I may not have taught them, the girls in particular that is really important to take time for oneself...they have been witness to me rushing around trying to take care of church things, the farm, my pre-schoolers, their father, Vince, and the animals...they rarely, if ever see me reading for fun, getting my nails done, or just going out with a bunch of friends. This isn't a good thing and I'm determined to talk with them more about this since being in this study. I don't want them to be forty and just figure this out. If I could do things all doing over again there would be some changes – wow!*

Grace mentioned that as a reaction to this study she rented the movie *Mona Lisa Smile* and sat down with her girls and some of their friends to watch it. It was at the midpoint of her journaling. This is what she had to say about the portrayal of women's independence in the movie:

*This movie was just excellent. The movie was set in the 1950's at an all women's college. Julia Robert's character just really didn't care about and how she came across to men – she was driven to take care of herself within a very male-dominated environment. She was able to nurture herself in that era, in that*

*culture, in the 50s culture and it was so amazing how she helped others to make positive steps in their nurturing.*

*I've even watched another movie since then with Julia Stiles and that was The Prince and Me. Well, I'm telling you, it has been excellent because, as a mom, I look at how can I best influence my daughters. How can I help them figure this whole life journey thing out? And the one thing that I have seen in the midst of these movies that I could not have demonstrated because my walk was different as an early mom and I've changed a lot in my parenting and I've changed a lot in the way I look at myself and in the way I look at my kids and the really cool part of all of this is the fact that it showed that it is okay to be both a woman and a mother. And I should say all three, a woman, a mother and a wife and that you can do it all, however, it may not come specifically as fast as you want it to be but it's okay to have that education. It's okay to work and be a mom. And it's okay to be a wife and still need to have friends outside of your husband/wife relationship. I didn't always know that. It took me a long time to get to where I am. Not that I've arrived, I feel healthier and I didn't realize that I was caught in my own little world, you know and yet, at the same time, I was so happy in that world. It is kind of bittersweet looking back, but things can only get better from this point.*

*I mean, it's not all about what you can do although that's a part of who I am but you have to be self nurtured if you're going to take care of somebody else. That's all there is to it. You cannot give and give and give and not get something,*



*not necessarily from that person that you're giving to but to be self nurtured in a way that picks you up.*

As closure came upon the second interview, I asked Grace if she had any final thoughts. Grace paused and then reflected a bit more on her early motherhood role:

*I'll be honest with you, because my children are older, I found this whole concept easier to grasp, if I had a baby in my home, I don't think I could have even participated in the study and I know my perspectives would be different. Young children are just so all encompassing ... you have no life. It's a whole different ball game.*

*Which we all have been there and I don't know, you just have to come to the point where you realize that you are better when you are taken care of in whatever area of your life, I don't care whether it's mothering or your wife responsibility or in your career, you can't be your best you if you can't take care of yourself and self nurturance is the only way to do that.*

The tone of this second interview was much more relaxed than the first and Grace noted that herself by saying, "I have learned so much about myself in these past few months...if you would have asked me to read this in a book it would not have had such an impact...I now realize and it sounds cliché, but if you don't care of yourself first you aren't going to have enough energy to take care of those around you – I've had this backwards and I'm exhausted!" During the second interview, Grace touched on the following notions in relation to taking care of self: needing more of an allowance of time to focus on self; understanding and talking more to women in her church about their religious beliefs of caring for self; reflecting back on the constraints that being a farm

wife had on her well-being; remembering and cherishing the good times of being on the farm, but letting go of the unhealthy pieces; gleaned insight from positive role models that she has found since the beginning of the study; recognizing her boundaries as a mother; and acknowledging that she wants/needs to be a positive role model to her daughters in relation to facilitate their personal health and well-being.

#### Creative Synthesis Project: Grace among the Boxes

Grace indicated that she struggled with the creative synthesis project because she wanted to find something that visually portrayed her various thoughts about nurturing self. She did get her daughters involved in the activity and together they came up with what Grace felt is a perfect visual representation of how she now currently views her self-nurturing behaviors in the past, present, and future. Her first picture is entitled, “A Grace Without Self-Nurturance”. It is a pile of boxes, she is the smallest box in the middle of six larger boxes in a pile. She writes the following:



*Figure 12.* Grace's creative synthesis presentation of not being self nurtured.

*I am like the smallest cube, representing myself, surrounded by the larger problems too big for me to manage. I feel overwhelmed with the expectations of myself and others, and often feel guilt because of my less-than-expected performance. I am not clear-minded, concise or decisive and question my ability to perform successfully. Because I have not been fueled by nurturance, I am not able to meet other's needs, since my own needs have gone unmet.*

In the second picture entitled, "Obstacles that I have Overcome in order to become a Healthy, Self-Nurtured Grace" the seven boxes are now stacked neatly from largest to smallest. Grace writes the following:



OBSTACLES THAT I HAVE OVERCOME IN ORDER TO BECOME A HEALTHY, SELF-NURTURED *Grace*

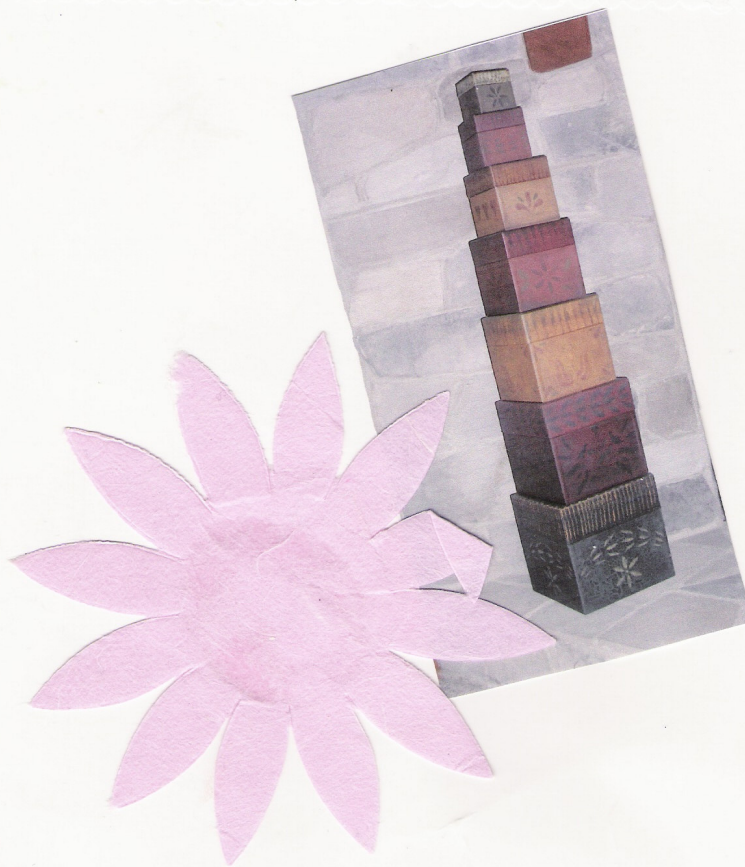
Because I have overcome the following obstacles, I am a stronger, healthier, more confident woman. I am becoming the woman that God is designing.

Marital Status: Today, I share more openly my need to nurture me, without regret. Previously, in my early 20's, I was not aware that I had nurturing needs.

Motherhood: Today, I am more confident as a parent when my needs are met. I can focus more on the enjoyment of watching my children grow, without fear of failure.

Rural Living: Today I live in an environment that is not as physically demanding on a daily basis. In my previous life-style, our family-time was often interrupted by the business needs. Because I didn't know another life-style, I assumed that all good farm wives must be willing to sacrifice family-time for the sake of the business.

Conservative Religion: Today, I understand that who I am in Christ, not my performance is of utmost importance. I am His child that He loves to lavish creative ways to nurture me!



*Figure 13.* Grace's creative synthesis presentation of obstacles to overcome in order to facilitate nurturance of self.

*Because I have overcome the following obstacles, I am stronger, healthier, more confident woman. I am becoming the woman that God is designing.*

*Maternal Status: Today, I share more openly my need to nurture me, without regret. Previously, in my early 20's, I was not aware that I had nurturing needs.*

*Motherhood: Today, I am more confident as a parent when my needs are met. I can focus more on the enjoyment of watching my children grow, without fear of failure.*

*Rural Living: Today I live in an environment that is not as physically demanding on a daily basis. In my previous life-style, our family-time was often interrupted by the business needs. Because I didn't know another life-style, I assumed that all good farm wives must be willing to sacrifice family-time for the sake of the business.*

*Conservative Religion: Today, I understand that who I am in Christ, not my performance is of utmost importance. I am His child that He loves to lavish creative ways to nurture me!*

The final picture is entitled, “A Self-Nurtured Grace” and it is a close up of the smallest cube securely resting at the top of all of the other blocks. Grace writes:



Figure 14. Grace's creative synthesis presentation of being engaged in self nurturance.

*I am like the top cube on the block tower. I feel on top of my world,  
 blessed by all the supportive people that encourage me. I can calmly handle the  
 expectations of myself and others, and perform to my potential, without guilt. I*

*am clear-minded, concise, and decisive. I am a better friend, wife, and mother because I have chose to fuel me, before attempting to meet others' needs.*

At the end of the interview, I thanked Grace for sharing so many intimate details with me. Her reflections, compassion for living, and insight to being a mother and woman are priceless. I will be forever grateful for the time and passion she put into being part of this inquiry. She is truly an amazing woman.



## CHAPTER 8

### INTERSECTING NARRATIVES IN MOTION

*Women, even more than things, have to be restored, revived, reclaimed and redeemed;  
never throw out anyone. Audrey Hepburn*

This chapter is a collective interpretation of the women's stories which will be termed, *intersecting narratives in motion*, that were revealed by exploring each mothers' *narrative in motion* which includes the first interview, journaling, second interview, and creative synthesis project. The analysis also includes data gleaned from discourse during a dinner with Laci, Roxy, and Victoria post all other data collection, in which they shared insights into their interactions with other women in the community, as well as me, in relation to the study. Additionally, they discussed their intertwining stories of nurturing self while reflecting back on the interviews and journals. Furthermore the mothers unveiled and shared their creative synthesis projects with one another at dinner. Throughout the evening each woman shared how participating in this inquiry amplified her understanding of and active learning related to self nurturance during this five month period. Finally, this chapter reveals reflections from each woman during a brief follow up via phone three months post our dinner together.

This chapter attempts to display the movement of the mothers' intersecting and overlapping stories of shifting identity in relation to the gendered and cultural realities of self nurturance within the environment. Their stories not only intersected, but their stories also revealed a strong intersection with other individuals within their lives in relation to identity and nurturing self over a five month period. This multi-layered

intersection of the mothers' stories amplifies the breadth and depth of their engagement in nurturing self within this cultural context.

The *narratives in motion* in the previous chapters are a defined reflection of each mothers' lived experience. Mothers' nurturance of self complicated by the societal and cultural conflicts was presumed at the starting point of this study. The study was initially conceived as being composed of an initial interview, journaling, second interview, creative synthesis project, and finally a collective gathering of the women. The women's narratives of constantly shifting identity unfolded over the five-month period partly as a result of their participation in the study, given that they were consciously thinking about self nurturance and related issues in their lives as part of the study itself. Thus, the study in part focuses on *the process* of the unfolding of their identity. These women's narratives of engagement in self-nurturance came to life as they constructed stories through initial questions, journaling dialogue with self, reading of transcript one, which provided the construction and natural movement to the second interview, creative synthesis project, and collective process dinner. As each phase of the study moved forward another layer of knowledge, learning, and questioning about their shifting identity, alongside of self-nurturance and their continuing interaction with family and others was thought about, processed, and utilized for the mothers' continued story-line. As the story-line moved forward it was apparent that the women were critiquing and questioning the inherent social, historical, cultural biases, and rules related to mothers and self-nurturance within this environment. In essence their own consciousness was raised as a result of the process of the inquiry.

It is typical of most phenomenological qualitative studies to leave the discussion of findings in light of the literature to the final chapter. However, this is a feminist poststructuralist narrative study and as such, it focuses partly on *the process* of the constantly shifting identity of participants in light of their interactions with others and themselves throughout the study. Thus, it makes sense to devote this chapter to the interpretation of the women's *intersecting narratives in motion* while simultaneously relating back to the literature in a few places. However, the overall findings of the study as a whole will be discussed as it specifically relates to mothers' self nurturance and the literature in the final chapter.

Though it wasn't directly intentional, the process of ongoing and shifting identity was apparent both in my own process of data collection and interpretation, and in viewing how the process facilitated the participants' thinking about self nurturance and related issues. Furthermore, once all of the stories had been heard, transcribed and read a few times, it was apparent that the holistic content perspective that captures the motion and process was most appropriate for analyzing the narratives. As Batson (2000) notes, "Wherever lives overlap and flow together, there are depths of unknowing...We even surprise ourselves in our own becoming, moving through the cycles of our lives" (p. 3). The mothers' narratives demonstrated pivotal themes individual and collectively by considering experiences in relation to previous experiences (Bloom, 2002). Via these *narratives in motion*, the storylines revealed a journey of knowing more about their constantly shifting identity throughout the research process itself in analyzing history, in understanding the influence of patriarchy, and in relation to their attempts at nurturing self.

As Bloom (2002) noted in her study related to non-unitary self the second narrative response from women in her study revealed a “strikingly different self-representation” (p. 300). As with this study, the mothers’ representation and sharing of self revealed a clearer picture of oppression by the culture, history, and patriarchy as the *narratives in motion* unfolded. It was during the second interview that these women were seeing themselves as multi-faceted change agents of the environment. They voiced not only a need to find out more about self nurturance in their own lives, but also in the lives of other women within their community. This expression of wanting to assist others with personal health and well-being, not only extended to mothers, but to grandmothers, young women, and single women within the community.

Heilbrum (1988) argues, “For women’s subjectivities to be fully narrativized, they must speak of the vast range of experiences and emotions they have and reject regulating patriarchal definitions of being female” (p. 50). As a responsible researcher, writing in the midst of a multi-dimensional inquiry – time, place, the personal and the social, I simultaneously observed and interacted with all of the women within their social context at different times during a five month period. It was by this engagement that I gleaned these women’s collective story of self nurturance unfold as them *becoming* rather than *being*. This approach has allowed the flow of these women’s multifaceted and complex lives moving forward to be captured as *intersecting narratives in motion* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

To accomplish the objective of this chapter there will first be a discussion of the women’s shifting identities around revisiting their history and uncovering of patriarchy; next the discussion will speak to how acknowledgment of their shifting identities

facilitated a more constructive self concept; and the thirdly a discussion around the unfolding importance of self nurturance within these women's lives will be offered. Lastly, a summarization of the *intersecting narratives in motion* will be offered as a conclusion to the chapter.

### Shifting Identity: Revisiting History and Unmasking Patriarchy

This section describes the shifting identity the women acknowledged through revisiting of their history and the unmasking of patriarchy in their daily lives. It will demonstrate how these women challenged their memories and lived experiences of dominant male ideologies and power struggles in relation to self nurturance. These mothers found themselves spiraling back in time to reclaim pieces of their identity that they had left behind in the midst of being a mother, wife, and community member.

As noted in chapter 2 it was essential to find a framework that would encompass the nature of mothers nurturing self within a historically patriarchal driven context. The feminist poststructuralist perspective was chosen to drive the study secondary to its support of deconstructing dominant notions (Alcoff, 2000). It is this characteristic that allowed the women in this study to spiral back and revisit the challenges of being embedded in a strongly overt patriarchal community. This notion supported the women's active movement of deconstructing and acknowledging their shifting identity while participating in the study (Tisdell, 2001). Again, the feminist poststructuralist perspective offered these mothers a constructive means to revisit their history and form stories of their changing subjectivity.

The objective of this section is to illuminate the lived experiences that have made self nurturance difficult for these women throughout their lives. It will emphasize the impact of implicit and explicit patriarchal control, religious conservatism, and childhood beliefs/values that negated the women's full engagement in nurturing self as a means towards personal health and well-being through the aforementioned themes.

### *Ongoing Recognition of Mothers' Buy-In to Patriarchy*

Three of the women were married before and two of them (e.g. Roxy and Victoria) talked about their first husband being much more controlling and domineering than their current husband. Laci was the only one who was not in a second significant relationship, however she noted to the other women:

*Dave [husband] does control a lot of my time. I need to re-evaluate that and learn from you - this may not be the way it should be. I have a difficult time telling/explaining to Dave that I need time for myself. He views the time I have on my days off or the few hours he takes the kids one time a month as all the time I need for myself. I find myself asking him if I can do things all time, instead of telling him I need to get out.*

As a result of Laci's point, she and the other women recognized how they have bought into the social norm of patriarchy controlling the environment both implicitly and explicitly. As the women talk more about this they each talk about instances in their past and present where they have sacrificed their own needs consistently to take care of their husbands, significant others, and/or children.

The women noted that Grace was not at the dinner specifically because she was attending to the needs of her children. Grace did give me permission to share her journal and creative synthesis project with the other women and I read this passage to them out of her journal that demonstrated that she too has had a conscious raising experience and does feel that she has more insight into the social norm of women being everything to everyone as a consequence of participating in the study. Grace wrote:

*Quiet time by reading God's word or prayer is important for me, but I only get to do this after the children's and Vince's needs are met. I guess I'm not exactly sure what began that, and yet at the same time I would have to it does reflect how I feel some days. It stems from the fact that I have a real tough time doing something for me unless everything is taken care of and what I mean by that is I have to do it in my quiet time that may or may not come to me. With a house full of kids and a husband that does seem to need me a lot – it is very difficult to put their needs on hold so I can take time for myself. I see that is going to need to change in the future.*

In response to my reading and sharing of Grace's journal entry, Roxy voiced:

*I know - I am constantly writing myself notes to remember to do this for the kids or Rod...do you [other women at dinner] think our husbands are writing notes to themselves to remember to do something for us – I don't think so! I am always trying to remember four people's schedules (mine, Rod's, and the boys)...it gets really difficult and I know that Rod, nor many other men are even attempting to keep a mental schedule of what needs to be done. Why do we do this for men? Is it automatic, born in us, or are all of us taught this as young*

*girls? We need to challenge the idea that it is the woman's responsibility to be organized and taking care of everyone else's needs in the house – it just isn't fair or healthy for us!*

Laci, Victoria, and myself shook our heads in acknowledgment that we knew exactly what Roxy had voiced. Stories surrounding the implicit and explicit ways we have bought into the dictates of patriarchy to take care of children and to take care of men throughout our lives in this community were shared for a while and it was evident that we realized and/or had gleaned insight that this fact of life needed to change immediately to ensure a healthier outlook and identity shift. Although these women voiced a significant change in their identity perspective as being part of this study, they all agreed that more work was needed in their individual homes. At this point, they brainstormed how they could enlighten their husbands, significant others, children, and others about the overwhelming reality of patriarchal influence over women [and men] within this community. They collectively agreed that they did not feel other women would even understand and/or comprehend the totality of male influence unless they were engaged in a similar study such as this one. At this point the discussion rested on this point and we had to move on to other areas of the inquiry.

#### *Influence of Religious Belief and/or Value Systems*

All of the women acknowledged the conservative religious tone of the community and felt that the community, as a whole, did support the notion that a woman's place is in the home. They felt the fact that sixty-seven percent of the women in the community worked outside of the home did not negate the fact that these mothers were expected to



simultaneously work and take care of the majority of the housework and child care. The women agreed that during the course of the study they had the community under a bit of a microscope and were surprised, alienated, disappointed, and frustrated by how many times they observed women being expected to do more than a fair share within the household. They all concurred that this reality was very much supported by the Christian teachings and values of the community. Laci added:

*Most of the women I know are hanging on by a thread as it is and then they start to talk about everything they are doing for the church...bake sales, vacation bible school, youth retreats, and taking a hot/cold dish in on Sunday mornings for lunch after church with the congregation. It amazes that the major of the planning in the churches is done by men, but the women are expected to carry it out. How many men want to get up at 6 o'clock on a Sunday morning to bake a cake and macaroni and cheese, then wrap it in 8 layers of tin foil so it is hot for lunch after preaching is done...it just blows my mind. And how many men do you see in the church doing crafts and putting out snacks for 100 kids during vacation bible school – not too darn many!*

In response to Laci's story Victoria noted from her conservative religious experience:

*When I had small children the women within the German Baptist community were expected to do all of the gardening and I'm not talking small gardens, we had huge gardens. We were to plant it, weed it, and harvest whatever was in season, bring it into the house, clean it and then can or freeze it. One year I remember canning over 300 jars of fruits and vegetables. By the end*

*of each day, I was exhausted and then I was expected, as a woman within the German Baptist community to have the house cleaned and a meal on the table for my husband as soon as he walked in the door. The children were expected too at a very early age to help the moms with everything, especially the girls. As I look back, I wouldn't give up the time I had with my children, but the expectations of the woman doing everything related to the housework and child rearing was just too much...the fathers were not involved in the child's life at all – the only time the children were with the men is when they were old enough to be working – carrying or holding something while the dad worked. (Victoria noted this was not part of the dad's caretaking role, but that is was expected for small children to work alongside of their parents by age 4 or 5).*

The women told many stories of other women being ordered or coerced into doing “God’s work” within and outside of the church to the detriment of their own needs. All noted times when other female family members or friends neglected their health to bake a cake or make a flower arrangement for one more gathering at the church. All felt the amount of work expected by women in local churches did not match and/or consider the roles and responsibilities of the working mother in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All three of these women had left their childhood churches and were not attending church regularly simply because they felt the churches required too much of women through “works” (i.e. baking, dinners, visiting people who are ill in the church, organizing vacation bible school).

Throughout their talking it became evident that they were comfortable talking within this small group about their experiences of oppression within the church, but may not be as comfortable outside of this trusting situation. Laci noted:

*I don't talk to anyone who goes to church about this, there are only a few women that understand where I am coming from or they understand, but because of their loyalty to the church they will not say they feel used by the church. I came to a point where I just knew I couldn't go to a conservative church anymore – I felt worse when I left than when I went in. I would stand and watch these women bow to the pastor saying, "Submit unto your husbands" and I would think am I the only one who thinks there is something wrong with this picture. I would love to go to a church that had a woman pastor, but there is just none around here...I would even love to talk to spiritual leader who was a woman that would not approve of the whole "The man is the leader of the household". I love Joyce Meyer [a national feminist Christian speaker] and feel she would understand where I am coming from. I am not under my husband – I am equal to him and men need to understand that whether a woman works outside of the home or not – she is a person with a mind and heart of her own!*

All of the women agreed that there needs to be a greater recognition of women within this community as human beings and not as help-mates to their husbands, mothers to their children, and/or doers for the church. The women agreed that there is a specific "perfect mother model" that the community accepts and any woman appearing different than that is looked upon in a different light. The women talked about how they feel they are just as capable, smart, and functional as mothers, friends, and wives as this "perfect mother model", but admitted that they all had come to a point where they were no longer willing to remotely fit into that mold, but break out and be just who they are – if other people in the community weren't accepting, that was going to be their problem. This

conversation highlighted the fact that they three women had made dramatic gains in accepting their multi-faceted identities in a social climate that was looking for sameness.

*Reflections: Past to Present*

The women concurred that a woman's responsibilities as a contributor/doer within the community has dramatically increased in the last thirty years, but that the view of the responsibilities of mothers has not kept up with the other demands in their life. This conversation was as if it had been taken directly from the *The Second Shift* by Hochschild and Machung (2003). In the introduction of the re-released version of this book, Hochschild (2003) notes, "Researchers discovered that, starting in 1994, men started to do less housework again...is the pendulum swinging back?" (p. 3). Between the four of them, none of their mothers worked outside of the home when they were young. As they talked they realized that now they only know a handful of women in the community that do not work outside of the home. However, they feel that the community still wants the ideal house wife of the 1960's. Through their conversation, the women had realized that their identities were much more multifaceted and complex than what is acknowledged within their immediate and larger environments. As the feminist poststructuralist literature emphasizes, non-unitary self is actualized when women realize that they have a constantly shifting identity and that identity is shaped and a product of their sense of self and identity within this power relationship (Clark, 1999).

The community belief is that women should do just as much in the home as they did thirty years ago while holding down a part/full time job. All four women agreed that even within their own families they get the feeling from their parent(s) that they should

be able to handle anything that comes their way because they are the mother of the household. All noted that their mothers seemed to not understand how much more they were actually doing on a daily basis. The women realized this was probably due to the fact that daily living has just changed so much and that the expectations for individuals as a general rule have increased so much in the past thirty years. Laci brought up a very important point – in that thirty years ago four year olds were not expected to be in sports year round or expected to write their first short story in first grade. Laci also pointed out the following:

*Mothers today are trying to do it all with a smile and what is being sacrificed behind that smile is our personal health and well-being. Our mothers had more time to themselves when they were home all day...I'm not saying they took more time for themselves, but at least they had many more opportunities for quiet cups of coffee than we do now. It seems like the role of motherhood has changed, but the community still wants the Clever Family Story – it just isn't that way anymore. The community just needs to wake up and smell the roses.*

The women again, felt that a massive surge of preventative women's health and well-being education needed to be disseminated into the community. They talked about the positive affects that the *Women's Healthcare Center* had on the medical needs of women in the community, but that this is a different topic. They felt that current perspectives on womanhood and motherhood within the community need to be challenged from a grass roots level. Oddly enough, they felt the place to start may be women's bible studies. Another option noted would be for a large university in the area to gain a grant for women's health and well-being education; however this information

would need to be delivered within the community and not at the university level (i.e. community centers, farm women's groups, reading groups).

Next, the women engaged in a healthy discussion about new television shows that are in some strange way uplifting and putting a twist of reality on motherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Roxy commented:

*Look at the new shows, Desperate Housewives and Wife Swap...they are not sugar coating the reality of being a mom and trying to do it all. Oprah even had women on her show the other day that were real life images of the women on Desperate Housewives. The women were saying that they just can't do it anymore – it is just too hard to be a the perfect mom – who has time to get your nails done when you are baking 10 dozen cookies for your kid's bake sale! Maybe these shows will change the image of American mothers within the next year – maybe we will finally get some credit!*

Again, I shared this piece from Grace's journal that seemed to fit into the conversation:

*I know that my grandmother had six children and was responsible for all of the housework, baking, cooking, and even a good majority of the farm work, but that was the "way of life" in the 1950's and 1960's around here. I only have four children and some days all I get done is taking one child one place, picking up the next, dropping off and picking up another. The amount of things the children are expected to be involved in these days has dramatically shifted the role of the mother. Even with my oldest being 17 and driving I am still finding it difficult to get everyone where they need to be and I feel so guilty when I swing*

*in/out of the drive through at McDonald's to get them dinner, but where is the time to cook a meal...we are lucky if all of us are at the dinner table at the same time one time a week.*

These reflections of the dramatic change in responsibilities, but the lack of change in this culture's belief system was an enlightening story-line for the women to create and bring to the surface. They were excited, however cautious about the recent media interest in women's, more notably mothers' daily lives. They felt that a wide range of reality and quasi-reality based media were assisting with sharing what a mother's typical day looks like. They felt that if you really looked at the motherhood part of the shows the key message was that being a "perfect mom" is not a common and that moms very much struggle to balance home, work, children, and all other responsibilities. This was another example of how the interaction of self and others was assisting in the shifting of their identity. This story-line acknowledged and validated that all of these women were being challenged by the same oppressive forces within the environment, however in light of these challenges they were coming to know a means of shifting their identity to allow for a healthier reality of self. All indicated at the closure of the study that they had definitely gleaned and were actively working on a balance of personal health and well-being.

Consequently, it is by the sharing among mothers of their social history within this community, that each woman will be closer to being able to make the decision to reclaim and remake history for her daughter, friend and/or niece. By revisiting their past assumptions and lived experiences as mothers within this environment a positive step has been made to affect other women in the community. As will be highlighted later in this chapter, each woman who participated in this study felt compelled to share their

experience about engaging in this inquiry. By simply planting the seed for other women to think about their identity within the community as it relates to their personal health and well-being was the first step in the environment's education about the magnitude of women caring for self. As Meyer (2000) notes, "Women need a conception of self that renders emancipatory transformation of one's values and [care for self]" (p. 2).

### Shifting Identity: Toward a More Constructive Self Concept

This section describes the unfolding of the mothers' realization of the importance of self nurturance within their daily living and developing a more constructive self concept. Barkty (1990) and Babbitt (1993) concur that it is only by overcoming the internalization of patriarchal norms and preconceived perspectives of self that women will be able to glean the full capacity of their cognitive, emotional, and affective realities of identity. As noted by Bloom (2002) the utilization of the notion of nonunitary self as a driving force of an inquiry allows the participants to generate alternative interpretation of their lives in more "forgiving and thoughtful ways" (p. 312). As noted in chapter 2 this inquiry challenged women's memories and lived experiences of self as related to dominant social norms and discourse. This challenge brought forth questions and set the women on a path of realizing different stories about their identity. Additionally, it brought forth new ideas and thoughts related to their role and responsibilities to self and others within their cultural context in relation to women's personal health and well-being.

The intent of this section is to shed light on the intricacy and depth of these women's insights about nurturing self during the course and process of this inquiry and the importance of developing a more constructive self concept through the following



themes: increasing self-confidence and self-esteem and trying to move beyond what I have come to call “the guilty mother syndrome”.

*Increasing Self-confidence and Self-esteem*

At the beginning of the dinner the women shared that they were not quite sure what to think when I contacted them to be a part of this study. All indicated that they didn't feel “worthy” enough to be part of a study and were worried in the beginning about the prospect of talking about self. However, each woman indicated that shortly after the first interview started they found a comfort in telling their stories. They noted that at first they felt guilty about taking time to think about self, but as the study progressed it became a welcomed daily routine.

The following story-line is offered to emphasize the impact of the women's individual and shared investigation of why they were not taking care of themselves. It is presented to highlight the movement in frame of reference from not thinking about their health and well-being to focusing on a holistic perspective of nurturing self. Laci noted:

*I wasn't sure what I had to offer you by being part of this study – I thought, why is Angie asking me to be part of this study, but now that we are at the end of the study I feel so fortunate to have been part of it. It forced me to see that I am worth taking time for and meeting all of you and knowing that I am not the only one that struggles with feeling good enough to take time for myself is such a relief, such an eye opener.*

Roxy took a moment to collect her thoughts and with her arm outstretched on the table and with her hand placed on Laci's she noted:

*Why do women feel they are not good enough and take themselves for granted so much? There are so many women where I work and in my community that sell themselves short and are not healthy because they give and give without taking a moment for themselves. If there is one thing that I learned from this study it is to carve out time for myself and I am telling all the women I know to do the same – we are worth it.*

Similarly, Grace and Victoria indicated that they were not sure that their stories would be worthwhile, however both indicated that by the end of the first interview they felt comforted in having told their stories of misunderstanding and not knowing how to resolve the conflict of self nurturance as mothers. The positive shifting self confidence and self esteem in the mothers was exciting to witness. Gathering around the table these women were understanding, maybe not for the first time, but in a new light that there were other mothers in the community struggling to feel good about themselves. This fact opened up the door for these mothers to talk about the issues and in fact, enhance their confidence and esteem in knowing that others would be forever connected to them in mind, body, and spirit in sorting out this personal challenge that had become a public challenge. Victoria noted:

*Within this community there are not any really good role models that tell women to feel good about themselves...our high school has one of the highest pregnancy rates in PA and yet a lot of conservative parents don't want to talk about the reasons girls may be getting pregnant – low self-esteem and looking for love in all the wrong places. Girls in this community, including myself growing up were very much encouraged to get married and have babies. I was*

*not encouraged to go to college or wait to get married later in life. It was kind of unspoken that you were not a complete woman until you were married [to a man].*

*I have encouraged Julie [daughter] to go to college and stand up for herself.*

*Knowing this earlier would have made my life much easier. I struggled just to own my thoughts and opinions at one point – this has very much changed in the few years.*

Dovetailing into the notions of personal self esteem and that an awareness and understanding of wanting to have a secure and trusted feeling that you are worth your own efforts Grace noted in her journal:

*I love being a woman and yesterday confirmed it. I enjoyed a relaxed breakfast with my sister-in-laws and mother-in-law. We enjoyed one another so much and it was if we needed to recapture some of the laughter and tears that helps maintain our individual sanity. In the afternoon I enjoyed going to a woman's tea with another sister-in-law and friend. It was good to hear how other women nurture self. The speaker/musician was a talented, down to earth, mom and wife who shared her experiences of how God has led her on a path outside of her own comfort zone. I connected with this concept and know that I owe it to myself to go outside of my comfort zone to get the nurturing I need!*

All of the women noted that they had a much clearer concept of the importance of putting health and well-being at the forefront of their lives. By being part of this study and talking with other women in the community about the study their outlook about their identity as a mother, wife, friend, and self had been significantly enhanced.

*Attempting to Move Beyond the “Guilty Mother Syndrome”*

Throughout the women’s individual narratives they talk a great deal about feeling guilty about taking time away from their families to take care of their needs. I’ve come to call this “Guilty Mother Syndrome” and each of them discussed trying to move beyond guilt at the same time that they accept the lived realities of motherhood. This is key to their ongoing development of a constructive self concept and to the unfolding of their sense of why self nurturance is important. They talked about this guilt phenomenon at great length at dinner and Roxy summarized the conversation with the following example:

*Of course it always seems like we’re always rushed at the end of something because something’s pushed back or something happens. But we need to learn to not let it side track us. It’s just ... anytime I go do something out of the norm, other than coming home, getting supper, getting the kids baths, getting homework done, I feel like I’m off schedule and then the guilt starts to creep in that I should have made a different decision and I wouldn’t be behind. You know, the other day my friend asked me to go to aerobics on Tuesday and Thursday. Well, the boys have karate and Lord knows I feel guilty asking Rick to make sure he took them on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Why would I or should I feel guilty about taking time to be healthier? I feel like it’s my job above and beyond anything else to make everyone else’s life comfortable - Why do we feel like it is our job to organize everyone else above/before ourselves? We need to talk about this whole guilt thing and make a promise to make it disappear from our lives – we are good – damn good mothers!*

All of the women agreed that their guilt of caring for self had to cease and that the addition of self nurturance need to be included in their daily routine. They talked a bit about how small changes in their daily routines. Additionally, they talked about it making sense to ask husbands and children to take on a bit more responsibility for the household chores...each noted they were taking steps to incorporate this into their home environment. Laci noted:

*I have just come to the conclusion that I am going to have to keep reminding Dave and the kids that I need time for myself and help around the house. I looked over what I have written in my journal so far and I noted when I exercise I feel so good. I haven't been able to exercise since the boys' baseball started in April [now September] and I have just neglected that time for myself since I felt guilty if I wasn't at the baseball games or if I wasn't at the baseball games I felt I needed to spend time if Katelyn...that old saying, a mother's work is never done...got that right! I know the guilt comes from Dave and my parents often make me feel guilty if I say I am going to do something just for me. The lies I have to tell my mom if I am going to get a massage! I'm definitely on overload and I need to stop feeling guilty for not doing enough, because I am doing enough, actually more than enough.*

The following story of Grace's intersects with the above notions and sums up the attempt by these women to overcome "guilty mother syndrome" and move forward to nurturing self in union with caring for others (the neighbor's cat included):

*I have found it nearly impossible to take a few quiet moments to journal...between Morgan's dental surgery, the other three returning from camps,*

*house guests and Vince seemingly needing my undivided attention, “Grace-time” has been nearly non-existent. I sat quietly today and wondered why everyone is so needy and why I feel obligated [guilty] to take care of their needs immediately...just yesterday I had three friends over and we were sharing our needs to nurture selves, as we enjoyed time a time of women gathering poolside. Each mother has small children that require much attention and husbands that work away from home. Each woman needs to refuel and sometimes feels as if they are about to “lose it” if they don’t get out of the house and away from their children and husband, but yet we were talking about how we are programmed to find five or ten minutes at eleven o’clock at night to reorganize our thoughts for another day. I could see myself in each one of these women – I do understand the need to refuel and I must encourage myself to self nurture more than just ten minutes a day when I am already exhausted and tired. It can be the difference between just making it or being a better woman...*

In the process of trying to move beyond guilt they also discussed the importance of acknowledging the lived realities of motherhood in the moving beyond guilt process. All the women are very active in their children’s lives and agreed that they have attended almost every baseball game, band concert, and PTO meeting in the course of their children’s lives. Incidentally, all noted that they attended the majority of the children’s activities alone because their husbands were busy with work and/or some task at home. This point was discussed a bit, but the same comments were made to the effect that they understood their husband’s didn’t like PTO meetings or that they didn’t have time to take away from their business for every game on the calendar. The discussion about the

husbands was acknowledged as something that needed major adjustment, but right now the women didn't focus on the men too long before Laci transitioned the conversation and noted:

*It [motherhood] is getting a lot harder...it is getting so much more difficult. In my mind as the kids got older it was suppose to be easier – this is what I had in my mind, but it is harder. I remember one girl at one of the places I worked when I first had Katelyn say to me why are you worrying about working part-time now when you have babies – you are going to want to work part-time when they are older and in all of the activities – now is the time to work – I thought – she doesn't know what she is talking about. She knew what she was talking about! It is really difficult taking care of three kids' schedules – I hate to say it, but there just isn't time for me anywhere in the day!!! I thought/assumed things were going to get easier and after the second kid it did for a little while, but with the third one things just went out of control – maybe because the third pregnancy wasn't planned and we didn't know what we were up against. Just getting groceries and food on the table is a major accomplishment anymore.*

Victoria and Roxy agreed that with each birth time for self just seemed to evaporate into thin air. Additionally, all noted that as the children were getting older the roles and responsibilities of being a mother have dramatically increased. They laughed as they talked about no longer days having days of changing diapers, dropping their child off at preschool, but now it was days of driving each child to a different location, looking over and reviewing homework, calling other moms for dates/times of birthday parties, and all but giving up weekends for their children's social calendars. The realities of

motherhood were noted to be intense, all encompassing, however rewarding with the twist that no time will be set aside for mom unless mom sets aside that time – every hour, every day, and every month!

We all agreed to one another to give nurturing self a good faith effort in our daily living from this point forth. Again, the realities of motherhood will be forever upon us, because we are mothers, but we all realized during this conversation that we can have an impact on how the reality plays out. As we made our way to our separate cars in the pouring rain Roxy yells out, “Remember - keep the faith – stay healthy ladies – until we meet again!”

#### Shifting Identity: The Revealing Importance of Self Nurturance

This section describes the telling of the mothers’ recognition of herself as a mother, a being, and a woman that needs to engage in and share the benefits of nurturing self within their community. As Hanslanger (2000) asserts women’s coming to understand self and the connection to gender and social positions fosters the conscious knowing of how they [women] regard their identity. While Meyer (2000) notes that the more informed a woman is about her shifting identity the more able she becomes to positively impact her personal health and well-being. As noted in chapter 2 she states, “Women need a conception of self that renders emancipatory transformation of one’s values and [care of self]” (p. 2). This study revealed that the central notion of mothers being the caregiver to others above and beyond themselves holds true to form within this cultural context. These mothers faced the dilemma of honoring self beyond another



(Glenn, 1994; Weingarten, 1994). These mothers realized this notion and moved beyond within their narratives during the course of the inquiry.

This last section demonstrates the striking movement of progression in their lives in relation to their every day engagement in nurturing self. The action of their stories is facilitated through the following themes: forging more of a balance, positive shifting identity in relationship to others, and re-writing self nurturance story.

### *Fostering More of a Balance*

This story-line is presented to acknowledge the continued movement of learning these women engaged in during the process of this inquiry. The objective of this piece is to note that all of the mothers agreed that finding a balance to self nurture had not been given priority previous to their engagement in this inquiry and they found through this study that finding a balance in their life is not only desirable, but mandatory in their life plan. In a certain way, by participating in the study, there was almost a call or a forcing of balance that the women more than likely would not have taken time to pursue otherwise. During their discussion they came to the conclusion that nurturing self has been neglected much to the fact that the cultural expectation for mothers is to be everything to everyone all the time. It came to no surprise to them that this is what the environment supported and they realized that unless they put a plan into place to counteract it, as individuals it will be easy to fall prey to the same old concepts. In response to the overall discussion of finding a balance Laci eloquently offered the following notion:

*I knew that it may be difficult to find time to do this research project with you, but I have been looking for an opportunity to do something for myself and you asked at the right time. It was also something organized that I could tell Dave that I was doing and I made it sound like I was really helping you out more so than it was for me. If I didn't use this explanation, I probably wouldn't be here right now, because he would have thought that I was just having dinner three times and journaling so I didn't have to do something for him or the kids. It was difficult sometimes to fit the journal and the interviews in, but I am so glad I took the time. I knew it, but this even made me realize more that I need to take care of myself or I'm going to just lose it – then where will I be...*

Seamlessly Victoria offered the following notion:

*As women we need to take ownership of our own destinies. We have witnessed for so long men being the head of the household and women following directions [in this community]. We are never going to find a balance with this set up. We need to take the lead in shaping our own lives instead of waiting for a man to give us permission.*

The women agreed and noted that in essence this study provided a structure for them to challenge the system, which they were not doing on their own. They agreed that even though they were constantly struggling to find a balance for self within the environment, they would have more than likely continued reading self help books, getting a massage, and/or going out for an evening alone not realizing that these actions were mere Band-Aids on their “wound”. They felt that these were merely mini-steps in nurturing self which helped out for a few hours or a day, but that after participating in this

study they realized that they needed to shift their identity from being victims of the cultural norms to constructors/shapers of the cultural norms. They needed to take the lead on positively affecting their health and well-being instead of looking to the environment to bring something to them.

Roxy joined the conversation and affirmed the above thoughts and remarked:

*It was hard to find time too, but when I started to journal the words and thoughts just flowed out of me. I wasn't sure if I was writing the right things down, but it sure felt good to be sharing with someone else that I was pretty much exhausted most of the time...By the end of the journaling, I realized something had to give. This whole process has just been so empowering and eye opening as a mom who was beginning to fad fast!*

The acknowledgement that finding a balance is better developed in theory than in reality was unanimous, but the mothers did make a commitment to one another to put a plan into action to find that balance over the course of the next few months. They all agreed on the positive affects of being part of a group that was cultivating change, even if they were not together physically during the entire process, they knew that other women were in this positive process of change with them. They agreed that it was going to take a bit more internal investigation and some external maneuvering and education, but felt it needed to be a priority.

#### *Positive Shift in Identity in Relationship to Others*

The women felt their engagement in this study opened the door for them to talk to their husbands, friends, children, and family about the importance of mothers taking time

for self. They noted that it became evident that it was very important for them to actually take time for themselves in order to be good role models for their children and maybe even their husbands/life partners. They didn't want their children seeing them miserable and complaining about being tired, worn out, and just plain old cynical about life any longer.

Roxy, who has two boys noted:

*It is really important for my boys to see me as a happy, balanced, and healthy woman. I want them to see that women can be happy and healthy for themselves while at the same time being capable moms and wives. So often the mom gets a bad wrap – moms are tired and cranky all the time – which we often are, but this study has helped me realize that I can be more stable and even across the board. I am going to have to enlist the help of the men in my life, but I really don't think it is going to be that difficult once they understand that taking care of myself is really, really important to my health [and sanity].*

The women indicated that they would love to see grants written for mothers in the community, which would involve them in this exact or a similar research project. They felt very strongly that learning about the importance of self nurturance needs to get out to all of the women in the community. Each woman shared story after story about other mothers that were exhausted from not knowing how to begin to take care of themselves and/or feeling like they needed permission to take care of self. Roxy stated:

*I am just so glad that this exciting and inspiring research about women is being done in this community – it is what it needs! We need to get the word out that women do matter in this community*

While Victoria commented:

*I had a deep conversation with my daughter about this and she thinks it would be a great idea if you talked with her friends about caring for themselves...We need to start talking to our daughters about this topic while they are young.*

The importance of the innovation aspect of the creative synthesis project was discussed too. As each woman shared her project and the process by which she went through to get the final product, it was evident that this project not only visually, but emotionally captured the movement from being women who minimally thought about and/or engaged in self nurturance to women who were actively engaging in self nurturance. Additionally, they were talking to other women (and men) in the community about their need for unique time, space, and location for self. The creative synthesis projects eloquently demonstrated each mothers' story-line of the effects on their individual minds, bodies, and spirits without and with engagement in nurturing self. The women were eager to share these at dinner and all noted that they had not taken such an amount of time to be this creative and/or consider only themselves for years. They even seemed a bit surprised by stating this at dinner, but felt closely connected to one another as they shared over and over the similarities in their past, present, and future stories of well-being.

Lastly, it appeared very important to the women to share that they had talked about their participation in the study with women in the community. There was a strong consensus that workshops, seminars, and/or 1:1 educational sessions with other women in the community about self nurturance needed to be planned and implemented. They felt

that other women in this community needed to find a trusting environment to talk to one another about their fears, needs, and accomplishments as mothers...they felt that a community women's health seminar would be an excellent starting point. All offered their support and assistance for such an event. Laci noted:

*This project gave me a concrete and sane means of talking to my children, Dave, and my parents about the importance of me taking time for myself. Any other time I have attempted to bring this topic up to any of them I am told and/or I just feel like I am bitching, but this opened a whole new way of visually describing to them how I feel when I am exhausted and how I feel when I am not. I told you [Angie] before that my dad actually hugged me and told me he was proud of me for being part of this study – what a shocker that was for him to have listened that much to me that I actually made sense to him!*

While Roxy stated:

*I used to do creative things all the time. I have been working on this for weeks. I used to make collages all the time in high school and they always made sense...make you feel better by putting your feelings into pictures. I even had the women at work looking for pictures for me. They would sit with me at lunch and help me find and cut out pictures for my self nurturance booklet. It really open up the door for us to talk about how tired all of really are and that we all need a break from everyday life. There is one man in the office, I think he thinks we are crazy and he definitely knows that he is part of the problem of all of us being stressed out – we just won't take his crap anymore. There are a few women that will not stand up to him, but for the most part – all of us just blow him off.*

As noted in their narratives of motion, both Grace and Victoria have daughters who they got involved in the making of their creative synthesis projects. Victoria's daughter even made her own self nurturance poster and taped it to her door to remind herself and the men in the house that she needs her space. Grace's daughter assisted her in every step, from helping her come up with the concept to typing up her description of the project. Both of these women noted that this was a very meaningful part of the being involved in the study. It opened up a conversation with their daughters about how difficult it can be to care for self within the cultural context; however they stressed the importance of a woman taking ownership of her personal health and well-being in every phase of her life.

The sharing of creative synthesis projects went on for at least an hour and it was evident that this task that was conceived as an individual task ended up being a means for these women to share their story of self nurturance with others in their immediate and communal environment. Each woman had built this project into an opportunity to share with others (parents, children, husbands, friends, and co-workers) about their increased understanding of nurturance in relation to self and others.

It appeared that the mere creation of these projects expanded their perception of their own identity. It brought to the forefront their need to expand and explore pieces of self that had been lying dormant and/or not touched upon as adult women and mothers secondary to this type of exploration not being appreciated or valued within the culture. Each woman noted being hesitant of their ability to complete this portion of the study when I first introduced the concept, but that the study would not have been complete without this hands-on exploration of their past, present, and future engagement in self

nurturance. At the conclusion of our time together, each of the women noted that they wanted to go deeper with more practical journeying into the components of their identity and personal well-being both independently and with other close friends within the community.

### *Re-writing Self Nurturance Story*

By the time we gathered for dinner to talk about the inquiry, each of the mothers had a definite and defined awareness that they needed to re-configure their perspective and engagement in self nurturance. All agreed that when they re-read their journals they felt sorry about the fact that they had not taken better care of their mind, body, and spirit during their life up to this point. Additionally, all reinforced that the creative synthesis project assisted in spiraling them back to that first interview when they weren't even sure if they were able or worthy of nurturing self. All felt that in the past they had failed to recognize the importance of carving out time to self nurture.

The following are examples of the mothers re-writing their self nurturance stories. Laci rewriting her story by seeing light at the end of the childcare tunnel, she envisions taking time for self and feel good, not guilty about it:

*I'm looking forward to the kids going back to school. Katelyn will be in kindergarten 3 hours - 3 hours I'm so excited. And I want these 3 hours to myself. This is the first time in thirteen years that my kids are going to be 3 hours away and I don't have to pay a sitter and feel guilty about leaving them and doing something for me. I plan to quit my job the Friday they go back to school and I know that Dave is not sold on the idea, but I'll deal with things as they come. It's*



*not all going to work perfect in the beginning but it is such a rush to know that I am going to have time for myself!*

While Roxy shared her full circle reflection from our first meeting to the last:

*I thought about our first interview and about my journal entries all the time during the past five months. The journaling helped me realize that my days need a major overhaul and that I need to make plans to do things for myself...no one else is going to recognize this need...at least not until we educate them...Self nurturance really needs to become a conscious part of my life!*

Victoria eloquently noted:

*I knew even on the surface that I needed to be taking care of myself on a more regular and consistent basis. You brought your questions into my life at the right time – there is no turning back now. I know what I need to do to ensure a healthier me...*

Whereas Grace affirmed to herself the need to re-write her self nurturance story:

*I'll be honest with you, because my children are older, I found this whole concept easier to grasp, if I had a baby in my home, I don't think I could have even participated in the study and I know my perspectives would be different. Young children are just so all encompassing ... you have no life. It's a whole different ball game.*

*Which we all have been there and I don't know, you just have to come to the point where you realize that you are better when you are taken care of in whatever area of your life, I don't care whether it's mothering or your wife*

*responsibility or in your career, you can't be your best you if you can't take care of yourself and self nurturance is the only way to do that.*

As a follow up to the study and in order to discern how their identities are still shifting, to further consider how their self nurturance story is unfolding, and as member checks, I had follow up conversations with each of the women 3 months post our last meeting. Each woman stated that they have continued to search for new means and methods to enhance their personal well-being.

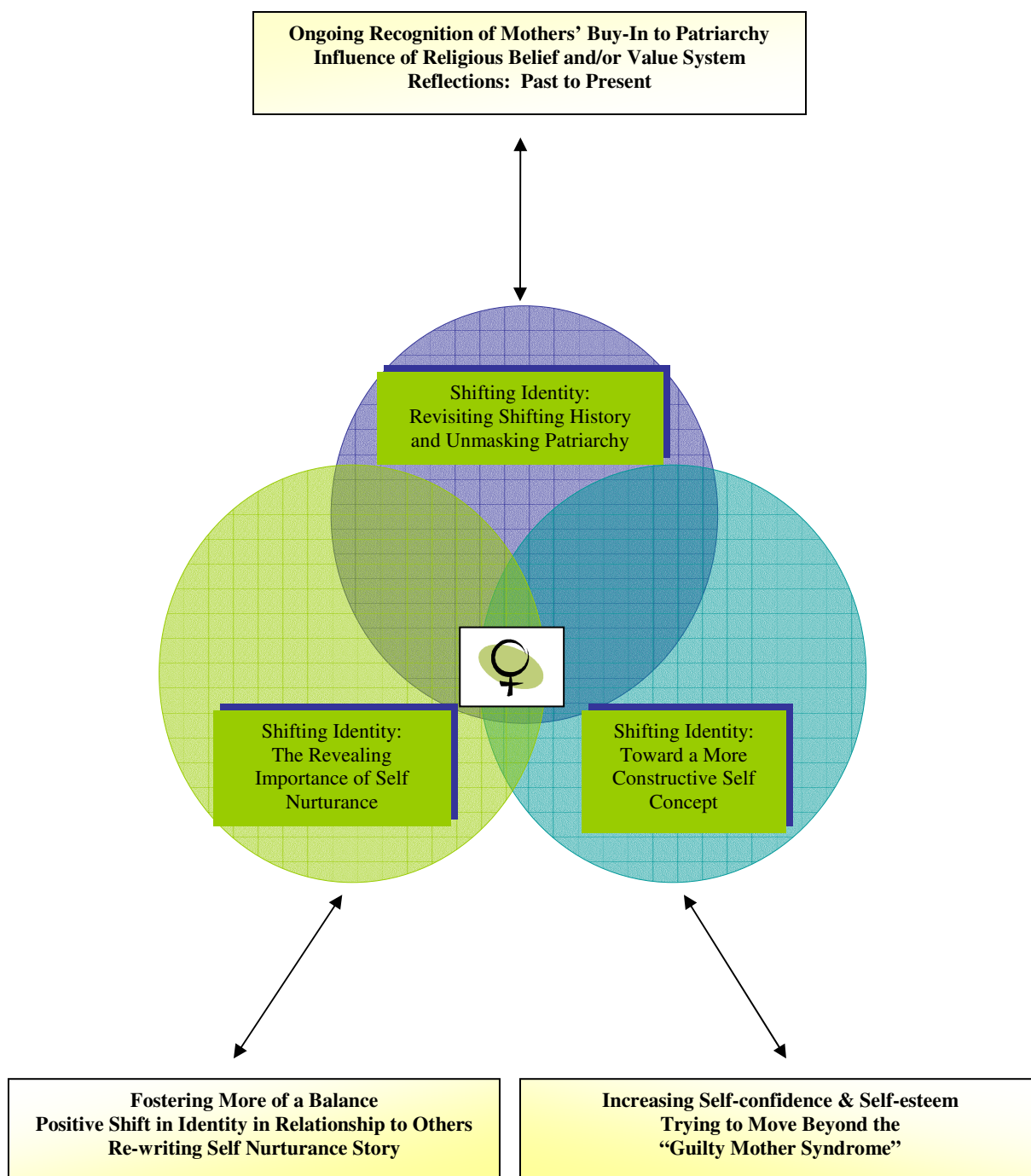
Laci came to the conclusion post her engagement in the study that her work environment was toxic to her identity. She quit her job with the domineering boss and is taking time to explore various means of nurturing self. She noted this is the first time in fourteen years that she has had three hours five days a week (remember her youngest is in kindergarten) just for her. She has been reading several women's health books and would very much like to meet with the women in the study to catch up on every one's progress.

Roxy recently sustained a health issue which required surgery. She is doing fine and the surgery has forced her to stay off work for six weeks, which at first was a scary thing, but she is finding that is giving her an opportunity to read anything and everything she can get her hands on in relation to women's well-being. She notes her favorite books right now are *Simple Abundance*, *Comfort Queen*, and everything by SARK. She stated that she has really started to talk more to women in the community about taking care of themselves and she would really like to see a grant written for mothers in the community so they too can engage in a study such as this one.

Victoria has moved closer to her children's school so she does not have to transport them to/from each day. She feels strongly that through the study she gained a better understanding for the costs that mothers really do pay in their well-being, secondary to the social perspectives of this community. She also continues to read books and search the web for enlightening practices for women's minds, bodies, and spirits. She would very much like to see a non-traditional, holistic, and multidisciplinary women's center be founded within the community. She is working on a few things to see if this can become a reality...more to come!

Grace is doing really well, however she continues to struggle with the balancing the needs of her four children and husband. She offered that she gained a great deal of insight through the study and continues to pull out her diary once in a while, but needs to make more of an effort to connect with other like-minded women to keep motivated to take care of self. She would very much like to meet with the women in the study at some point and/or form a women's group focusing on nurturing self.

It was very exciting to connect with these women again and I was thrilled to hear that they were engaging in nurturing self and that they wanted to connect with one another again. It was very inspiring to hear they were taking time to talk to other women in the community about women's wellness. It appears for the time being; their commitment to move towards a healthier self has been preserved and continues to develop since our meeting three months ago. After talking with the women and reflecting on the contents of this chapter, Figure 15 came to my mind as a visual representation of the delicate unfolding and construction of the mothers' understanding of and engagement in self nurturance within their socio-cultural context.



*Figure 15.* Delicate unfolding and construction of mothers' engagement in self nurturance.

Considering that all of the women indicated a strong interest in wanting to get together again to check up on one another's commitment and involvement in nurturing self, I wanted to compile the collective insights from the inquiry into a meaningful learning tool for the women. This chapter will serve as the springboard for our next gathering. All of the women are eager to read the final dissertation and to share it with other women in the community and I suspect that the above pictorial will serve as a means of sharing their experience in this inquiry with other women and [men] in their lives.

### Summary

The interpretation of the narratives of these four mothers' parallel understanding of identity and engagement in self nurturance within their unique socio-cultural environment are ones that may not have emerged through a different qualitative methodology. At the initial stages of conceptualizing this inquiry it was gleaned that feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self would be the most effective cogency to compel these mothers' stories around four key spheres impacting their engagement in self nurturance. The significant realms of motherhood; implicit and explicit patriarchal control; attentiveness to issues related to religious beliefs, values, and standards; and the implicit and explicit traditions of rural living provided the backdrop for discerning the constantly shifting identities realized by these four women.

It is through the insights of these women's constantly forming and shifting identities that the *intersecting narratives of motion* came into existence. This chapter established the connections between personal and collective narratives by the interpretation of themes which were interwoven throughout this chapter. These themes articulate the crucial dimension of the women's shifting identities and the unfolding of

their awareness of their past, present, and future engagement in nurturing self. The concluding intersection of the mothers' stories stand as a witness to the valuable process of narrative inquiry. Ultimately, this narrative inquiry offered a template of greater understanding of identity, hence the possibilities of personal health and well-being by four mothers of school-aged children within a conservative, patriarchal-driven, and rural cultural context.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING FROM NARRATIVE INQUIRY

*Life is lived forward but understood backwards. Kierkegaard*

The purpose of this narrative analysis study was to glean insight from and illuminate personal stories of four working mothers of school-aged children living in a defined cultural context and to explore how the cultural realities impacted their engagement in self-nurturance. This chapter will accomplish the following missions. First, a summary of the study overall will be provided, specifically in light of the poststructuralist feminist assumptions of the study that identities are constantly shifting and thus narratives continue to unfold. As such, these mothers' narratives continued to unfold in light of the interaction both with each other as well as with others in their lives. Thus in the second section as discussed in chapter 8 the findings will be addressed in relation to the how the thematic expressions of these *intersecting narratives in motion* expand upon or move away from the related literature. Third, implications for the field of adult education and occupational therapy practice will be presented. Finally, this chapter will conclude with recommendations for future areas of research.

#### Summary in Focus

An examination of the existing body of published research on women's caring as an extension of mothering identifies a scarcity of research regarding mothers' lived stories outside of formal educational settings and/or that which is focused specifically on mothers' personal health and well-being. The unique feature of this study is that it

focuses on the mothers' shifting identities throughout the narrative process and their subsequent understanding of and engagement in nurturing self within an informal learning environment. Because mothers within rural communities have been considerably neglected in the research arena, the objective of this study was to illuminate the lived stories of four mothers of school-aged children who had identified that they were in a constant struggle to learn more about and engage in self-nurturance within their immediate contextual environment.

The design of this study grew out of my personal and professional observation that the importance of mothers' health and well-being had been greatly underestimated within this specific cultural context. Second, the narrative inquiry attempted to give a first hand description by the mothers as to their assessment of the environment's lack of acknowledgement for their personal well-being and their willingness to question the environment's perspectives on mothers' identities. Third, it involved the participants in identifying their notions for constructive mothers' wellness educational programs within the cultural context.

Chapters 4 through 7 presented the narrative process and interpretation of four women who constructed narratives, related to motherwork and the impact it has on their engagement in self nurturance, other than the ones typically told and/or accepted within their cultural context. The women shared many stories that grounded them in their orientation toward their formed identities and which shaped their coexisting notions about nurturing self. The narratives presented as being in constant reconstruction throughout the processes of the first interview, journaling, second interview, creation of synthesis project, and during a dinner gathering. Additionally, the women described



being in a constant state of flux and flow in relation to their insights and learning about self nurturance throughout their engagement during the five month period of the inquiry. Even during my brief discussion with them three months post the conclusion of the inquiry, each woman noted that she had continued to think about personal health and well-being in a different light than prior to her experience in this study. All indicated they were more cognizant about its importance and that they had engaged many friends and family members in the meaningful discussions related to nurturing self. It appears that it was by sharing and reflecting back upon their held notions of being a woman and mother in the cultural context where the impetus of coming to know more about their constantly shifting identity and their subsequent engagement in self nurturance arose.

In chapter 8 the intersecting narratives in motion were discussed in light of the dinner gathering and the sharing of synthesis projects with one another. Through holistic content interpretation, three central themes revolving around the mothers shifting identity emerged. These themes are a representation of the natural ascending and unfolding of these women's constantly shifting identities.

The first ascending theme involved revisiting history and unmasking patriarchal notions. The women were able to question their past buy-in to patriarchal norms within the community by simply questioning their daily interaction with the environment. Also by revisiting the history of the context, in relation to religious beliefs and values embedded within the environment, they were able to glean that this belief system very much continued to support women's submission as a wife and mother even though women have a much more of role in commerce and public life than forty years ago within the community. This awareness not only brought to light the dominant ideologies of

mothers being the primary caretakers of children and the household, but it also brought to the forefront that they were expected to earn a good portion of the family income and/or benefits. All of the women signified doing an unequal share of housework and childcare in relation to men within their homes and the environment. Additionally, the women became more aware of the inconsiderate notions of the church body's expectation that women were to be submissive to the church's needs as well and gleaned that a good portion of the work that was done in the church is, in fact done by part-time or full-time working mothers. By revisiting the past in general, the women concluded that although women's roles and responsibilities outside of the home have dramatically increased, not only in this community, but across America in the past thirty years the recognition that the added duties may be affecting their health and well-being just has not been addressed. Actually the notion that women need to take time for self within their environment is looked upon as a weakness in a mother's character. In fact, she should be doing for others and/or for the church before doing something for self.

Within the second ascending theme, the development of a more positive concept was found to be difficult for the mothers. Initially, all noted having a low self concept, but assumed that was just the way it was suppose to be, it was the general feeling of most mothers in the community. They could never do enough for others, therefore they were not supposed to feel good about or be boastful about self. It was difficult for these women to accept the fact that they *were* doing enough for everyone else and needed to make self nurturance a priority. The first striking comment made by all of the women was that none felt worthy enough to be part of this inquiry and were surprised that I contacted them participate in a research study. By exploring why these women felt this

way, it was uncovered that for much of their lives they have been told what to do and not asked or given an opportunity to explore what they truly wanted to do. Within this socio-cultural environment, they had been in relationships and situations where they learned a woman is implicitly and/or explicitly told what is best for her and that she is not to ask questions about those decisions. It was evident during the first interview that the women were still not quite sure about this study; however, shortly after the first interview and soon into the journaling it was evident that the women were beginning question the notion of “be seen, but not heard”. Roxy noted that as she drove home from the first interview she thought about how ridiculous this notion was when it was put right in front of her. It didn’t make sense for her life and it soon revealed to all of these women as the fundamental power behind their decreased self esteem and confidence. As the women explained during the first interview and as I read through their journals it was exceedingly evident that another reason for their decreased sense of self was that all of them felt they could just not do enough for their children and/or for anyone in their life for that matter. All felt guilty about the conflict of working and giving enough time to their school-aged children. This was only compounded by the culture’s constant reminder that mothers should be able to put their children on the bus and be there with freshly-baked cookies when the children arrived home, while maintaining job outside of the home, doing various work for the church, and as many things for other people in the community as possible. The pressure on these mothers, from the socio-culture’s perspective to “do all and be all” was overwhelmingly evident throughout their narratives. All of the demands put together assured that they would spend a great deal of

time feeling guilty about not ever being able to do enough. This fact left no to minimal room for them to even consider self let alone engage in self nurturance.

The third ascending theme of revealing the importance of self nurturance to self and others came to these women as the study proceeded in their own stories via journaling, the second interview, the making of the creative synthesis projects, and by gathering together for dinner to talk about the inquiry process and to share their creative synthesis projects. It was through the continued storytelling by the women to themselves, others, and me that they came to understand and take ownership of the idea that nurturing self was a meaningful and productive occupation for them to engage in within their everyday lives. Through their stories, these women experienced an increased understanding and lived reality of balancing their mind, bodies, and spirits. This in turn, led to more open and constructive relationships with others when explaining personal needs. The exploration of self nurturance in their own lives expanded into an opening dialogue with friends, husbands, children, and family about the importance of taking ownership of personal health and well-being. This ascending shift in identity brought about the avenue by which these mothers began to “re-write” their self nurturance story.

As noted in chapter 8, by the time I met with Laci, Roxy, Victoria, and Grace five months after the initial interview, it was quite obvious that they had gleaned with definite certainty that self nurturance was something that they deserved and needed to reconfigure into their lives. At our dinner gathering, all agreed that the process of conceiving and constructing the creative synthesis project truly brought their awareness to the forefront. All of the women noted that they spent time brainstorming with their children and/or other family members about how to organize and creatively shape the project. They felt

the collective visual representation of them not engaging in self nurturance, the obstacles of self nurturance and of them engaging in nurturing self was a glimpse into the true reality of their journey of self nurturance during this inquiry. Although, all agreed that they may not be able to maintain the high level of awareness as realized during the their engagement in the study, they agreed their participation in the study would be a reminder to no longer take self nurturance for granted. They all indicated wanting to get together for “self nurturance check-ups” and that they wanted to further explore the notions of the study with other women in their life.

Next, I will offer additional insight into the unfolding narrative nature of identity and self nurturance, before offering an analysis of each of the above mentioned themes as related to research found in the literature review and other recently published research.

#### The Unfolding Narrative Nature of Identity and Self Nurturance

This was a poststructuralist feminist inquiry exploring the unfolding nature of these mothers’ identity. Poststructural feminism highlights issues of positionality both of the research participants and the researcher, and as such, it assumes that the intersection of the narratives of the researcher and the research participant intersect in some way (Bloom, 2002). This of course was the case for this inquiry; further just as the participants’ narratives were in motion, so was my own, and it continues to shift in light of my interaction with these women.

The heart of the inquiry rested upon Laci, Roxy, Victoria, and Grace and how their stories unfolded as they pertained to mothers of school-aged children and their engagement in nurturing self within their cultural context. However, I too am a mother

of school-aged children, a white woman, who also lives in this same cultural context which is where the seed for the study began to blossom. Just as their narratives unfolded so did my own. Therefore, I went forth with this narrative inquiry believing that giving mothers a means to explore their own stories would in fact bring forth a more constructive understanding of identity, whereby enhancing the desire to nurture self. As May (2002) notes, “The task of the researcher using conceptual narrativity is multi-layered; first, they must set in place the conditions in which people are likely to produce narratives” (p. 253). With this in mind and judging from my own experience as a woman and mother living within the community, I set out to design an inquiry where mothers would feel comfortable and trusting of the objectives of the research.

It has been noted that the starting point for all narrative inquiries is finding an interest in exploring the inner world of individuals within their culture (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). Through a narrative inquiry process individuals create stories and simultaneously construct their identity among their cultural context. Within this study each mothers’ story provides insight into her everyday life, her personality, and her lived experience of nurturing self with the boundaries of her specific cultural environment. The narratives were patterned to form a holistic content pictorial of each mother’s story of reclaiming identity and engagement in self nurturance.

Within this study specific reference to motherhood, patriarchy, religious conservatism and the rural environment occurred as the themes emerged in each woman’s narrative. By reading the *intersecting narratives in motion* in-depth, the nature of the women’s collective narrative came to life. The *intersecting narratives in motion* represent the common voice among the mothers. It is at this point that one can glean

these women understood more on a conscious level the flow and form of their own, one another's, and the cultural conditions and beliefs that shaped the realities of contention between a mother's identity and self nurturance within this context. As such, the following subsections will speak to the ascending awareness by these mothers of their constantly shifting identity in relation to self nurturance as it expands upon and/or moves away from current related research.

### *Shifting Identity - Revisiting History and Unmasking Patriarchy*

The first of the three ascending themes of this study is the impact on the mothers constantly shifting identity by revisiting their history to unmask the patriarchal control of not only the methods of their mothering, but also of their identification of self as a woman.

Related studies of the positive impact of women unmasking patriarchy to learn more about the multi-faceted aspects of self include research in the areas of work outside of the home, incarcerated women, and the care of self in relation to personal knowledge (Chapman, 1998; Clark, 2001; Fenwick, 1998). As with the women involved in each of these studies, the mothers who participated in this study overcame their internalization of historical patriarchal values and norms of self by re-thinking and re-positioning themselves alongside of or in some cases in front of, instead of behind, patriarchs in their immediate and broader environments. The outcome of this inquiry was similar to Duffy's (1991) study in that the identity development of women may not be as dependent upon relationships as noted in prior research (Gilligan, 1982; Surry; 1985). In the study conducted by Duffy (1991) it was discovered that women's identity does indeed expand

beyond the dominant culture's notion that women need relationships with others to support their sense of self. As was found in Duffy's (1991) study, in this inquiry although women's relationships with others served as a constructive component of these mothers' identity, it was also concluded that their relationship to the immediate cultural context was smothering their energy to nurture self. As noted by Sedikides and Brewer (2001), women who no longer wish to adhere to the constant patriarchal notions of society may no longer need to be thought of as on the periphery of the social milieu, but be thought of as enhancing the milieu's perspectives. Women in this study were willing to challenge the patriarchal notions of the submissive wife and mother and their recompense for this confrontation was moving forward and finding a peace not understood by many other women they know in the community, but which lead to a greater understanding of the importance of nurturing self.

It is not a secret that care giving has traditionally been viewed as a mother's responsibility, not only within her family, but also within the typical context of life. Multiple studies have demonstrated that women's caring/nurturing is more often directed at others and not self (Finch & Groves, 1983; Noddings, 1984; Silvia, 2002; Ungerson, 1983). As Graham (1983) states, "...caring demands both labour and love, both identity and activity, with the nature of the demands being shaped by the social relations of the wider society. In gender divided societies like ours, caring tends to have particular consequences for identity and activity of women" (p. 14). Just recently in the revised edition of *The Second Shift*, Hochschild and Machung (2004) concluded from their review of the research on the gender gap that society is actually "backsliding" in terms of men assisting in the care of children and the household. In 1994 it was reported that men



were assisting with 8.2 hours of housework, while in 1999 only 7.1 hours of assistance was reported throughout the country. The researchers posed questions for the trend, but ultimately their concern was that mothers are working more than ever at the workplace and at home which leaves no to minimal time to think of self, let alone do for self.

In relation to this study, of particular concern was to highlight the ways in which mothers are marginalized and undermined in their attempts to meaningfully include both mothering and self nurturance in their daily lives. As the study moved forward the mothers found themselves asking for more in-depth answers from the cultural context as to why their needs were less important than others within the context as a whole. This questioning of the patriarchal and historically religious tone of the culture brought about the women's acknowledgement of a much needed shift in their identity within the environment. The increased awareness of being more than a mom, but one with many identities, none of which were less important than nurturer of self was the starting point for unmasking the oppressive notions of the context.

The studies that most closely relate to the issues of the current study are that of Hart (1992, 2002). She concluded in her ethnographic and descriptive studies with women living among the realms of welfare, inner city living, and illiteracy that they gained a more constructive and sense of self through their critical reconsideration of patriarchal influence on their motherwork. Additionally, Hart (2002) noted a powerful negative patriarchal and political dimension that mothers in her inquiries needed to unlearn surrounding the care of their children. Similarly, shedding of old ways of knowing that had been passed down via patriarchal control and notions in relation to caring for children and self was a story-line that was challenged by the mothers in this

study. This revisiting of history, which lead to the unmasking of patriarchy, allowed mothers in all of the studies, including the current study at hand, to acknowledge at the very least the notion of their constantly shifting identity. This study, however took the above notions one step further and questioned the historical patriarchal mandate of the culture that mothers are expected to “do all and be all” as a deterrent to their personal health and well-being. They were able to question this notion and continue an ascending shift in identity to further develop a positive self concept. This conclusion will be further investigated in the following subsection.

*Shifting Identity: Developing a More Positive Self Concept*

The second of the three ascending themes of this study was that of the women developing a more positive self concept by increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem while attempting to move beyond the “Guilty Mother Syndrome”. All of the women have lived within the same cultural context their entire lives, only leaving the boundaries of the county for vacationing. The reading of each story is multi-layered and full of conflicts and contradictions to the development of their self concept. Their personal narratives provided a multi-dimensional insight to their past development of self concept as a mother and women within their community. It is through their personal and collective narratives, by which these women were observed constructing new meanings and alternative interpretations of self concept while bringing to the forefront the disjunction between cultural and personal experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, the interpretation of the data is representative of a holistic content analysis by

which the stories ascend to the present moment and future prediction of self concept may be inferred (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998).

Bloom's (2002) notion following a study she conducted with two women focusing on non-unitary subjectivity in narrative representation from a feminist poststructuralist perspective holds true for the women in this study. She stated,

Again, whereas humanist conceptions of the self would imply that the blurring of subject positions diminishes the coherence of an individual, the feminist postmodernist conception of non-unitary subjectivity interprets the boundary speaking as both a positive aspect of human identity and a positive praxis. When these "uppity voices of the informants" do speak from the boundaries, they resound with a powerful challenge to humanist discourses of self and other. (p. 302)

As with Bloom's (2002) study this narrative inquiry afforded women the opportunity to learn about self outside "masculinist ideologies" thereby allowing them gain self confidence from an enhanced awareness of their constantly shifting identity as a mother, wife, significant other, friend, worker, etc. alongside the ownership of self nurturance. Throughout data collection these women's stories remained the central focus and the texture of this study which directly impacted their health and well-being, which in turn continued the ascending movement of their awareness of non-unitary self.

In Hart's (2002) six studies focusing on the life-affirming work of mothers, she noted the mothers were involved in an invisible revolution which was continuing not differently, but changing directions in a changing world. The invisible revolution she was talking about was mothers' increased assertion that they and their children are

important to the fabric of the social context and that they should be acknowledged as such. Mothers, who lived in urban areas, had been able to assert these notions to people in powerful positions that were providing money for childcare, health care, and education. In comparison, the mothers in this study appeared to not have identified with women asserting their power as an enhancement to their self concept. To the contrary, in the past it had evoked feelings of shame, guilt, and self doubt. However, throughout the present inquiry the women began to gain the self confidence to challenge the notion that mothering should “just be done” without question. But still, their identities still seemed fractured in this regard. The “guilty mother syndrome” was not absent from their psyche, but they now had a different perspective to view how and qualify these feelings against, before this inquiry they did not. They began to reflect upon their previous roles and patterns.

As noted in chapter 2, Flannery (2000) notes that women are constantly re-learning, unlearning and recreating their identities. It appeared these mothers, for the most part, had suppressed or put in incubation the power of self to question the current devaluation of motherwork within their cultural context. This in turn, was constantly circulating negative feedback to their self concept. As demonstrated by Clark (2001) and Bloom (2002) in their narrative inquiries utilizing non-unitary self as a basis of research process, both found that the women had a greater sense of their shifting identity when configuring their stories against dominant cultural ideologies. Furthermore, Brooks (2000) notes in relation for transformative learning to occur within narratives women must, “...integrate their inclination toward relatedness with a need for separateness and competence so that they won’t totally subsume their own sense of identity and power” (p.

148). As such, by questioning their constantly shifting identity the mothers in this study were able to place value on motherwork, by questioning the status quo, and subsequently enhancing their self concept.

As noted in chapter 2, often women' caring for others is an expected extension of mothering. Chodorow (1978) noted twenty-five years ago that mothering is an activity greatly focused on the perspective of the child's needs. Furthermore, Gilligan (1982) and Miller (1991) noted that culture sets up women's lives around the principle of serving others. Within this current study, it was revealed that perspective had not changed for these four mothers within their rural socio-cultural context. The primary thought was that mothering equals caring of children, husband, and household beyond personal needs. As further noted in chapter 2, in the mid-eighties a wealth of studies were completed on the "burden of care" in relation to the well-being of women caring for aging parents (Brody, 1985; Brody, et. al., 1987; Cantor, 1983; George and Gwyther, 1986). These studies concluded, as did the current study that women's health and well-being are comprised secondary to the traditional beliefs of women's caring for others. The most notable relationship of this study to previous studies is that of MacRae (1995) and her study with elderly women and the meaning of their caring experiences. She found that these women's perspective on their negative or positive responsibility of caring ran parallel with their self meaning and concluded that it was significant in shaping their development of identity. As with this study, the mothers' increased understanding of their constantly shifting identity ran parallel to their increased self concept and awareness of the importance of self nurturance.

Furthermore, this inquiry accomplished what was customary in narrative inquiry

as noted by May (2002), "If we want to find out how people make identities, make sense of the world and of their place within it, if we want to find out how they interpret the world and themselves – we have to attend to the stories they tell..." (p. 255). Again, partial attention of this narrative inquiry was that of the mothers' ascending awareness of their constantly shifting identity within their cultural context.

*Shifting Identity: The Unfolding of the Importance of Self Nurturance*

The third ascending theme was the mothers' obvious unfolding of the importance of self nurturance. As I analyzed the mothers' narratives, I was reminded of a quote by Johnson (1998) in her revival of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Gifts from the Sea*:

Gradually, still somewhat reluctantly, I began paying attention to my basic human needs. As much as I knew it was what I needed to do, as much as it felt wonderful to begin taking care of myself, a part of me kept dragging its heels. Why was it so difficult to treat myself kindly? Obviously it was good for me. It was unreasonable to think I could deny myself tender loving care and still live in harmony with myself and God. I didn't treat husband or children this way. I didn't think they could go without good food, rest, and play and still be happy. I made sure they got plenty of whatever it was they needed. So why was I so hard on myself? Where had I learned that making time for myself was unimportant? What did I gain by trying to hang on to this false belief? (p. 33).

As Esdaile and Olsen (2004) recently noted in *Mothering Occupations: Challenges, Agency, and Participation*, "Mothering is one of the most important occupations of women, yet helping professions, such as occupational therapy, have all

but neglected it as a topic of research and scholarship until recently” (p. ix). Their edited text examines mothering through many theoretical perspectives and although it adds a moderate amount of insight from research into the *essence* of motherhood. However, hearing the mothers’ voice in relation to how to accommodate and/or explore her personal well-being is absent. The purpose of the studies presented were to discern the everyday challenges of mothering occupations, mothering with a disability, and mothering children with special needs. More importantly, as with the many studies on caring, discussed in chapter 2, the issue of women’s [mothers’] understanding of a constantly shifting identity as it relates and/or promotes nurturing self was not addressed (Chodorow, 1978; Rockhill, 1993 ; Silvia, 2002). As is the case with many studies on mothering the contested images of the perfect and/or ideal mother are discussed and debated, but none of the studies provide an avenue for mothers to focus on the needs of self. The lack of time and space for their personal health and well-being is mentioned but the methods to assist mothers in this area are missing.

The four mothers who participated in this inquiry became increasingly cognizant of the dichotomy of the cultural manifestations of *caring for others before self* which they had known their entire life and minimally challenged up to this point. Similarly to Coltrane and Adams (1998) study, the mothers in this study had learned throughout their years that to be a mother meant giving up your own identity for the sake of others. Early on after the women in this study began composing their identities in conjunction with an increased understanding of the importance of nurturing self, they began to reconcile the contradictory notions from the context with that of their stressed spirits. While each woman expressed that they had loving mothers, they realized the influence of their

mothers' identity and caring behavior did not fit the needs of their lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They came to realize that although the demands of motherhood had changed dramatically in the past forty years, the expectations of mothering and caring within this cultural context had not accommodated for the increased demands of motherwork.

The crucial challenge in these mothers' narratives was acknowledging the ignorance within this particular context that mothers did not need time, space, and/or a place to nurture their stressed spirits. The four mothers internally and externally challenged and questioned the dominant cultural paradigms through their narratives and consequently within their daily living. It was through an increased understanding of their multi-layered, complex, and fluid identities that they established the importance of time, space, and place to care deeply for self. As de Marneffe (2004) recently suggested to women, "As mothers we should give ourselves the room, the dignity, to discover what we think and what we want. Each of us must think through the issues for herself so that the life we live is a personal creation rather than a resigned-to reality" (p. 116).

The more I interacted with and talked with these four mothers, the more it became apparent that the most significant piece of this inquiry which allowed them to *create* and *act* upon their narrative of self nurturance was the creative synthesis project. I introduced this optional piece of the study during my recruitment phase and then briefly discussed it at the end of the first interview. Much to my surprise, all of the women were excited to explore the imaginative and creative parts of self that were often forgotten because of motherwork. Each woman called me and/or e-mailed me about the projects several times with ideas about the project. They did not contact me to ask my advice about how to do the project; they called/e-mailed because they had a flight of ideas or a concept for its



origin. In relation to spirituality, and drawing on Bateson's ideas about learning, Tisdell (2003) calls this type of coming to know "spiral learning" and the ongoing creative representation of it symbolic (or spiritual) knowing, whereas, Heron (1996) refers to the representation of it as presentational knowing. In a sense the creative synthesis project for the mothers in this study allowed for their past, present, and future engagement in nurturing self to be constructed via symbolizing their intuition, past and present learning, and refreshed memory into a visual learning testimony about self nurturance as an example of this symbolic or presentational knowing. Furthermore, as noted in chapter 8, the women not only constructed their creative synthesis projects just for their learning, but they constructed ideas and the actual projects by involving family members and friends. Laci asked her mom what she thought "feeling refreshed" would look like if it was food, Roxy enlisted her friends at work in finding pictures for her collage, while Grace and Victoria enlisted the help of their daughters in completing their projects. All noted the creative synthesis projects not only opened-up their learning, but it was an easy way to teach others about the importance of mothers nurturing self.

The women's participation in this narrative inquiry gave voice to their lived experiences and the changes needed to enhance and maintain their personal health and well-being. The following two sections explain the implications of this study for adult educators and/or occupational therapists interested in exploring research and practice related to women's wellness programs.

### Implications for Adult Education Theory and Practice

It should be noted that the discussion within adult education focused on women's lives from a feminist poststructuralist perspective has been mostly conceptual. While there are a few studies that draw on feminist poststructuralism as a theoretical framework (Chapman, 2002; Fenwick, 1999; Tisdell 2000), this study contributes to the field of adult education in three primary ways. First, it presents findings from a research based study in relation to an ignored population that of rural mothers and their informal learning in a rural, religiously conservative patriarchal environment, particularly as it relates to self nurturance. Secondly, the study offers to the field additional insights as to what research from a feminist poststructuralist framework might look like. Third, in addition to drawing on the elements of feminist poststructuralist theory and practice, it highlights the importance of creativity in ways perhaps implied but not highlighted in other discussions of poststructural feminist theories and pedagogies. These three aspects are discussed further below.

#### *Informal Learning by Mothers in Rural Contexts*

This study expands scholarly knowledge concerning mothers' informal learning in rural contexts. Adult education has a history of challenging patriarchal notions within higher education settings (Sork & Chapman, 1998), women's workplace settings (Fenwick, 1998), and formal workplace settings (Carter, Howell & Schied, 2002). Sork and Chapman's (1998) study explored the notion of traditional patriarchal-driven graduate supervision from the perspective of the relationship of the advisor and advisee. Fenwick's (1998) study considered the how women compose an identity within the workplace setting, while Carter, Howell & Schied's (2002) study focused on the effects

and consequences of professional power in the workforce. Although Valerie Lee Chapman's (2002) study did examine patriarchy in personal ways of becoming an academician, the others do not focus on the informal learning embedded in participants' lives.

Furthermore, as Mulder, et. al.(2002) noted, that have been done on rural women a great percentage of studies in the past few years has focused only on the needs of rural women's behavioral health and not their related learning. In October 2004, at the *National Rural Women's Health Conference*, the research presented again focused primarily on the areas of community-based mental health, childcare, nutrition, and elderly women's healthcare options in the rural context and not the pathways or avenues of women's learning to overcome or to learn more about these issues. The conclusion may be drawn that research specifically directed towards women in rural communities has not supported the possibilities of their informal learning as related to preventative health and well-being.

I conducted this particular study in light of the lack of research on rural women's learning in general and on learning self nurturance in particular. As such, my previous immersion within the culture, as a white mother of two school-aged children enabled me to better understand the needs of mothers in the environment and it allowed me to become intimately acquainted with the focus of the inquiry prior to its initiation. This immersion was extremely helpful in understanding the socio-cultural norms and belief systems in which these mothers were accustomed to on a daily basis. As noted in chapter 2, much of the education of women in rural settings is focused on women's physical rehabilitation secondary to disease, mental disorders, and childcare (Mulder, et. al.,

2002). The current informal learning model represents the dissemination of information via doctor's offices, community health centers, childcare facilities, and extension offices. This concept of mothers learning about issues via mass dispersement of material continues to represent a minimal understanding of the mother's full range of responsibilities for children and/or work outside of home (Ruddick, 1989) and minimizes their options for learning about topics of primary concern as they relate to their health and well-being. Often educational materials are circulated from the perspective that mothers will take the materials home and read when the children finally go to bed or it is put in doctor's offices so they may read while waiting to have their sick child seen by a doctor. In other words, informal learning about the needs of self is expected to happen in the midst of motherwork.

This study ultimately explored the negotiation and the navigation of an informal learning opportunity with four mothers. The associated power relations within these mothers' lives played an important role in them coming to know their needs in relation to health and well-being. It was among the intersections of motherwork, patriarchy, rural living, and conservative religious traditions along with the associated expectations of this socio-cultural context where these mothers found a comfortable way of knowing and learning about nurturing self. The environment had historically structured very inequitable situations for these mothers in terms of their well-being and the elements of the overt and internal oppression ran very deep in the mother's identity formation. Therefore, this study contributes to a more informed understanding of an effective and well-received methodology of informal learning of mothers with school-aged children in a complex rural context. The study identified that the engagement in personal

storytelling, journaling, creative expression, and group discourse facilitated the ascending process of these mothers understanding, coming to know, and learning about nurturing self parallel to their constantly shifting identity. It highlights that adult educators may need to enlist a similar scheme to facilitate informal learning with other women in similar contexts.

### *Embarking upon Feminist Poststructural Research*

This study was conducted to bring to the forefront rural mothers' learning of self nurturance and in the process they unmasked patriarchy within their environment. The feminist poststructuralist notions of positionality, authority, and voice discussed by many feminist poststructuralist authors appeared to be naturally embedded in the ascending process of the narrative inquiry. As the mothers came to voice through their increased awareness through each consecutive story they began to examine and question the patriarchal authority structure, and thus began to look at their self as primary makers of authority over their daily lives. This awareness of voice transcended across their constantly shifting identity validated by their own story-lines. They were able to put into perspective the overwhelming roles and responsibilities placed on them by the culture and discern the overall negative effect on their health and well-being. In conjunction with this new learning they were able to view the notion of non-unitary self with a sense of comfort and acknowledge that it was appropriate to be multi-faceted, complex, and constantly changing in respect to the needs of their minds, bodies, and spirits.

Again, the awareness of my own constantly shifting identity within this environment supported my understanding and observation of each mother's transpiring awareness of her own constantly shifting identity and this previously held knowledge

assisted me in conducting this study. I thoroughly embraced this research process and was humbled by the mothers' generosity, spirit, and openness to explore untraced terrain with me. It was throughout many conversations, journaling, creative explorations of project making, and our gathering together that the totality of these women deconstructing notions of authority, coming to voice, and gleaning the notion of constantly shifting identity which spoke to the hallmarks of embarking upon a research process guided by feminist poststructuralism. As a researcher, this arrangement assisted with my understanding of the texture of the women's stories and allowed for my deepened appreciation for the nature of the research process. Furthermore, this research highlights that inquiries where the researcher has a prior understanding of the cultural context, may serve as an invaluable component to the process. As with this inquiry, as the women shared their perspectives of changing selves, I was able to share and/or reflect upon my own. These women were ready to search out enhanced ways of knowing and learning about self nurturance in the same light that I was eager to hear their stories. As Bloom (1998) notes, "Through the analysis and celebration of the strength of non-unitary subjectivity can have for women, women become authors of their own lives in ways that do 'explode' male discourse" (p. 5). As with the structure of this narrative inquiry, it allowed the mothers to construct and reconstruct their knowledge in relation to health and well-being within a rural, patriarchal-driven, and religiously conservative context. Additionally, this study focused on the informal knowing and learning of mothers specifically embedded within their cultural context.

In light of this expanded exploration, this study offers the field of adult education the following: (a) a framework for providing participants with a structure to consider

their unfolding of non-unitary identity alongside as a of the key focus of the inquiry; (b) a research question that was formulated by with the interests and needs of the participants living in a rural area where informal learning is more common place than structured formal learning among adults; (c) a methodology and a theoretical perspective that was very effective in unmasking patriarchal notions of learning environment; (d) engaged the participants in stories of their own, which created the embodiment of the individual and collective narratives; and (e) provided the participants a means of creative exploration with facilitated further learning from a non-traditional perspective.

In chapter 2, narrative studies by Clark (1999) and Bloom (2002) were discussed that were structured solely on engaging women's awareness of non-unitary self for the resultant facilitation of greater self knowledge within prison and higher education. The methodology of the current study expanded on Clark (1999) and Bloom's (2002) conclusions and demonstrated the consequences of mothers exploring their own stories of self nurturance while spiraling back to construct new learning via the effects of interaction in the ongoing construction of identity in the research process.

Furthermore, the design of the study was constructed as Ellis and Bochner (2000) note as being, "...complete (but open) in itself, largely free of academic jargon and abstracted theory" (p. 745). Within the description of this study, I have requested that readers join in and learn more about the intimate lives of four mothers who are constantly moving and questioning their identity as they construct new knowledge and navigate among the constraints of the environment. While the process of research with the participants themselves was free of academic jargon, the research process itself was firmly grounded in feminist poststructuralist theory. It made the use of the

poststructuralist notion that identity is consistently shifting from moment to moment in light of interaction and new experiences in the research process itself. Moreover, as Richardson (1994) requests, "...[Narrative researchers] ask the readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (p. 521). In essence, she is highlighting the importance of feeling the movement of the story, and not boxing participants' stories into one category or another, but rather to listen to the identities in motion unfold, as each participant makes use of multiple ways of learning and knowing.

Finally, as a researcher, one always needs to ask whose interests are served by research? Clearly the participants own interests were served by this research, in that while the study was meant to study their experience of self nurturance, in the research process itself, they actually learned to nurture self while they unlearned patriarchy. Given that the purpose of adult education is adult learners' learning, it is exciting to have conducted a research project where the methodology itself evoked the participants' learning and served their needs. The following section further notes the creative exploration of self nurturance in which these mothers engaged upon to glean the reality and potential of their health and well-being as a possible consideration for future feminist poststructuralist approaches to adult education.

### *Highlighting Creativity in Feminist Poststructuralist Approaches to Adult Education*

So what do the conclusions of this study have to offer adult education? Adult educators may want to consider adding components of creativity to their research methodology and practice. Although, the framework of feminist poststructuralism lends itself to creative modes of inquiry, creativity when using other frameworks should be



considered when designing a research project. A great majority of adult educators tend to be somewhat formal in their methods of conducting research and in their means of practice. As described in each of the women's narrative and discussed early in this chapter, the creative synthesis project proved to be a pivotal learning experience for these mothers. The creative synthesis project component extended their learning in coming to know the full picture of self nurturance in their daily lives within this context.

An adult educator may also want to re-consider feminist modes of teaching which convey a more open and nurturing environment for the learner (Connell, 1985). As Hayes and Flannery (2000), Tisdell (2001), Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) and Fenwick (2002) note, feminist perspectives of adult education must also consider the construction of knowledge, the deconstruction of authority, the learner's voice, positionality, and identity as shifting. As noted before, all of these issues were addressed and explored in this study. An additional component that was explored was the importance of creativity in the construction of knowledge and how a project involving multiple ways of knowing and learning can add to the learners' awareness and consideration of their constantly shifting identity. The creative synthesis project was a very important component to this narrative inquiry. It added significant depth and breadth to the stories of these mothers' negotiation and navigation of nurturing self within their cultural context. As related to Tisdell's (2003) symbolic knowing and Heron's (1996) presentational knowing, it appeared to allow the women to create a *significant translation* of their coming to know and calming of the chaos around nurturing self within their environment. This *significant translation* spoke to their stressed spirits and gave them something organic to reflect upon. Furthermore, when

shared with the other women during our gathering it was evident that they had come to realize the same realities through the texture of the symbolism between each creative project. Therefore, the creative synthesis project engaged the mothers in their ascending awareness of constantly shifting identity alongside of nurturing self and had a significant impact on their overall understanding of their health and well-being. Post this inquiry, I concluded that the framework of feminist poststructuralism played an important role in setting up a research environment that fostered creativity and imagination in the re-construction of identity for the four mothers who participated in this study.

Consequently, in relation to creativity, I shared Flannery's (2000) notion related to her perspective of how women should venture upon their "journey into learning" the evening of our dinner gathering:

Take along three sisters travelers from Native American folklore as your guides. The Old Spider Women is the Great Mother, the creator, weaver, tender of the fires of life, teacher of culture. "She is the eldest God, the one who remembers and re-members" (Allen, 1989, p2). She weaves us together. She gives her daughters a covering of creative wisdom attached by a thin thread to her web. The Seeker Woman is a guide for women on a journey into the unknown, into the darkness, into places where we don't want to go. Her gifts are consciousness and enlightenment, insights and intuition, and unmasking, which reveals inner truth. The Woman of Knowledge is a guide for turning things upside down on our learning journeys, for looking and listening and feeling and thinking with different eyes. Her gifts are openness, willingness to question, change and [creativity]. (p. 252)

In the end, this inquiry communicates the creation and the negotiation of the mothers' constantly shifting identity through their dialogue with self and others. It provides an example of the adult education researcher capturing the ascending spiral of participant stories as unique, dynamic, holistic, and engaged perspectives to further their learning and understanding of the texture of their culture and their place within it. This narrative inquiry was initiated from learning, conducted to advance learning, and written to assist others in designing research studies which may lead to meaningful creative investigations outside of academic structures.

*An Alternative Perspective: Women's Development of Self in the Context of Learning*

As D.F. Flannery (personal communication, March 14, 2005) notes it is within a woman's personal life where she must begin to explore the depths of her emotional, physical, intellectual, and social self. It is so imperative that women find a space of their own to calm the external forces pressing upon them in order to listen to and respond to their own needs. Similarly, Cherin (1987) notes that women need to strive to find a means within their daily walk to reveal their self to self. In this narrative inquiry by the end of journaling phase, three of the four had already deconstructed their identity as a mother to allow more room to come to know and move about a bit easier within their own skin and give honor to their own voice. These mothers had made a choice to reclaim an identity of nurturer of self that had long been buried, secondary to the oppressive notions and effects of their immediate and surrounding socio-cultural environments. Similar to Miller's (1986) research, in which she gleaned women are socialized to care for other before self, this quickly became evident within this inquiry. All of the women

had a deeply embedded picture of their identity as a mother and that identity was guided their formation of self in relation to others and self. All of the women had been and in some respects still aggressively encouraged to care for others before self by their mothers, grandmothers, and through religious teachings/beliefs. At the beginning of the inquiry, it was evident that this notion was the standards by which all of the women were measuring their “rational, linear identity” upon. However, by the end of the study three of the four women clearly understood that the notion of a constantly shifting identity - an identity that was fluid, complex, and multiple in its ways of knowing, learning, and being was a much healthier choice of measurement as a mother living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Since the late 1970's writers and researchers concerned with women's development of self have purported that women develop a sense of self in-relation to others (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986/1991; Noddings, 1984; Surry, 1985). Along with this perspective of self-in-relation came the thought that women learned best in conjunction when involved in social groups and/or small group pairings. It was Hayes and Flannery (2000) who in their ground-breaking text *Women as Learners* put women's self-in-relation development, as it relates to women's knowing and learning, on its edge. As illuminated through the ascending process of this study, the mothers' relationships of care to others and self were much healthier as their ability to disconnect from others in their immediate environment was broaden. As they better understood and practiced the notion of constantly shifting identity they felt less guilty and were able to find the time and space to nurture self. However, Grace did provide an example of a mother not able to fully entertain and/or acknowledge the concept of constantly shifting identity. Although, she was able to identify that she needed time to “refuel” she was not

able to fully disengage from the socio-culture's restrictive notion of the Christian mother. In light of the pressure from her immediate and broader social context she was not able to go to the core of her non-unitary self and explore the full depth of nurturing self.

As noted by Meyers (2000) and revealed within this study, the notion of a rational, unified self neglects the contextual oppression felt by women. Within this study, the mothers' exploration, learning, and coming to a more informed understanding of the notion of non-unitary self alongside their stories of self nurturance allowed them to feel and realize for the first time that it is appropriate for their identity to shift from others to self! This consciousness-raising, by the end of the study, afforded each of the women an avenue to take charge of their personal health and well-being with a limited amount of guilt. Again, as Meyers (2000) purports, "Women need a conception of self that renders emancipatory transformation of one's values and [care of self]" (p. 2). Within this study, as the women learned to change their perceptions and reactions to the dominant discourse and patriarchal power surrounding held beliefs of mothers' self, they were able to acknowledge to others and themselves that a constantly shifting identity was much more appropriate and accommodating to their personal health and well-being.

The women's engagement in story-telling with self, one another, and the researcher allowed them to put into perspective that the majority of individuals in their environment had erroneous notions of power, discourse, and knowledge as related a mother's health and well-being. This misplaced energy on the part of the environment neglects to acknowledge that by affording mothers the context to learn more about the natural, fluid, and multiple layers of their constantly shifting identity is denying them to aspire to a healthier way of doing, being, and becoming. Similarly to Sedikes and Brewer

(2001) notions that women needs to explore their fragmented self to fully realize the power within, this inquiry sought to challenge the false dichotomy between the identity of a mother and self nurturer. Thereby, engaging these mothers in learning related to the notion of non-unitary self dimensions of politics, power, and conflict in relation to mothers caring for self and others was brought to the forefront of their understanding.

The outcome of this narrative inquiry in relation to women's development of self and learning offers the field of adult education that it imperative in any given educational environment to assist women in evaluating the justice, equality, and trust issues within their internal and external contexts. Within the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the capacity to understand and learn more about one's perspective of self is becoming a prerequisite to active involvement in everyday learning. Adult educators may further assist women in actively engaging in learning, by first affording them the opportunity to identify and/or enhance their conceptual framework of self. This narrative inquiry offers a picture of self from a feminist poststructuralist perspective (Bloom, 2002; Clark, 1999; Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Hart, 1990, 1992, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 1995, 2000, 2001).

This narrative inquiry concentrated on giving consideration to the productive nature of women learning about the notion of constantly shifting identity within a specific socio-culturally defined environment and it offers questions adult educators may want to introduce to women within various formal and informal learning environments. Some possible questions are as follows: What is the contextual nature of a woman's subjectivity? What pieces of self do women bring to the educational environment? How does a woman's concept of self interplay with her learning process?

In essence this narrative inquiry offers an alternative perspective of women's development of self in the context of informal learning and it puts forth the question - What may be the implications and outcomes of adult educators taking a more active role in facilitating women in the investigation of the poststructuralist feminist perspective of constantly shifting within various learning environments? Within this narrative inquiry, the perspectives of feminist poststructuralism and the notion of non-unitary self most certainly opened up an avenue to free the mothers of guilt and allow for an enhanced ascending movement of learning while they remained situated, but no longer controlled by the oppressive beliefs of what a mothers' self should look and act like with a rural, religiously conservative, and patriarchal-driven context.

In summary, I offer four insights that this study has to offer the field of adult education in relation to pedagogy. First, it may encourage an increased interest among adult educators to discover more about women as learners. Second, it may promote a genuine desire among adult educators to consider women's development of self as it relates to informal and formal educational contexts. Third, it offers a focused understanding of how women learn about, navigate, and negotiate their constantly shifting identity within an informal learning environment. Fourth, I am hopeful it promotes a framework of approaching women's learning from the perspective of feminist poststructuralism.

#### Implications: The Occupational Therapist as an Educator of Women's Health and Well-being

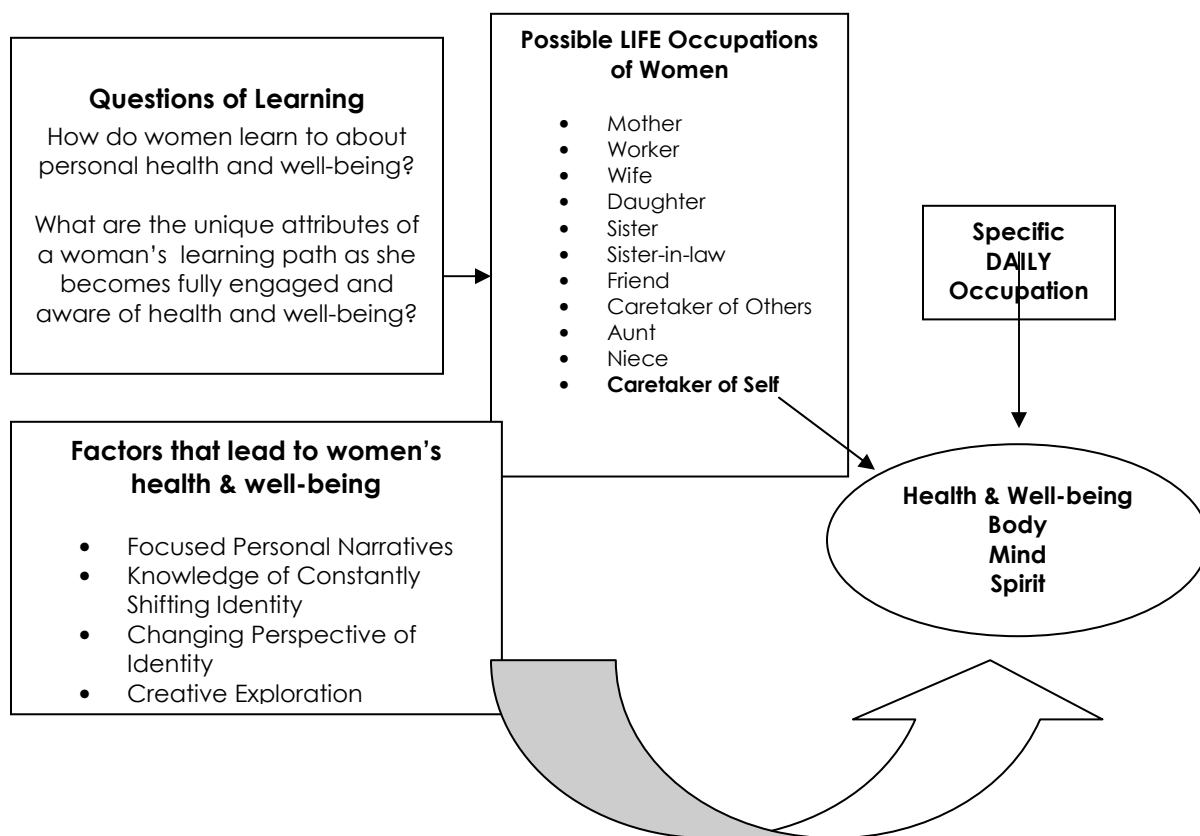
This narrative inquiry which explored a deliberate connection of the theoretical perspectives of feminist poststructuralism, non-unitary self, narrative inquiry, and the

meaningful occupation of self nurturance adds to the current research on health and well-being from the perspective of the mothers living in a rural context. This study concluded that a mother's care of others rests first in her healthy care of self. I feel it will be beneficial to the theoretical underpinnings of occupational science and to the practice of occupational therapy, to consider women's learning theories and alternative theoretical perspectives as lenses to view the development of occupational behavior(s) and meaningful occupations. In keeping with the premises of women's learning and knowing occupational therapists may provide a productive framework focusing on self, voice, and personal authority to assist women in developing their health and well-being. As women become more aware of their constantly shifting identities they may more effectively promote the positive aspects of their own development (Clark, 1999; Tisdell, 2001). Yerxa's (1998) notion that occupational therapists must develop a better understanding of how to assist individuals in learning how to promote their own status of health and well-being lends itself to the findings of this study, "Occupational therapists need to learn much, much more about how human beings develop adaptive skills, rules, and habits that enable competence...such knowledge of "coaching" could benefit all persons who need to develop skills in order to survive, contribute, and achieve satisfaction in their daily life occupations..." (p. 418). Occupational therapy has a rich history of collecting stories from individuals from the perspective of the medical model, but research and practice must extend well beyond and into our communities.

The dynamic process of this inquiry provides occupational therapy with a rich understanding of mothers' educational needs based in the context of wellness. Since the field of occupational therapy continues to struggling with embedding itself in holistic and



preventative educational roles, this study may further emphasize and implicate the need for evidence-based research studies focused on the learning and ways of knowing of women in relation to daily occupations. The American Occupational Therapy Foundation announced on March 23, 2001 it was changing the title of its long standing publication *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research* to *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research: Occupation, Participation, and Health*. Baum (2001) stated, “This name makes explicit our commitment to study occupation and health and to the participation in society by those who occupational therapists serve...we hope to receive research articles that test new models, enhance measurement of occupation, and demonstrate efficacy of occupations” (p. 3). To date, the profession continues to seek insight on how to demonstrate evidenced-based research and practice within the areas of health and well-being. Figure 16 represents a framework of the occupational therapist as a researcher and educator of women’s wellness programs which was gleaned from this narrative inquiry.



*Figure 16.* Framework for the occupational therapist as a researcher of women's wellness programs.

As the occupational therapy profession continues to change and evolve this study highlighted a realistic assumption within this socio-cultural environment for mothers. It may be if mothers are not engaged in creative exploration and meaningful informal learning, they may continue to care for others, without question, thereby sacrificing personal health and well-being. As a nontraditional community-based occupational therapist, I feel we need to continue to research and explore how engagement in meaningful occupation provides a means of expression of self thereby contributing to the understanding by individuals about their constantly shifting identity. I feel this narrative

inquiry guided by feminist poststructuralism focused on four mothers' journey of learning and engagement in the meaningful occupation of self nurturance will assist occupational therapists in having a better understanding of how to frame evidence-based wellness research and practice for women as a means of inquiry, exploration, and/or engagement in forming healthy living patterns.

### Questions for Future Research

Although I believe this study was successful in its intent to capture, depict, and interpret the experiences, and, hence, the *narratives in motion* and *intersecting narratives in motion* of four mothers of school-aged children living in a specific socio-cultural context, as is the instance with many research projects, more questions are raised. As Alcott (1997) reminds us, "The construction of femininity in which women are positioned is the relevant issue and the basis for action and social justice" (p. 6). Taking this into consideration, future investigations might examine the following issues in light of the sources cited in chapter 2 as well as through the lens of this study:

- How do women of other aged children (i.e. infants, preschool aged, and college aged and/or adult children) explain their identity as a mother living within the same or different cultural contexts of this inquiry?
  - What positive and/or negative messages have these mothers received within their contextual environment about engaging in self-nurturance?
  - How have these mothers re-negotiated aspects of their identity over time in order to nurture self within their cultural environment?

- What aspects of self-nurturance are these women still struggling with at this point in time, secondary to perspectives and notions of the cultural environment?
- How has past and present engagement of self-nurturance been simple and/or complex in relation to gender within this cultural environment?
- How do elder women explain their identity women living within a rural, religiously conservative and historically patriarchal-driven environment from a retrospective point of view?
- How do women who do not have children explain and come to know their identity in relation to self nurturance within specific cultural contexts?
- How can adult education programs plan for the educational needs of mothers living within rural communities?

The multidimensional nature of this study is both a strength and limitation of the inquiry. What occurred during my interviews with these four women transpired secondary to their history and lived reality within this community, alongside of my lived reality and history within this context. My previous knowledge, insight, and bias about the culture can not be ignored and/or replicated by another researcher. My conclusions and subjective reading of these women's narratives are basically non-reproducible; however they do provide a window through which to understand the nature of nurturing self by these four mothers within their cultural context. Narrative inquiry is complex and researchers who engage in this type of research have many options for analysis. One researcher may chose to be meticulous while another many chose to illuminate broad themes (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). I chose

to represent an in-depth narrative of each woman along with a collaborative voiced narrative of all four women. The period of analyzing and interpreting the narratives separately and collectively naturally achieved what is presented in chapters 4 through 9. As Franks (2001) notes, “As feminists our most important task is to develop an understanding of each other’s standpoints, locatedness, and positionalities” (p. 8). Another researcher may have taken a different approach and/or a interpreted the narratives differently, however I utilized my knowledge and understanding of narrative inquiry, in addition to a good faith effort to present what I gleaned from the data.

### Summary and Conclusions

Although these mothers identified that they engaged in some form of self-nurturing behavior prior to this study, it become apparent at subsequent points of the study that these women were increasingly utilizing their own stories to positively impact their health and well-being. As Batson (1990) noted, “Women today...compose lives that will honor all their commitments and still express all their potentials with a certain unitary grace...in finding a personal path among the discontinuities and moral ambiguities they face, they are performing a [creative synthesis] with a value that goes beyond the merely personal”(p. 232). These women shared their intimate stories without hesitation and they too hope, as I do, that the inquiry will benefit other women who are engaged in the dual role of motherwork and vocation within similar or different cultural contexts have an enhanced understanding of how important it is to think about and take action upon one’s journey of personal health and well-being. By presenting an analysis

of the lived experiences of the mothers in this study and by providing recommendations for future research it is hoped that many other mothers may soon realize a more enhanced understanding of and engagement in self nurturance.

I feel the use of feminist poststructuralist perspective guided and shaped these mothers' stories within this cultural context. This study supported women as learners and their knowing and learning of self in relation to their context whereby enhancing power, voice, and authority over their non-unitary self. As I reflect upon the study, I now know that this philosophical stance was the most appropriate for me as a researcher and for the mothers' stories I was attempting to gather and shape into a meaningful inquiry. Finally, I hope that this narrative inquiry has faithfully recorded the stories of Laci, Roxy, Victoria, and Grace within their cultural context and that they stories will make a noteworthy knowledge contribution to adult education and occupational therapy by promoting future inquiries. For now, I'll leave you with this thought – *The shape of a woman's knowing becomes the shape of a woman's being, doing and becoming.*

## EPILOGUE

*I am used to being a cultural outsider an “outsider within”...*

*Hart (2002) via Lorde (1984)*

As noted in chapter 9, I am a White thirty-something mother of two amazing school-aged boys who consistently finds herself striving and struggling for a balance of health and well-being, but my likeness to the mothers in this study does somewhat close at this juncture. For the past twenty years, I have consistently and openly contested the patriarchal control, conservative religious traditions, and the notions of rural living as a woman and mother within the community. Unlike the participants in this study, I am an occupational therapist. In addition, I lived outside of the cultural context for several years within two major cities in the United States in my early twenties, which affected how I think and thought about my home community and context. What I gleaned while conducting this study has greatly influenced and answered many questions about my constantly shifting identity. My identity has been in constant motion and I suspect will remain on a path of reformation my entire adult life. Additionally, I gleaned through conducting this inquiry that I have consistently lived among men who have not bought into the patriarchal notions of this cultural context. If I may do so without too much contention, I would actually align them with the feminist poststructuralist notions of this study and this too I suspect is why my lived experience is different than a great majority of women in the community.

As an occupational therapist I have worked on the borders of traditional practice for the past fifteen years, which has greatly enhanced my understanding of human

occupation, challenges, and adaptations across the lifespan and within different cultural contexts. My philosophical stance of research related to human behavior and interaction have been greatly influenced by Yerxa (1998) who has been credited with founding occupational science. She believes, “Subjective, qualitative approaches to inquiry are more suited than experimental methods for the study of occupation because of occupation’s richness in symbolic meanings and the science’s ethical roots in occupational therapy” (p. 415). I now know, like many other novice researchers before me, that narrative inquiry will be my methodology of choice. Listening to, gaining understanding of, and putting into print stories of everyday life is the journey I wish to embark upon.

It is through this study that my identity shifted from a mother of school-aged children, wife, friend, and occupational therapist to the additional component of passionate researcher of rural women’s wellness issues. As I spiraled back with Laci, Roxy, Victoria, and Grace I was reminded of the gentle teachings of Mary and Anna, my two very insightful grandmothers. They were before their time in understanding the wisdom of nurturing self. They found refuge in nurturing self through planting their gardens, picking strawberries in the early morning, and/or making a flower arrangement for Tuesday afternoon lunch. These women are at the cornerstone of my story, my understanding about everything I know in this life and what I may come to know in the next. In honor of them and the four mothers who so graciously gave of there time and self for this narrative inquiry - I offer one final creative synthesis project which reflects my *significant translation* of coming to know and better understanding the informal learning needs of mothers in relation to self nurturance within this socio-cultural context.





*Figure 17.* Introduction to researcher's *significant translation* of the mothers' understanding of and engagement in self nurturance – "Learning by Heart with the Heart."



*Figure 18.* Representation of mothers' journey of nurturing self.

The center medallion represents the mothers' ascending spiral movement of stories. The feathers represent the initial flight and the unfolding of the mothers' constantly shifting identity throughout the inquiry process. The spiral extensions represent the mothers' ongoing understanding, navigation, and negotiation of nurturing self in the midst of their socio-cultural context.





Figure 19. Researcher's storied perception of mothers' journey of nurturing self.

To this end, I will want to share one more thought found in McAdam's (1993) book, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, which describes how this narrative inquiry has impacted the researcher who found the four mothers who willingly gave of their self, heart, and time to be amazing in their own right:

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. I must come to see in all its particulars the narrative of the self – the personal myth – that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years. It is a story I continue to revise, and tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living. (p. 11)

This inquiry has evoked in me a passion to continue to search out other mothers' stories within this socio-cultural context in hopes of assisting them find more of a balance in their everyday occupations of being a mother, wife, friend, worker, sister-in-law, and beyond. I feel it is through continued stories and discussions that the mothers and women in this community will find self and gain insight to the needs of their minds, bodies, and spirits.

## Appendix A

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

#### The Pennsylvania State University

ORP USE ONLY:  
**The Pennsylvania State University**  
**Office for Research Protections**

**Approval Date: 6/23/04 – J. Mathieu - Expiration Date: 6/9/05 – J. Mathieu**

**Social Science Institutional Review Board**

**Title:** Learning Self Nurturance and Unlearning Patriarchy: A Feminist Poststructural Narrative Inquiry of Rural Mothers' Constantly Shifting Identity

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 7786 Warmspring Rd., Greencastle, PA 17225

**Advisor:** Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell, E-mail: [ejt11@psu.edu](mailto:ejt11@psu.edu), Phone: 717-948-6640  
 Penn State Harrisburg, 777 W. Harrisburg Pike, Harrisburg, PA 17057

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to shed light on the lived stories of mothers of school-aged children who have identified that they are in a constant struggle to engage in and learn more about nurturing self within a rural, religiously conservative, and historically patriarchal-driven environment.
2. **Procedures:** Participation includes completion of two interviews and keeping a reflective journal for two weeks after the interviews are complete. You will also have the opportunity to volunteer to complete a 'synthesis' project.
3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are few risks to participating in this study; however participants may experience slight discomfort in being asked questions about themselves, their families and/or communities.
4. **Benefits:** You may learn more about your past, present & current engagement and understanding of nurturing self and how it affects your general health and well-being. This research could help other mothers better understand their routine of and the benefits of nurturing self.
5. **Duration/Time:** The interviews will last approximately 2 hours each and will be audio taped. Journal writing will be completed for a time-frame of two weeks for 10-30 minutes daily. The optional final synthesis project may take 1-2 hours.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Only the researcher will know who you are. If this research is published, no information that would identify you would be written. The researcher and her primary advisor may read the journals and see your final synthesis projects. Audiotapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home until one year after the study is complete. The audiotapes will be destroyed 5 years after the research is concluded.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You have the right to ask questions and to have questions answered. Contact Angela Hissong at (717)597-2594/anh1@psu.edu or Dr. Tisdell 717-948-6640/ejt11@psu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.
8. **Compensation:** You will not receive monetary compensation for participating in this study.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** You do not have to participate in this study. You can end your participation at any time by telling the person in charge. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this study. If you consent to participate in this study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix B**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. In what ways have current family beliefs/values or family of origin influenced decisions of how you nurture self?
2. How has your culturally defined role as a mother and the primary caretaker impacted and/or influenced your decision and/or ability to nurture self?
3. In what ways have current and prior religious beliefs and/or value systems influenced the decisions made by you regarding your engagement of nurturing self?
4. How has living in a rural community impacted your decisions to nurture self?
5. How has living in a primarily patriarchal-driven community impacted your decisions to nurture self?
6. What are the facilitators and/or barriers you can identify within your cultural environment that have assisted and/or hindered your engagement in nurturing self?
7. Why is it so difficult to nurture self within this socio-cultural environment?
8. How will your self nurturance story change in the future secondary to your participation in this inquiry?



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## VITA

### Angela Nanette Hissong

Prior to her doctoral studies, Angela earned a baccalaureate degree in occupational therapy from the Medical College of Virginia. She also earned a baccalaureate degree in biology focusing on health sciences and a master's degree in special education from Shippensburg University.

She has practiced as an occupational therapist for fifteen years, with particular concentration on child and adolescent development, women's health and well-being, and occupational therapy education. Currently, she is the director of the occupational therapy program at The Pennsylvania State University. In this role, she has taught courses in conceptual foundations of occupational therapy, complementary therapies, behavioral health, pediatrics, assistive and environmental technology, and research. In addition, she has served as the primary advisor and fieldwork level I coordinator for occupational therapy students.

Angela has earned numerous grants to enhance the academic experience of occupational therapy students and the occupational performance needs of children with disabilities. She has facilitated a multitude of community-based and emerging practice fieldwork level I experiences with the purpose of actively engaging students in hands-on learning in the areas of occupational performance, occupational challenges, and occupational adaptations.

She is a member of The Pennsylvania State University's *Scholars Institute* and *Commission for Women*. She holds memberships in the *Alpha Sigma Lambda* and *Pi Lambda Theta* honorary societies. In 2002, along with the seven amazing women in her doctoral cohort, she received the outstanding graduate student in adult education award from *The Learned Society of the Whispering Pines*.