

Women Who Are Mothers: EXPERIENCES OF SELF-DEFINITION

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ABSTRACT

Recent literature has challenged traditional views of women's development of self. Many scholars have suggested that the traditional concept of self-as-autonomous being does not reflect women's experiences. Further, it has been suggested that for women who are mothers the conceptualization of self-as-autonomous is particularly questionable. With no other apparent research existing to illuminate the nature and experience of self-definition for women who are mothers, this study addressed the question: "What is the experience of defining self for women who are mothers?". A human caring methodology which integrated elements of interpretive phenomenology and feminist inquiry was employed to explore this research question. Seven women who were actively engaged in motherhood participated in the study. Data gathering involved two individual interviews with each of the participants and concluded with the women participating in a focus group where the preliminary findings were discussed. The study revealed two interrelated aspects including, (a) a description of the nature of self, and (b) the ongoing process of defining self. The nature of self consisted of three themes. The themes which arose were: (a) self as a multiplicity of parts, (b) self as a relational process, and (c) self as a synthesis. The process of defining self consisted of three phases: (a) non-reflective doing, (b) living in the shadows, and (c) reclaiming and discovering self. Each of these phases were continually experienced with different ones dominating at varying times and in varying situations. Within each of the phases, a number of themes were described and illuminated. The study pointed to the

definition and their experience of health. In addressing the implications for practice, therefore, a framework for health promoting practice to support women's process of self-definition was developed.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'self' is prominent throughout the psychological literature. The inquiry into the nature of the self as an organizing principle in human development and experience has been a fundamental aspect of psychological, philosophical, and spiritual investigation (Mahoney, 1991; Surrey, 1991).

Wide-ranging differences exist among theorists in regards to what constitutes self, assumptions underlying the nature of self, and methodologies used for studying self. Some of the differing views of self include self as illusion, self as object, the looking glass self, self as social persona, self as defensive center, and self as process (Mahoney, 1991). Markus & Nurius (1986) also talk about the notion of multiple selves, and contend that in addition to the self in existence in the present moment there are numerous 'possible selves'--the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming.

Although there are numerous theories concerning self, overall self is thought to provide the vision and structure of a person's life. Mahoney (1991) contends the evidence is now substantial that elements of self pervade all human experience. "The interdependence of selfhood and knowledge processes makes it possible for the generation and assimilation of information to be regulated by self-identity patterns thus far structured, and this in turn makes possible the continuous ordering of experience along a unitary and coherent dimension" (Guidano, 1991, p. 9).

This view of self as being a fundamental determinate in human experience, has also been discussed in the nursing literature in relation to people's experience of health. In fact, nurse theorists such as Watson

(1988), Parse (1990), and Newman (1986) seem to imply that the processes of evolving health and defining self are not only interrelated but are in some ways synonymous. Watson (1988) for example, describes health as "unity and harmony within the mind, body and soul" (p.48). Watson maintains that health is associated with the degree of congruence between the self as perceived and the self as experienced. Similarly, Parse (1990) describes health as a process of human becoming. In describing the unfolding of health, Parse refers to people as creative authors and describes health for the 'creative author' as a personal commitment and choice. Newman (1986) views health as the process of transformation to higher levels of consciousness. Newman maintains that the gaining of self-knowledge and understanding (evolution of consciousness) provides concomitant gains in freedom. As one gains an understanding of self, one can work in relation with the pattern of self. According to Newman, health is the evolving pattern of the whole life, "the process of the evolution of consciousness is also the process of health" (p. 43).

Newman (1979) describes the goal of nursing as one of assisting people "to utilize the power that is within them as they evolve toward higher levels of consciousness" (p. 67). According to Newman, people need a partner in the process of expanding consciousness. Nursing practice is therefore focused on "recognizing the pattern of the person in interaction with the environment" (p.88) (understanding that person's experience) and supporting the person in making and implementing choices that emerge through his or her increased knowledge and understanding of the pattern of self. In a similar vein, Watson (1988) describes the goal of nursing as helping "persons to gain a higher degree of harmony within

the mind, body, and soul which generates self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-healing, and self-care processes while allowing increasing diversity...the nurse helps individuals find meaning in their existence, disharmony, suffering, and turmoil and promotes self-control, choice, and self-determination" (p.49).

From the preceding discussion it appears that the experience of self and the experience of health can be considered to be integrally related. For nurses to promote health requires that they simultaneously promote people's gaining of self-knowledge and expression of self. For nurses working with women who are mothers, this constitutes a challenging task. Promoting women's experience of self requires an understanding of how women experience and define self. Peck (1986) maintains that at present there is little knowledge about how women define self. Within the developmental literature the formation of a sense of self has long been considered as a differentiating process involving the separation of oneself from others (Miller, 1991). Most developmental theory stresses the importance of individualistic self-definition. Theorists stress autonomy, self-reliance, independence, and self-actualization as part of the development of a healthy, mature self (Surrey, 1991). Recently, however, several writers have suggested that this traditional notion of self does not fit women's experience (Miller, 1991; Rabuzzi, 1988; Gilligan, 1982; Heilbrun, 1988). These writers argue that in contrast to the individualistic concept of self, a woman's self is developed and defined in-relation with others. This conception of self-in-relation involves the recognition that for women the self is organized and developed in the

context of important relationships and that the primary experience of self is relational (Surrey, 1991).

In particular, Rabuzzi (1988) asserts this relational experience of self is especially true for women who are mothers. By definition the term mother is relational--without a child a woman cannot logically be called mother. There is not a motherself without a relation. In discussing motherself Rabuzzi (1988) asserts that motherselfhood is in fact a paradox. Motherselfhood contradicts our intuitive notion of selfhood as existing within a single being. Rather, in motherself there is a dual consciousness--instead of my needs it is our needs--a far different orientation. Chodorow (1974) suggests that this relational way of being makes the establishment and maintenance of a sense of self a difficult psychological issue for Western women.

A kind of guilt that Western women express seems to grow out of and to reflect lack of adequate self/other distinctions and a sense of inescapable embeddedness in relationships to others ...this happens in the most familiar instance, in a sense of diffuse responsibility for everything connected to the welfare of her family and the happiness and success of her children (Chodorow, 1974, p.58).

Similarly, Oakley (1981) maintains that a major expectation of a good mother which exists in western society is abrogation of self. This idea of relationship versus self is supported by Davies & Welch (1986) who investigated how women experienced and made sense of their situations during the period of intensive mothering when their children were of preschool age. These writers concluded "the problem for mothers, as we see

it, is in the fusion between responsibility and self-sacrifice, a fusion created out of current family structures and current beliefs about children's needs....It is in specific situations where they are making critical life choices, that their choices are influenced, not by attending to themselves as individuals with rights, but by attending to the network of relationships in which they are caught up" (Davies & Welch, 1986, p.422). Along a similar vein, Lemkau & Landau (1986) describe what they term the selfless syndrome which they identified through their clinical experience with women. "While their symptoms are diverse, women with the selfless syndrome have in common a set of entrenched ideological beliefs prescribing self-denial and a striving for satisfaction through vicarious means" (Lemkau & Landau, 1986). The literature suggests then, that there is often a confusing fusion for women who are mothers, a fusion between responsibility and self-sacrifice, and between self as autonomous and self as a mother-in-relation.

#### Significance of the Study

The preceding discussion indicates that womens' definition and expression of self appears to play a fundamental part in their health and in their overall life experience. For women who are mothers, the experience of defining self presents a perplexing challenge when considered in light of current views of development and selfhood. Scholars such as Miller (1991), Gilligan (1982), and Belenky et al, (1986) have offered alternative ways of thinking about womens' experience of developing self, however to my knowledge there is no research or literature which illuminates the interplay between self-definition and

motherhood. Does the edict for self-sacrifice and abnegation of self in fact hinder a woman's process of defining her self and thereby her health? What is the experience of defining self for women who are mothers?

Answering these questions is critical if helping professionals are to promote health within women and within families. Labonte (1989) alleges health essentially exists in the "dynamic moments of our social relations". In a similar vein, Gerson, Alport and Richardson (1990) point out that the well-being and self-esteem of parents and children are positively correlated--that an increase in the well-being and self-esteem of one will affect the other. If a woman's health is promoted, it is likely her family's overall health will also be promoted. Pointing to the pivotal role women play in families, Walker (1989) maintains that "everyday and ultimate responsibility for marriage, housework and parenthood usually remains with women" (p.870). Walker further contends that in general a central component in motherwork is maintaining the overall stability of the family. If a woman does not feel stable (and healthy) in her self it would seem unlikely that she would be able to provide this overall stability for her family. Regardless then, of whether helping professionals are promoting health in women or promoting health in families it seems important they have an understanding of women/mothers' experience of self-definition. Having an awareness and understanding of women/mothers' experience of self-definition could enhance helping professionals' ability to promote health in women who are mothers and in families.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the experience of self-definition for women who are mothers. Specifically, this study will address the question: What is the experience of defining self for women who are mothers? It is envisioned that the knowledge gained through exploring this question will enhance mothers' and families' awareness and understanding of women/mother's experience of self-definition. As Parse (1990) describes this increased awareness and knowledge of self will promote the unfolding of health and personal choice. In addition, it is anticipated the knowledge gleaned will serve to sensitize health care professionals to the possibilities inherent within women/mothers' experience of defining a self. With this sensitivity they may be better able to support the process of self-definition and to promote the unfolding of health within women and their families.

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"For self is a sea boundless and measureless"

-Kahlil Gibran

The idea of a person as a unique life process began to flourish during the Renaissance (Mahoney, 1991). Out of the Renaissance emerged two general approaches to human existence characteristic of the Western mind. These two approaches included Enlightenment and Romanticism. The Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment stressed rationality, empirical science, and a sceptical secularism (Taylor, 1939). For enlightened thinkers reality was ultimately located on a plane consisting of objects whose actions and reactions were governed by stable laws (Polkinghorne, 1988). Descartes, considered the founder of Enlightenment (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), emphasized the dualism of mind and body. For Descartes body was of the material world and was viewed mechanistically and functionally (Taylor, 1989; Tarnas, 1991). This dissociation between mind and body is commonly described as Cartesian (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Descartes' ethic called for disengagement from world and body and the assumption of an instrumental stance towards them (Taylor, 1989). It was thought that by abstracting objective time and space from the original human experience of the world, it was possible to obtain a more accurate depiction of the world as it really was (Polkinghorne, 1988). Taylor (1989) describes how the self of disengagement and rational control has become a familiar modern figure. Developed to its fullest through Locke and the Enlightenment thinkers he inspired, this punctual self "has become one way

of construing ourselves, which we find hard to shake off" (Taylor, 1989, p. 160).

In contrast to Cartesianism, Romanticism the second approach, tended to express the aspects of human experience suppressed by "the Enlightenment's overriding spirit of rationalism" (Tarnas, 1991, p.367). Associated with Rousseau (who was subsequently followed by Goethe, Schiller, and Herder) this side of western sensibility fully emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Tarnas, 1991). In contrast to Enlightenment thinkers, the Romantics viewed the world as a unitary organism as opposed to an atomistic machine, venerated inspiration rather than reason, and "affirmed the inexhaustible drama of human life rather than the calm predictability of static abstractions" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 367). The Romantic thinkers believed in the multiplicity of realities and in the uniqueness of each object, event and experience.

Both of these approaches, Cartesian and Romanticism, continue to influence the Western world's view of self. As Taylor (1989) describes, these two big and many-sided cultural transformations, the Enlightenment and Romanticism with its accompanying expressive conception of (woman/man) have made us what we are...What I mean is rather that our cultural life, our self-conceptions, our moral outlooks still operate in the wake of these great events (p. 393).

According to Taylor, all families of modern views of self, draw on these frontiers in different ways and combinations in creating their world view and theory of self.

This chapter will begin by providing an overview of the predominant world views that inspire theories of self. Influential theories of adult development of self will then be examined with particular attention given to contextual theories of self. Following this review of adult development of self, recent work and theories in the area of womens' development of self will be considered.

#### The Characterization of Self: Four Contrasting World Views

In considering the predominant world views or theories of self which exist today, Pepper (1942) provides a schema which yields clarity regarding the guiding perceptions and thinking underlying each. Pepper believed that metaphors, like spotlights, guide perceptions and thinking and thus create and restrict world views. Reflecting on the history of mankind, Pepper identified four metaphors which he believed reflected the predominant scientific world views. Sarbin (1986) uses these four metaphors which include formism, mechanicism, organicism, and contextualism, as organizers for the existing views of self. This typology is somewhat of a simplification in regards to existing theories, however it does characterize some of the central differences between the varying approaches to understanding self.

#### Formism: The Form of Things

According to the world view characterized by formism, objects can be classified on the basis of their perceived forms (Sarbin, 1986). Hermans & Kempen (1993) identify personality trait theories in which people are classified and compared according to psychological traits such as intelligence, aggression, anxiety, shyness and so on as familiar examples of psychological theories of self which evolve out of formism.

Another example presented by Hermans & Kempen is the use of diagnostic categories such as the ones presented by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). These examples aim at revealing how people's personality or character has been formed and the individual differences that exist, using general characteristics or traits. A central criticism of this world view of self is that it restricts individuality of a person's particulars, in that the individual can not be more than a combination of general trait categories (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Hermans & Kempen argue that as long as the description is confined to trait categories nothing will be discerned about the particular events of a person's history or about the personal meaning of a trait to the person.

#### Mechanicism: Cause-Effect Relationships

Mechanism is considered to be the dominant world view in Western civilization with the machine being its root metaphor (Sarbin, 1986; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). The mechanist world view sees events in nature (and self) as resulting from external stimulation. A mechanistic model of development characteristically focuses on the role of events as antecedents to various response outcomes. Mechanicism regards a person as reactive to external stimulation. Sarbin (1986) identifies behaviorism and radical empiricism as movements which exemplify this world view. Hermans & Kempen (1993) include the problem solving model in this category and maintain that the problem with mechanistic models is that they preclude the possibility that the same event as an antecedent factor may have qualitatively different meanings for different people. These writers provide the example of Dohrenwend's model of stress responses, in which

the death of a significant other is defined as a stressor. For some people the death of a significant other may have the meaning of a relief of tension, a consolation, or so forth. The mechanistic view of development as antecedent response fails to allow for this individual variation.

#### Organicism: Maturation and Growth

The third world view is the Organismic view, which has the root metaphor of an organism as opposed to a machine or a set of forms (Sarbin, 1986). In this world view, the components of the organism are seen as parts of an organized whole. The cause of change is teleological in nature in that there is a goal-giving unity and direction to the organized process of development. Organicism is associated in philosophy with Hegel, and examples of psychological theories include Maslow's self-actualization, Roger's personal growth, and developmental theories which depend upon the notion of stages or tasks of maturation. Theorists whose work reflects the organismic view include Erikson, Havighurst, Levinson, Piaget, and Kohlberg (Sarbin, 1986; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Organismic theories differ from theories derived from the mechanistic world view in that they are governed by final causation as opposed to efficient causation and they describe qualitative changes in contrast to quantitative changes (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). A criticism of the organismic theories is that they typically presume the existence of a fixed sequence of developmental stages or tasks, with one era or stage leading invariably to another. In addition, many scholars question the underlying tenet that the same processes are involved in the same order and in the same way for all people (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991; Gilligan, 1991).

### Contextualism: The Historical Nature of Events

The fourth world view is contextualism in which the central element is the historical event that can only be understood when it is located in the context of time and space (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). History in this sense does not necessarily mean an event in the past, but rather history is viewed as an attempt to re-present events. Sarbin (1986) describes the imagery of the historical event metaphor as that of an ongoing texture of multiply elaborated events, each being influenced by collateral episodes, and by multiple actors who engage in actions. There is a constant change in the patterns of situations and in positions occupied by actors (Hermans & Kempen). Inherent within contextualism is constant change, with the integration of conditions, events and actors altering the context for future events. Contextualism views any event in the context of other events, and presupposes a multiplicity of events in which the past, present, and future form a coherent and interconnected totality. Contextualism is reflected historically in the work of scholars such as William James, John Dewey, and George Mead, and more currently by theorists such as Guidano, Hermans, and Gergen.

In summary, the four root metaphors which reflect the predominant scientific world views are formism, mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. Formism classifies objects (including people) by general traits, types or characteristics in an ahistorical manner. Mechanicism places events in antecedent-consequent relationships, where the antecedent functions as the cause. Organism, which has traditionally been the most influential metaphor for developmental psychology (Harter, 1983) presupposes a predictable sequence of developmental stages or tasks.

Contextualism is sensitive to the particulars of time and space and highlights an event or experience in the context of other events.

In considering womens' experience of defining self, many scholars have emphasized the importance of a model which will adequately capture the complexity of womens' life circumstances (Belenky, et al, 1986; Carlsen, 1988; Josselson, 1987; Miller, 1991; Peck, 1986; Surrey, 1991). In addition, Carlson (1988) contends that we need a developmental model to show how culture has shaped men and women in differing ways. Along this line, constructivist psychologists have argued that context is an essential element in the development of self and one that is not considered in existing developmental literature (Kegan, 1982; Mahoney, 1991). Mahoney (1991) emphasizes that the meaning of self varies with cultures, ages, and ideologies. Although in Western cultures the view of self is often as a self-contained or body-bound entity, research suggests that cultural experiences and gender-role stereotyping often exert a significant influence on the development of self. With these considerations in mind I have chosen contextualism as the root metaphor that will guide the explorations in this study. I believe the theoretical perspectives that have evolved out of the world view of contextualism address the above concerns. In reviewing the literature, I have, therefore focused on theories which I perceive as evolving out of the world view of contextualism, with particular emphasis on ones relevant to womens' development.

#### Contextual Theories of Self

Throughout the 1950s the discipline of psychology turned almost exclusively to the practice of behaviorism (Polkinghorne, 1988). During

this reign of behaviorism, most attention within psychology was given to "behaviors and publicly accessible data" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.101). By the 1970's however, many of the shortcomings of this approach were apparent and the discipline of psychology began to open itself to the investigation of cognitive processes and human experience (Polkinghorne, 1988; Mahoney, 1991; Harter, 1986; Schlenker, 1985). This renewed interest in human experience led to a resurgence of interest in the study of self. A large majority of this interest (and the subsequent inquiry into self) has evolved out of the world view of contextualism.

As described earlier, the contextual view of self places emphasis on the notion of the historical event. Concepts which are integral aspects of the contextual view include the concepts of time, space, and narrative. Since an understanding of these concepts is essential to understanding the theories of self which evolve out of contextualism, prior to discussing specific theories I will provide a brief explanation of these concepts and the relationship between them. Following this explanation I will examine the work of prevalent scholars in the contextual view of self. For discussion purposes, the examination of this work will be organized according to the concepts of the decentralized self, self as polyphonic novel, the dialogical self, self as a process of valuation, and self as social being.

#### Time, Space and Narrative

Polkinghorne (1988) describes narrative as the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. According to Polkinghorne (1988) narrative is one of the forms of expressiveness through which life events are joined into coherent, meaningful, and unified themes. The events

within the narrative are marked according to different segments of time. This temporality of human experience is punctuated not only according to one's own life, but also according to one's place within the longer time spans of history and social evolution (Polkinghorne, 1988). "Narrative is the mode of meaning construction that displays these various experiences of time" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 126).

For Ricoeur (1984\86) time became mortal as it was articulated through narrative. Narrative time is not analogous to the traditional view of time which represents time as a succession of "nows". Rather, as Polkinghorne (1988) describes, narrative corresponds with Augustine's suggestion (which was later accepted by Heidegger) that the present is not a singular notion but rather a threefold one. Present includes "a present about the future--expectation; a present about the past--memory; and a present about the present--attention" (Polkinghorne, 1998, p. 129). In narrative, time is a multiple structure of the threefold present (Crites, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988).

An essential feature of any narrative is emplotment. Through emplotment events are constructed and interconnected in such a way that meaningful structures are developed (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). In contrast to chronicles where events are chronologically ordered, narratives have many ways of combining events and their relations, and it is in the combination of events that narratives manifest their coherence (Polkinghorne, 1988). "A story is made out of events, to the extent that plot makes events into a story" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 131).

The employment of narrative as root metaphor of self is founded in the work of William James. James (cited in Hermans & Kempen, 1993)

identified the terms I and Me as the two main components of self. The I was equal to the self-as-knower and was seen as continuously organizing and interpreting experience in a subjective manner. For James, the Me was the empirical self that describes all that the person can call his or her own, including body, clothes, house, family, reputation and so forth. A feature that distinguished James from Descartes was the inclusion of the body as part of the self. The I can never be dissolved from the Me, and consequently, the I cannot be thought of as separate from the body. Another essential aspect of James' theory was the view of self as extended toward the environment.

Building on James' work, Sarbin (1986) translated the I-Me distinction into a narrative framework. Sarbin contends the I stands for the author, and the Me for the actor or narrative figure. With the self as author, the I can imaginatively construct a story in which the Me is the actor. Polkinghorne (1988) describes the approach to the self as narrative or story, as shifting from focusing on one's identity as an underlying substance of sameness (What am I?) to focusing on the process of actualizing what is potentially possible in one's life (Who am I?). In a Narrative framework, the experience of self is organized along the temporal dimension in the same manner that the events of a narrative are organized by the plot into a unified story (Polkinghorne, 1988).

The self is that temporal order of human existence whose story begins with birth, has as its middle the episodes of a lifespan, and ends with death. It is the plot that gathers together these events into a coherent and meaningful unity, and thereby gives context and significance to the contribution

that the individual episodes make toward the overall configuration that is the person. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 152).

The self as narrative perspective views context as an essential aspect of self. As Polkinghorne describes, the plot of a normal self is bound by the events and environment in which a person lives and expresses him or her self, as well as the imaginative possibilities. One does not simply act out a plot but, rather, the self-plot gathers into significance all of the events, accidents, organic or social givens, and unintended consequences as well as personal motivation (Polkinghorne, 1988). Because the plot is context bound, and because contexts are always changing, new plots or changes in existing plots within the narrative continually emerge (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

The concepts of time, space, and narrative are the building blocks of most theories within the contextual world view. The theories that I will describe within the contextual world view of self evolve out of and integrate these ideas. For discussion purposes, the examination of these theories will be organized according to the concepts of the decentralized self, self as polyphonic novel, the dialogical self, self as a process of valuation, and self as social being.

#### Theories of The Decentralized Self

Hermans & Kempen (1993) maintain that a narrative approach to self results in the decentralization of the self. Whereas Descartes supposed a highly centralized ego in full control of its own thoughts, recent theorists within the contextual world view conceive of self as functioning as a multiplicity of voices (Bakhtin, 1984; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen,

1993; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Martindale, 1980; McAdams, 1985b). The narrative self is a decentralized multiplicity of divergent and even opposed characters that are related to one another in a dialogical way (Hermans, Rijks & Kempen, 1993).

This view of a complex, multifaceted self is in keeping with the views of the American pragmatists including John Dewey, John Pierce, William James, and George Mead. Current authors who transcribe to this view include Gergen (1972) who proposes that the self is a collection of masks each of which are tied to a particular set of social circumstances. Similarly, Markus & Nurius (1986) describe the presence of possible selves that are differentially activated by the social situation and determine the nature of the working self-concept. "Possible selves are represented in the same way as the here-and-now self (imaginal, semantic) and can be viewed as cognitive bridges between the present and future, specifying how individuals may change from how they are not to what they will become" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 961). These writers argue that the internal existence of these possible selves explains the frequent lack of agreement between individuals' self-perceptions and how they are viewed by others, since these possible selves are only known to oneself.

Coinciding with Gergen and Markus & Nurius, Mair (1977) describes the notion of self as a community of selves. Mair suggests that people incorporate any number of selves, some of which persist and others which may be transitory.

McAdams (1985) conceived the self as composed of a number of imagoes, idealized and personified images of self that function as main characters in an adult's life story. For McAdams the structure of identity is a story

complete with setting, scenes, characters, plot, and recurrent themes. Identity formation is the process of constructing a self-defining story. The main characters in the story are imagoes. McAdams' imago is similar to Jung's archetype, and interestingly data from the study of 50 men and women at midlife provide support for Jung's notion that archetypes (or imagoes) are often arranged in the self as a pair of opposites and that the integration of these opposites is a hallmark of maturity in self-development.

Sampson (1985) provides an interesting discussion of decentralized personhood including the notion of decentralized governance of self. Using the analogy of the decentralized governance of nonstate communities, Sampson argues that in the decentralized self each person's many aspects are not fragmented and distanced from one another or hierarchically ordered on behalf of a ruling center, but remain in full interconnectedness and communication. Sampson emphasizes, however, that order rather than chaos emerges only when there is an expanded interconnectedness among elements that need not be hierarchically ruled once they become aware of their interrelationships.

#### Self as Polyphonic Novel

The decentralization of self is further expanded by Mikhail Bakhtin (1929/1984). Bakhtin's book "Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics" provides a significant contribution to understanding the nature of the decentralized self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Bakhtin described Dostoevsky's creation of a polyphonic novel. The central characteristic of the polyphonic novel is that it is composed of a number of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, characters not illuminated by a single authorial

consciousness or merged in the unity of a single event. Rather, Dostoevsky's characters embody independent and mutually opposing viewpoints, all of which are engaged in dialogical relationships. In the polyphonic novel there is not one single author, but several authors or thinkers, each having his/her own voice and telling his/her own story.

For Bakhtin the idea of dialogue opens the possibility to characterize the inner world of a person as an interpersonal relationship. As Hermans & Kempen (1993) describe "by transforming an inner thought of a particular character into an utterance, dialogical relations spontaneously occur between this utterance and the utterance of imaginal others" (p. 41).

Hermans & Kempen (1993) maintain that the metaphor of the polyphonic novel expands on the narrative conception of I as author and Me as actor by going one step farther than Sarbin's notion of the self-narrative as a single author. The conception of the self as a polyphonic novel permits the person to live in a multiplicity of worlds with each world having its own author telling a story relatively independent of the authors of the other worlds (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

In the polyphonic translation of the self there is not an overarching I organizing the constituents of the Me. Instead, the spatial character of the polyphonic novel leads to the supposition of a decentralized multiplicity of I positions that function like relatively independent authors, telling their stories about their respective Me's as actors. The I moves, in an imaginal space, from the one to the other

position, from which different or even contrasting views of the world are possible (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p. 47).

### The Dialogical Self

Herman's, Kempen & van Loon (1992) maintain that from a constructionist point of view the self can be conceived of as basically dialogical. Building on the notion of the polyphonic self, these authors describe the self as a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I positions in an imaginal landscape.

In contrast with the individual concept of self, the dialogical self is founded on the assumption that there are many I positions which can be occupied by the same person. Guidano (1991) also acknowledges this dialogical concept of self. Guidano describes personal identity as an ongoing process whose recursive nature gives unity and historical continuity to the individual community of self-subsystems.

According to Hermans & Kempen (1993) the dialogical self emerges through four developments: a) act, b) memory, c) imagination, and d) language. From the moment of birth people act and interact. By developing a memory, the self is able to do more than live purely in the moment. Imagination provides the possibility of combining real events in such a way that new structures emerge. Imagination is a constructive activity that uses realistic elements but combines them so that new meaning structures are produced. Language allows the self to exchange the things remembered and the products of imagination and to share them with other human beings.

One of the major assumptions of the concept of dialogical self is the existence of a relationship between self and other. For a relationship to

exist requires that there also be some differentiation between the two. Hermans & Kempen describe this differentiation as simultaneously an orientation to the other and a separation from the other. These writers use the image of a screen as the self boundary which people carry with them at all times, and which at any time they can interpose between themselves and the outer situation. According to Hermans & Kempen, the inside and the outside world function as highly open systems that have intensive transactional relationships. In this sense, the dialogical self is a social self in that other people may occupy positions in the multivoiced self (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992).

Corresponding with Sampson's (1985) notion of decentralized governance, in the dialogical self different I positions may govern at any one time. The I positions represent different anchor points that may organize the other I positions at a given point in time. As Guidano (1991) describes, because of the integrative capacity of self, at any moment an individual has a perceived identity that represents merely a single example of his or her possible self images.

#### Self as a Process of Valuation

There are numerous authors writing in the area of the narrative self. Although all have contributed to the knowledge and advancement of self as narrative, I have found Hermans & Kempen (1993) particularly helpful in informing my thinking and understanding. Hermans & Kempen have developed a Valuation theory of self. Central to this theory is the concept of self as an organized process of valuation. The process aspect refers to the historical nature of human experience and intimates a spatio-temporal orientation. "The person lives in the present and is, from a specific

point in space and time, oriented toward the past as well as the future" (Hermans & Kempen, 1993, p.81). The organizational aspect emphasizes that through the process of self-reflection the person brings the spatio-temporal aspects into a composite whole (a valuation system). In other words, the self is envisioned as a developing narrative of personal meanings attributed to events considered as relevant in one's individual history.

Supporting Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic self, Hermans & Kempen describe the notions of relative autonomy of the I positions, and the notion of dialogue as integral aspects of their theory. According to these writers, the multiplicity of selves (or I positions) are not autonomous, rather, self is seen as having a synthesizing role where, despite the existence of parts that try to maintain their autonomy, there is a continuous attempt within the self to make it whole. The authors characterize this synthesizing activity as consisting of two antagonistic forces in the self; one centrifugal, another centripetal. The centrifugal force refers to the tendency of the different parts to maintain and increase their autonomy, while the centripetal force attempts to bring these parts together and create a field in which different characters form a community. In valuation theory, the self does not integrate the subparts in any final way but, rather, is always in the process of synthesis. This process occurs between the parts of self as well as between those parts and the outside world. Hermans & Kempen (1993) use the image of a composer to illustrate self as a valuation process.

In particular, we have in mind a composer of contemporary music who invents new music by letting himself or herself be

inspired by a vast array of sounds, intonation of voices, folk melodies, visual impressions, music from other composers, music from previous eras, other styles, etc. (p. 96)

In so far as the composer listens to these voices, he or she takes a decentralized position. In addition, as the composer combines a great heterogeneity of musical material, new musical structures are produced and unexpected relationships emerge.

### Self as Social Being

Schlenker (1985) maintains that different angles of entry for examining the self lead to different perspectives of self, and create variations in how self is viewed. One such variation is within the field of social psychology. As Schenkler describes, social psychologists who work in psychology tend to emphasize the individual, with social life being the particular habitat of interest. Social psychologists working in sociology on the other hand, emphasize the social, with the individual being a key agent. Up to this point most of the literature reviewed has described the psychological perspective of self. I turn now to some consideration of the literature concerning the social view of self.

Symbolic interactionism has perhaps been the most influential approach in our understanding of the social self. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the symbolic meanings attached to objects, activities, and events. The fundamental premise uniting symbolic interactionists is the belief that the individual and society are inseparable and interdependent units. According to symbolic interactionists it is through social interaction that people learn how objects and events are generally interpreted and dealt with by members of their society, and this learning

affects the evaluative reactions and behavior toward events or objects (Schlenker, 1985). People are viewed as active agents who develop plans out of the bits and pieces supplied by culture, and who attempt to execute these plans in social encounters (Schenkler, 1985). The self, as both an internal cognitive representation and a set of public characteristics and roles presented in interaction, is viewed as developing through the social interaction process (Schlenker, 1985). In contrast to some perspectives of self, in symbolic interactionism the self is not considered to exist in society, but rather the self and society mutually interact, with each being fully comprehensible only in the context of the other (Schlenker, 1985).

Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead are most often credited as the founders of Symbolic interactionist thought (Schlenker, 1985). Cooley, who found it impossible to consider the self as existing in isolation, is most widely identified with the notion of the looking glass self. The looking glass self is based on the idea that the raw material for the formation of self consists of reflections of the person provided by others (Scheibe, 1985). Mead's perspective contrasts with Cooley's in that his notion of self is not one where self looks at its reflection in a passive mirror, but rather Mead suggests the self takes the role of "the other" (Scheibe, 1985). Mead describes what he terms the generalized other which consists of the community or social group whose attitudes an individual gradually takes toward him or her self. Hermans & Kempen (1993) differentiate the dialogical self from Mead's view of self by stating that as opposed to a multiplicity of I's in an interconnected dialogue, Mead's generalized other is internalized and as a result cannot function as a

relatively autonomous voice in the self. In addition, these writers maintain Mead's conception of the I lacks intentionality and purpose and therefore cannot play a role as author. For these reasons, Mead's conception of self is not considered dialogical in its nature.

Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective of social life has been another influential approach with symbolic interactionism (Schlenker, 1985). Goffman argued that social interactions consist of performances by the parties involved. According to Goffman, people's actions are transformed into performances that present images of self for the social world to see. These images that people present to the social world vary from audience to audience, depending on who is in the audience and what is valued by that audience.

Another perspective of self which emphasises the social aspect, yet in a somewhat different manner than the symbolic interactionists, is Cushman's notion of the historically-situated self. Building on social constructionist thought, Cushman (1990) describes self as "the concept of the individual as articulated by the indigenous psychology of a particular cultural group, the shared understandings within a culture of what it is to be human" (p. 599). According to Cushman, there is no universal, transhistorical self, only local selves and local theories. For Cushman, the process of studying humans is not the same as reading persons as texts but, rather, is more like standing behind them and reading over their shoulder the cultural text from which they themselves are reading. An evolving self is a result of an evolving culture. Cushman asserts that humans do not have a basic, fundamental, pure human nature but, rather, humans are incomplete and unable to function unless embedded in a specific

cultural matrix. Cushman describes Western society's current self as the "empty self", a self which has "specific psychological boundaries, an internal locus of control, and a wish to manipulate the external world for its own personal ends" (p. 600). According to Cushman, our current construction of the empty self is a cultural paradox. The individual is expected to function in an autonomous isolated way, yet in order to develop this ability it is argued by psychologists that the individual must have an early environment that provides empathy, nurturance, attention, and mirroring. Cushman questions who is to provide this environment if healthy adults are autonomous, independent, ambitious and self-serving.

The social views of self certainly share many of the central aspects of the psychological theories which evolve out of the contextual view of self, but begin with the emphasis on the social aspect as opposed to the intrapersonal aspect. Both, however, emphasize the importance of culture in the process of defining self. Another body of literature which looks at the development of self and also emphasizes the centrality of culture is the recent work in the area of women's development of self. I believe the vast majority of this work evolves from a contextual world view and complements the work of scholars described in the preceding discussions.

#### Womens' Development of Self

In reviewing the literature that relates to development of self in adulthood I have chosen to include literature that specifically addresses the development of self in women. I have included this literature not because I necessarily believe that women's development of self is innately different from that of men, (consideration of that issue is well beyond

the scope of this study) but because numerous writers have spoken about the differing ways in which culture (context) shapes men and women (Chodorow, 1978; Belenky, et al, 1986; Gilligan, 1991; Surrey, 1991). This consideration of gender is done as part of a larger consideration of context. Gender is conceived of as an aspect of social organization which structures relations, and influences the ways in which women perceive, interpret, and respond to events (Crawford & Marecek, 1988; Tavris, 1992). Since gender influences womens' perception and interpretation of events, I believe it cannot help but influence womens' experience of defining self.

#### Developing Self: Individuation vs In-Relation

Developmental theory has often stressed the importance of separation from the mother at early stages of childhood development, from the family at adolescence, and from teachers and mentors in adulthood in order for the individual to form a distinct, separate identity (Surrey, 1991). Recently however, several writers in the area of womens' development have maintained that health can exist in a self that develops through relating rather than separating (Miller, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978). Gilligan (1982) argues that women not only define themselves in a context of human relationships, but judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. Womens' sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then maintain affiliations and relationships. According to Miller (1991), for women disruption of an affiliation is perceived not only as a loss of relationship but often as a loss of self.

Interestingly, Miller (1991) points out that few men ever attain such self sufficiency as espoused in the notion of individuation. Rather, men

are usually supported by wives, mothers or other women as evidenced in the Levinson studies. Miller raises the question whether these taken for granted models accurately reflect either womens' or men's lives. Lawler (1990) believes that traditional theories have dealt a "bad hand to everyone who buys into the game" (p.653). Lawler questions how women can not come up short and deficient when qualities valued in our society are stereotypical male qualities such as independence, emotional detachment, and aggressiveness. Likewise Lawler (1990) questions how men can not feel railroaded by the image of manhood which deprives them of their early childhood needs, disallows their feelings, and restricts their ability to fulfil their needs for relationship and connection in their lives. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to consider men's experience of self-definition, these arguments raise interesting questions concerning the fittingness of developmental theories which emphasize individuation for understanding womens' development of self.

In contrast to theories which stress separation and individuation, contextual theories of development assert that the process of human being and becoming always occurs in relation to others (Guidano, 1991; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Guidano describes how mirror-image techniques have shown that prior exposure to interaction with others is the fundamental requisite for great apes placed in front of a mirror to be able to refer the reflected image to themselves. "Thus, while being an event of our praxis of living that is at once discursive and actional, self-consciousness is always consciousness of others, existing by means of language and within a historical context" (Guidano, 1991, p.12). Hermans & Kempen (1993) provide an interesting variation from Miller's notion of

developing self-in-relation. For Hermans & Kempen self is a relationship. This self-as-relation (as opposed to Miller's self-in-relation) transcends the boundaries between the inside and the outside worlds. While Miller emphasizes the relational nature of self, this relational aspect seems to be focused on the relation of self with the other while Hermans & Kempen's multiplicity of I's include the other as an aspect of self.

In summary, there are both contrasting views and unanswered questions concerning whether development of self in women involves a differentiating process, a relating process, or a combination of the two. Different theorists describe the process in differing ways and with different emphasis. I turn now to a discussion of specific theories of womens' development of self which have emerged in recent years.

#### Theories of Womens' Self-Definition

Kaschak (1988) maintains that in developing new theoretical models of womens' self-definition we must seek to avoid the fundamental error of viewing one model as truth or in even supposing that there could be one truth for all women in all situations. Similar to Kegan's (1982) notion of renting a theory as opposed to buying it, Kaschak suggests the development of models which are additive or alternative rather than absolute and exclusive. In considering the process of womens' self-definition then, I have chosen to provide an overview of the major theories in existence, as well as present other aspects of defining a self which are discussed throughout the related literature.

Chodorow's (1978) theory of womens' development of self was one of the earliest theories proposed. Chodorow asserted that women come to be mothers through a profound process of psychological character formation.

Chodorow's perspective is largely psychoanalytic and draws on the theory of object-relations. This perspective suggests that a crucial differentiating experience in male and female development arises out of the fact that women, universally, are largely responsible for early child care and for later female socialization. Chodorow argues that contrary to the traditional model, the preoedipal experience (the period of undifferentiated mother-infant attachment) differs for boys and girls. According to Chodorow, a mother is more likely to identify with her daughter than with her son. Because of this strong identification mothers tend to help their daughters to differentiate more slowly and ultimately not as much as their sons. Mothers perceive and treat their daughters as continuous of themselves, while they treat their sons as separate from and other than themselves. Because of this difference, girls develop a different personality structure from boys. Specifically, Chodorow proposes that female personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does. The feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate and autonomous. In psychoanalytic terms, women are less individuated and have more flexible ego boundaries than men. According to Chodorow within this connected sense of self women retain a greater capacity for empathy with other persons, they retain the capacity to regress to a less individuated state and to experience themselves as connected to others, and do not sense this relatedness as threatening to their sense of self.

Gilligan's (1982) research investigating women's moral development complemented Chodorow's work. Gilligan's findings suggested that women

find safety in relationships and fear losing connectedness. Gilligan suggests although this is in part due to socialization, womens' early developmental experiences set the foundation for such differences. According to Gilligan many young women approach young adulthood having mastered the tasks of relating, but experience a struggle with the task of separating and defining a clearer sense of self within relationships. Gilligan (1991) contends for girls, adolescence precipitates a relational crisis which poses a quandary in psychological development. How does one maintain her sense of self which is based on self-in-relation, while at the same time separate and become an autonomous mature adult?

Although both Chodorow and Gilligan have been very instrumental in challenging the traditional views of female self-definition, Kaschak (1988) is critical. Kaschak describes Chodorow's theory as a "uni-dimensional analysis of a multi-and inter-dimensional problem" (p.110). According to Kaschak, women are not naturally prone to engage in relatedness as a result of experience in the nuclear family. "Women are instead driven to relatedness by the messages of the culture, which include the demand to be unconscious of the masculine context and the danger and derision which it affords women" (Kaschak, 1988, p.110). Kaschak maintains that any theoretical stance must acknowledge the complexity of the experience of each woman, along with the multiplicity of influences which determine her self at any given time. Kaschak argues that the relatedness of which Chodorow and Gilligan speak is embedded in relationships in a society that values individuality--but not for women. Women are continuously faced with paradoxical choices. One of these central paradoxes involves the distinction between limits and boundaries

(Kaschak, 1988). Limits define the extent to which one may grow and explore. Limits (usually imposed by parents, culture and so forth) contribute to the formation of boundaries. Kaschak describes the formation of boundaries as signifying a clear and consistent definition of self. According to Kaschak part of early female training involves learning to have permeable boundaries. As a result, their boundaries are not self-defined, but are defined by others. "Women then learn to survive in the connectedness, not in the self...their limits then are not firm boundaries...of the self defined by an interplay of self with self and with a consistent environment...but are defined by others continually throughout life" (Kaschak, 1988, p.116). Kaschak emphasizes that when considering the notions of relatedness, limits, and boundaries in regards to womens' definition of self, the meaning of these concepts becomes of paramount importance. For example, relatedness that occurs in the name of caring and humanity is both qualitatively and experientially different from relatedness in the name of meeting others' needs, or in the name of safety or subordination. Miller (1984) supports this notion in describing that it is not because of relationships that women are suppressed or oppressed, but rather the issue is the nature of the relationships.

In a similar vein, McBride (1990) addresses this notion of the meaning of relatedness and boundaries in a discussion of female autonomy. McBride suggests Erikson's view of female autonomy may have been limited by the population he used, and suggests that we must consider different concepts of autonomy for women. Building on Chickering's notions of autonomy, McBride contends that being autonomous means choosing to take care of oneself as well as give to others. McBride's notions are in

keeping with Miller's (1991) self-in-relation theory which assumes that other aspects of self (e.g., creativity, autonomy, assertion) develop within the primary context of relationships. The relational line of development suggests that relationship and identity develop in synchrony, with the girl moving from early emotional responsivity to adult responsibility (Surrey, 1991). "Inherent in this (self-in-relation) model is the vision of womens' development as moving from a relationship of caretaking to one of consideration, caring and empowering" (Surrey, 1991, p. 63). Markus & Oyserman (1989) contend however, that it is the way women and men are socialized and the way they take meaning from this socialization process that leads to differences in how they make the self/nonsel self distinction.

Josselson's (1987) investigation into identity development in women supports this notion of a revision of relationships as opposed to a severing of connection in adolescence. "Separation then, does not imply individuation...What is critical here is that aspects of the self become reworked during adolescence so that the young person has some choice in the creation of a self, a self that will function autonomously but in relation to the parents" (Josselson, 1987, p.20). In a similar vein, during an investigation into womens' development of autonomy Straub (1987) found that relationship tasks preceded autonomy tasks for the majority of women in the study, and for some women, mastery of the relationship task had significant impact on their development of autonomy.

Josselson (1987) contends that to fully understand the process of self-definition we must look at both sides of the process--both the individuating, autonomous part and the connecting/relating self. Guidano

(1991) concurs with this view, by asserting that another's perceived similarity is a necessary requisite for experiencing a sense of personhood, while the differentiation from such perceived similarity is a necessary condition for experiencing a sense of selfhood. Similarly, Gilligan (1982) states "we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others and we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self" (p. 63). The definition of self then, is simultaneously both an intrapsychic and a psychosocial process. What is important is that the two are played in harmony together (Lawler, 1990).

Teresa Peck (1986) has proposed a model which seeks to describe, and perhaps best captures, the numerous factors affecting women's process of self-definition. Peck's model is a reflexive one and attempts to explain how a woman creates a knowledge of her self through her experience of adulthood. The model is encompassed by a flexible outer wall that represents the social-historical time dimension within which a woman lives her adult life. Inherent in this outer wall is the social, emotional and political context within which a woman is allowed to define herself at any given time. The consistency of this wall may range from pliant (thereby allowing a wide range of possible roles and experiences) to rigid (thereby constraining and constricting options). Interestingly, Brown's (1991) study of adolescent development also supports this notion of social-historical time dimension. Brown maintains that in our present day western culture, long before a girl reaches adolescence she hears both directly and indirectly the established story of the good woman. Within this umbrella story of the good woman there are a select few life stories or narratives available for girls and women to choose from. Brown poses the

question "what would it mean for a girl at the edge of adolescence to talk to another about herself including her thoughts, feelings, experiences, and the world of relationships she engages in on a daily basis?". Brown suggests for a girl to speak of this in this culture at this time would be "to protest against the available fiction of female becoming". Worse yet, "a girl who chooses to authorize her life experiences by speaking openly about them resists the security of convention and moves into uncharted territory" (Brown, 1991, p.72). Heilbrun (1988) suggests it is only past the age of fifty that women can stop being female impersonators once they have moved beyond the categories our available narratives have provided for women.

The next layer of Peck's model is the sphere of influence, consisting of the relationships in which a woman is involved. Two critical characteristics of this sphere of influence are flexibility and elasticity. Flexibility refers to its ability to expand or contract, in order to include or prevent new relationships. It also includes the ability to redistribute emotional involvement with each relationship in order to receive support and reaffirmation of the self when necessary. The second characteristic, elasticity refers to the degree to which relationships in the sphere are responsive to the woman's changing needs. Elasticity is the primary way in which a woman learns and experiences her ability to influence people around her and to influence her world. "A sphere of influence that is flexible and contains key elastic relationships provides the woman with a strong sense of information about her personality, competence, and ability to function in the world. Particularly if key relationships are inelastic, an inflexible sphere

causes self-doubt and possible emotional maladjustment" (Peck, 1986, p.280).

Emerging through the center of the sphere of influence in Peck's model is the woman's self-definition. The process of self-definition is portrayed as occurring by means of a spiralling motion, with increasing clarity of self-definition occurring with the passage of time. The spiralling indicates the constant process of monitoring personal growth and change against the possible impact upon valued relationships. According to Peck, the need to regulate personal growth against any possible negative effects upon key relationships is a central dynamic in women's self-definition. This need requires that a woman be able to psychologically separate herself from dependence on the relationships as her sole means of self-knowledge, while at the same time maintain a connectedness to them.

#### Self-Definition of Women Who Are Mothers: Research Considerations

As can be seen from the various models and ideas discussed, there are numerous elements which may be both inherent in, and which may influence women/mothers' process of self-definition. An essential characteristic of this self-definition process, however, is that it is intertwined with women's adult experience. As Kaschak (1988) contends, to understand women we must acknowledge the embeddedness of each aspect of experience in all the others. To come to understand a woman's experience of the process of self-definition, we must seek to understand her life experience in its totality. As well as considering the situatedness of self and being, research methodology must permit the evolving nature of self and self-definition to be illuminated.

## Conclusions

Kaschak (1988) suggests that in developing theories of womens' development we should avoid seeking one ultimate truth. Womens' development of self is very complex and multifaceted. Considering all of the many possibilities within womens' experience is essential to understanding their development of self.

As Kegan (1982) describes, people are meaning-making beings. It is not, however, that a person makes meaning as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. "There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we are the meaning-making context" (Kegan, 1982, p. 11). Experience is not what happens to you, but rather it is what you do with what happens to you (Huxley, cited in Kegan, 1982).

To understand what it is like for women who are mothers to define their self, we must come to understand the experience of the woman/mother living that self. "That is, understanding is a mode of being, not a technical problem for epistemologists or, more narrowly, philosophers of science. Understanding occurs only in the context of being-in-the-world" (Pinar, 1981, p. 179). For this reason, in my quest to understand the process of self-definition of women who are mothers, I have chosen to focus my study on the 'lived experience' of those women. The question that guides this study is: What is the experience of defining a self for women who are mothers?

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Context

Our models of inquiry, of science-making, are also models of reality; they reflect how we conceptualize what is, what is to be known, and how it is to be known. The beliefs we hold about the nature of reality and of human beings are ways in which we organize and make meaning out of experience and information; beliefs, too, are ways of knowing" (Du Bois, 1983, p.105).

As an inquirer I begin with the assumption that each person is unique. A person's evolving structure (including all they are born with and all they acquire) is the medium through which experiences are interpreted and given meaning (Maturana & Varela, 1987). The only truth or reality which exists is that which is drawn forth by each person as a result of his/her evolving structure (Bateson, 1979; Maturana & Varela, 1987). There exists, therefore, numerous interpretations or "realities" all of which are as valid as the other.

Rationality is seen as existing only in a broad sense.

To be a rationalist is to believe in the power of thinking, insight and dialogue. It is to believe in the possibility of understanding the world by maintaining a thoughtful and conversational relation with the world...(it) assumes that lived human experience is always more complex than the result of any singular description, and that there is always an element of ineffable to life (van Manen, 1990, p. 16).

In understanding human behavior and experience, the notions of cause and effect or predictability may not capture the rich complexity of human experience.

Human inquiry consists of engaging people (participants and researcher) in the task of delineating their meanings and experiences and then contrasting and comparing them in an effort to formulate a collective understanding on which all can come to consensus (Guba & Lincoln, 1990).

Finally, a fundamental belief I hold is that only through a caring relationship can I come to understand another human being's "reality". As an inquirer my "self" is a vital element which I bring to any inquiry process. When I meet other people in their weakness, vulnerability or innocence I can only know those people through a human caring relationship (VanManen, 1988).

#### Research Method

Lincoln (1992) maintains there is a need for "philosophical and paradigmatic flexibility and disciplinary permission for each researcher to make her or his own choices, given the kinds of problems she or he has made a career commitment to investigate" (p. 384). In a similar vein feminist scholars challenge researchers to articulate their values and on the bases of those values develop new research practices (Gergen, 1988). In considering the question I pose and the manner in which I pose it as an inquirer, I have chosen to conduct my study using what I term a human caring methodology. This methodology draws on elements from interpretive phenomenology and feminist inquiry. My research question, "What is the experience of defining a self for women who are mothers?" evolves out of the contextual world view of development and seeks to address the

complexity of womens' experience. I believe this integrated methodology will best serve my goal of exploring and coming to understand womens' experience of the process of self-definition. The interpretive phenomenology aspect will facilitate the illumination of the lived experience of women/mothers with consideration of the complexity of that experience. Principles of feminist inquiry will promote sensitivity to the cultural aspects influencing womens' development, as well as provide guidance about essential aspects in research with women.

General characteristics or guidelines of the human caring inquiry done in this study include:

- 1) There was continual interaction between the researcher and the participants and there was a process orientation to the research. The participants, the researcher, and the relationship between them were considered to be in a constantly evolving process. The research procedure as a whole was an evolving process that was immediately influenced by what emerged (Mearns, 1984).

- 2) The relationship between the researcher and participants was nonhierarchical (Gergen, 1988; Mies, 1983). "Participant" with its denotative meaning of "person having a share in" and "being a part of" indicates that the person is sharing in the research process and as such has an equivalent status to the researcher" (Mearns, 1984, p.373). If reality is a human creation (as opposed to nature's creation) there can be no special warrant for expert knowledge (Nielsen, 1990). Each individual was considered his/her own expert and most knowledgeable about his/her self and what that self thinks, feels, needs, and experiences.

3) Human inquiry is always a project of someone, a real person who in the context of a particular individual, social, and historical life sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence (van Manen, 1990). This study was a project initiated by myself as a researcher. Simultaneously I have experienced and continue to experience the process of self-definition while actively engaged in motherhood. As a woman/mother, a researcher, and a nurse-counsellor I sought to better understand women/mother's experience of defining self.

4) Because the research is the project of a real person, the inquirer's beliefs and values interact with the phenomena to create an interpretation of it. The creations of inquiry are, therefore, value-laden. Both objectivity and subjectivity are valued in human inquiry. "Objectivity means the researcher remains true to the object...Subjectivity means that one needs to be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and its greatest depth" (van Manen, 1990). In this study I likened this process to that of empathic understanding. Only through self-awareness and understanding of my own beliefs, values and assumptions could I truly listen to and understand (be empathic to) the participants' meanings and experiences.

5) Human inquiry investigates experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it (van Manen, 1990). This process begins with the experiences of the researcher as a person in a situation (Stanley & Wise, 1983). I began this investigation by investigating my own personal experience of defining self, followed by an inquiry into other women/mother's lived experiences.

6) The participants' experiences were viewed as being embedded within a set of social relations which may produce both the possibilities and limitations of that experience (Acker, Barry, Esseveld, 1983).

7) Human inquiry entails reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the experience (van Manen, 1990). In this study this examination and reflection process involved both the researcher and the participants. The process was a dialectic interchange aimed toward a consensual understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1990).

8) The phenomenon was described through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990). Information from other contexts (e.g. the literature) was introduced to increase the understanding and level of sophistication of the meanings illuminated (Guba & Lincoln, 1990).

9) Any inquiry process has the potential to help the participants, as well as the researcher.

10) Human inquiry is a learning process for both the researcher and for the participants. The process challenges us to look deeper into taken-for-granted everyday experiences, to form new meanings and deeper understandings of the life world.

By asking the question "What is the experience of self-definition women who are mothers?" I sought to engage women who are mothers in an interactive dialogue and reflection in order to come to a shared understanding of the experience of defining self. To ensure openness and flexibility, an emergent design was used. When conducting human caring inquiry as outlined above, a definitive plan may contravene the research process. "Unless the research plan is open, flexible, and creative, researchers will find themselves increasingly restricted as the research

progresses, and the rigid plan may in fact invalidate the research by preventing the researcher from pursuing all possible avenues necessary for a comprehensive inquiry" (Morse, 1991, p.149). Prior to beginning the study, I outlined a tentative description of the methodological process to be undertaken in conducting the study and had it validated by five expert researchers. These researchers confirmed the method's suitability for studying the experience of defining self.

As suggested in the preceding guidelines, the research design I used contained a process orientation. The process included a dynamic interplay (van Manen, 1990) between eight research activities. These included:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interested me (van Manen, 1990).

2. Sensitizing myself to the literature to heighten my awareness of what may be essential aspects in womens' experience of self-definition (Oberg, 1987).

3. Delineating my own beliefs, values, assumptions and experience of defining self while actively engaged in motherhood.

4. Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

5. Engaging with women/mothers through individual interviews to explore and come to understand their experience of defining self.

6. Entering into a group dialogue with the participants to further enhance understanding and provide ongoing dialogue and expansion.

7. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

8. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990).

I have described my interest in womens' experience of defining self in the introductory section of this dissertation. The second activity of sensitizing myself to the literature was attended to in the literature review in the second chapter. Activities three through seven will be addressed in this chapter during the discussion of my research method. The eighth activity will be undertaken in the fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation.

#### The Question of Bracketing

"The work of critical scholarship is to make  
transparent that which is taken-for-granted"

(Anderson, 1991, p. 115).

Peavy (1989) outlines several reasons for carrying out a thorough review of the literature related to the topic being studied. These reasons include ensuring familiarity with already existing knowledge and with the vocabulary and terminology other researchers use in relation to the topic under study, increasing awareness of methodological options which can improve one's own research strategy, and the obligation and necessity of engaging in scholarly dialogue to ensure communication of knowledge gleaned from research. In a similar vein, Oberg (1988) asserts knowledge of the literature is important in that it serves to inform the researcher of the possibilities inherent in the situation being studied and thus sensitizes the researcher to pick up and to recognize things she/he might otherwise miss.

Although a thorough literature review is an integral part of any inquiry into human experience, an additional purpose of conducting such a review is to allow the researcher to identify and thereby put aside all pre-existing knowledge about the phenomenon being studied. As van Manen (1990) describes "the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate but that we know too much" (p. 46). To remain true to the phenomenon being studied, and genuinely capture the lived experience of my participants it was essential to consciously be aware of any preexisting knowledge that was influencing my interpretations. This process of being aware of preexisting knowledge and assumptions is often termed bracketing in the research literature. Although probably most phenomenological researchers would probably agree about the imperativeness of bracketing, there are two conflicting views in regards to what bracketing is and how it is undertaken.

One view of bracketing evolves from the writings of Husserl, and is exemplified in the work of Colaizzi (1978), De Koning (1982), Giorgi (1970), and Spiegelberg (1982). These researchers maintain that it is both possible and essential to bracket or to suspend all prejudgments, assumptions and beliefs about the phenomenon. Bracketing within this perspective is thought to allow the true essence of a phenomenon to be discovered.

In contrast to Husserl's idea of bracketing, the second perspective of bracketing is exemplified in the writings of such researchers as Gadamer (1975), van Manen (1990), Kvale (1983), and Pinar (1981). These scholars suggest that bracketing is neither possible nor desirable.

Bracketing within this perspective is viewed not as an absence of presuppositions, but as a consciousness of one's own presuppositions. As the researcher becomes conscious of how life history, commitments and assumptions operate in the experience of the situation being studied, the researcher is able to hold them in abeyance while listening to understand the person's lived experience. Bracketing is the act of turning this knowledge against itself, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character (van Manen, 1990). In this study, I followed the second philosophical perspective as espoused by van Manen (1984, 1990). I began the bracketing process by carrying out an extensive review of the literature as described in chapter two. Next I began a personal journal within which I recounted my own personal experience of defining self while engaged in motherhood. Exploring my own personal experience provided an opportunity for me to become attuned to my preconceptions about what this experience is like. As I become conscious of how my life-history and experience had informed me, I became aware of many of my underlying beliefs and assumptions regarding both self and motherhood. Specific beliefs and insights I identified in my journal included:

1. My conception of what self is has been remarkably influenced by western culture and traditional views in psychology.

2. I began with the view of self as a singular entity. Throughout my reading and reflection prior to the study, my thinking shifted to questioning if self were more like an ever-evolving process.

3. Culture shapes men and women in differing ways through the norms, roles, and expectations which are directly and indirectly communicated.

4. By gaining an awareness of how culture is shaping us we are better able to make personal choices regarding our expression of self.

5. Relationships are extremely influential in the development of self. Some relationships are more influential than others. The relationship of mother to child is perhaps one of the most (if not the most) influential relationship in the development of a woman/mother's self.

6. Self and experience are in mutual relation, with each influencing (if not creating) the other.

7. Past, present and future form a coherent whole.

8. Motherhood has the potential to both foster and inhibit the process of self-definition.

8. The process of defining self, of knowing and being self is complex and multifaceted.

Throughout the interviewing and analysis process I continued to use my journal to record and reflect thoughts, feelings and insights which occurred for me as I engaged with the participants and with the data.

Bracketing was also employed throughout the individual interviews and the focus group meeting. The bracketing method I used during this time was similar to the use of empathy in a helping interaction. As a researcher the awareness of my preexisting knowledge and assumptions allowed me to hold them in abeyance as I listened empathically to the participants' experiences of defining self. As suggested by van Manen (1984, 1990), I at times turned this knowledge upon itself. Because of my preexisting knowledge I was able to be sensitive to subtle aspects in the experiences

described to me, and through the use of reflection and dialogue with the participants come to a greater understanding of these subtleties.

#### Selection of Participants

Morse (1991) identifies two methods for evaluating samples in phenomenological research. These methods include questioning the appropriateness of the sample and questioning the adequacy of the sample. Appropriateness refers to the degree to which the choice of informants and the method of selection fits the purpose of the study as determined by the research question and the stage of the research (Morse, 1991). An appropriate sample is guided by participant characteristics and by the type of information needed by the researcher (Morse, 1991). Appropriateness of the sample for this study was ensured by the researcher deliberately and continually selecting women who were mothers and who had a particular knowledge of the experience of self-definition. Specifically, a combination of volunteer, nominated and purposeful sampling was used in this study (Morse, 1991). I began with volunteer sampling by distributing notices (Appendix A) to agencies and organizations which had the potential to be in contact with women who are mothers, and by posting notices in various locations that I believed would be frequented by women. In addition, I began spreading the word to people known to me, requesting that they in turn spread the word to anyone that they thought would be interested in participating in the study. As I began interviewing, I asked participants if they knew of any other potential participants (nominated sampling). Potential participants were then screened over the telephone to assess their suitability for involvement in the study. The preliminary screening criteria included:

1. Participants were mothers who had children between the ages of 3-16 years. These are years following the transition to motherhood, yet where there is close, and often intensive mothering occurring.

2. The participants had experiential knowledge, were reflective, and were able to articulate their thoughts and experiences (Morse, 1991). Peck (1986) emphasizes that the study of self-definition is dependant on a woman's ability to be introspective concerning the way she sees and assesses herself within the context of the social roles she holds and within her relationships. During the screening this was determined by asking potential participants "What comes to mind for you when you think about your experience of developing yourself during the time you have been a mom?". Through the discussion that entailed I was able to determine if they in fact met Peck's criteria of introspection.

3. There was a commitment to participate in the study over the appropriate time frame.

During the screening conversation I went through the criteria in the above order. Three potential participants did not meet criteria one. Of the potential participants who contacted me all appeared to respond positively to the second and third criteria. In addition to the above criteria, however, as the study progressed I attempted to include a diverse group of women in the study (Morse, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986). Morse (1991) suggests the importance of including people who have a range of experience to ensure the entire scope of the experience is understood. With this rationale in mind, from the potential participants who responded to my notices, or who were suggested to me by women already participating in the study, I selected women who were diverse in regards to such factors

as socioeconomic status, level of education, marital status, age, way in which they became a mother, and the number of children they had. This focus on diversity meant that some respondents were not invited to participate in the study. These decisions, however, were based more on the timing of the contact as opposed to unsuitability of potential participants.

Adequacy of a sample refers to the sufficiency and quality of the data (Morse, 1991). To ensure adequacy in this study I assessed the relevance, completeness, and amount of information obtained (Morse, 1991). The question I asked in regards to adequacy is, "was saturation achieved and has the experience been illuminated and the structure identified?" (Morse, 1991; Osbourne, 1990). Seven women participated in the study. The decision to include seven participants was made to meet the criteria of redundancy (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). During the interviewing of the fifth participant I began to hear repetition of experiences, with no apparent new themes emerging. I interviewed two more participants to be sure that no new information was forthcoming. Following this seventh interview data collection with new participants was terminated.

#### Ethical Components

Informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to conducting the interviews. Participants were informed of the exact nature and intent of the study. A consent form (Appendix B) was signed by each participant. Confidentiality was ensured by assigning code numbers to the participants. These code numbers were used to label audio-tapes and transcripts. The code numbers which identified each participant were kept

in a separate file cabinet. On completion of the study the identifying information will be destroyed.

Participants were informed that two or more interviews would be required and they would have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research. In research of this type, the interview may stimulate self-reflection, reappraisal or catharsis (May, 1989). For this reason, following each interview I spent time with the participants debriefing the interview and providing support as needed.

In addition to the interviews, participants were informed of the nature of the focus group and invited to attend. At the beginning of the focus group the purpose was explained and confidentiality within the group setting was discussed. Participants signed a separate consent for participation in the focus group (Appendix C). Termination and closure of the overall research process will be done by sharing the results of the study with the participants.

### Data Collection

#### Participant and Researcher Relationship

Heideggerian phenomenologists propose that all knowledge emanates from persons who are already in the world and seeking to understand other persons who are also already in the world (Leonard, 1989). According to these phenomenologists, a person is always within a hermeneutic circle of interpretation. In human inquiry, understanding of human experience involves an interpretation by the researcher of the interpretations being made by those persons being studied (Leonard, 1989). Within this hermeneutic circle the relationship between researcher and participant is one of mutuality and equality. In essence the two are co-researchers and

co-creators of an understanding of human experience. In this study the relationship between myself and the participants was one of mutuality and equality. Together we co-created an understanding of women/mothers' experience of self-definition.

#### Data Gathering as a Dialogical Process

The data in this study was gathered through a series of conversations or interviews during which I and the participants engaged in dialogue to come to understand women/mothers' experience of defining self. Anderson (1991) describes the interview as a dialectical process between researcher and participant which serves to reconstruct the participant's notions about their experience. In using interviews to gather data about womens' experience of diabetes Anderson found that through the process of discussing their illness experience, several of these women developed new insights. "Questioning leads to reflection, which brings to the level of discursive consciousness what might not have been thought of before" (Anderson, 1991, p.117). Similarly, Oakley (1981) in studying womens' experience of becoming a mother, reports that three-quarters of the women stated the interview had affected them. The three most common forms this influence took included leading the women to reflect on their experiences more than they would otherwise have done, reducing the level of their anxiety and/or reassuring them of their normality, and giving a valuable outlet for the verbalization of feelings.

Becker (1986) views interviews as "the most fruitful way of gaining rich portrayals of phenomenon" (p.102). Oakley emphasizes however, that the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical

and when the interviewer is prepared to invest her or his own personal identity in the relationship. This non-hierarchical relationship is supported by Carson (1986) in his discussions of establishing a conversational relation as a hermeneutic endeavour. Following Carson's notion of a conversational relation, in this study the interviews were conducted as conversations. Both the individual conversations and focus group conversation took the form of people talking together about a theme which was of interest and importance to those involved (Kvale, 1983).

### The Pilot Study

Prior to beginning the interviewing process, a pilot interview was performed with one participant to provide an opportunity to explore the planned interviewing process. The participant was asked to take part in the interview for the purpose of sharing her experience of the process of self-definition, as well as to provide input and guidance to the researcher in regards to the interview process (Kvale, 1983). The specific questions I asked of the participant following the interview included:

1. Would you describe your experience of the interview process?
2. Do you feel that we fully explored your experience of self-definition?
3. Was there anything in particular I did or said that helped you explore your experience more fully?
4. What might I have done differently that would have enhanced your ability to articulate your experience more fully?
5. Do you have any suggestions for me for future conversations?

The feedback from the pilot interview was very beneficial in helping me to make changes to the interview process. In particular I learned that leaving the interview too widely open in the beginning can make it difficult for a participant to know where to start. A gentle structure provides a focus without limiting the direction. Prior to the pilot I had planned to explain the nature of the research and ask each participant to begin where they would like. As a result of the pilot interview and feedback, I began each interview with a question such as "What do you see as the relationship between getting to know yourself better and being a mom?".

A second aspect which I became aware of and was able to fine tune as a result of the pilot interview, was that of balancing the use of my 'self' with the need to remain true to the participant's experience. I became aware that in my effort to remain true to the participant's experience, I was placing more value on holding my self in abeyance, than on using my self to establish a human caring connection. The participant gave me feedback that when discussing such a personal matter she felt a real need for an interactive sharing and feeling of connection. As a result of this feedback, I believe I became more adept at simultaneously sharing my humanness and maintaining my researcher stance. An example of this included being more forthcoming in my response to what the participant was describing (eg. nonverbal behavior communicating warmth, acceptance, understanding, and so forth).

#### Individual Participant Interviews

All individual interviews took place at a time and location mutually agreed upon by the participant and researcher. I met with five of the

participants in their respective homes, and with two in my home. All interviews were conducted by myself and were audiotaped. Since the interview is a dynamic and relational event, each interview within this study was a unique creation made up of the topic (self-definition), the researcher, and each participant (Becker, 1986). Osbourne (1990) outlines three phases of interviews which acted as the starting point for the interviews in this study. The phases included: a) establishing rapport and informing the participant about the nature of the research, b) engaging in open-ended dialogue for the purpose of gathering data, and c) successive data gathering to create a re-spiralling effect and enable a more complete illumination of the participant's experience.

Conversation one: Establishing rapport and open-ended dialogue. Kvale (1983) describes several aspects to consider in the interview process. These aspects were integrated into the overall interview process. First, the interviews were centered on the participant's life-world. The purpose was to describe and understand the central themes inherent within each woman's experience of defining self. Secondly, I attempted to understand the meaning of these themes in the woman's life. In attempting to do so I attended to what was said, as well as how it was said. I was observant of vocalization, facial expressions and other bodily gestures. "It is necessary to listen to the directly expressed descriptions and meanings as well as what is said between the lines, and then seek to formulate the implicit messages and send it back to the interviewee" (Kvale, 1983, p. 175). In this way, empathic attunement was a central component of the interview process.

The primary aim of the interview was to obtain descriptions of the participants' experiences. With this in mind, I encouraged the participants to describe what they experienced, how they felt and how they acted. The women were asked to describe specific situations and action sequences rather than give general opinions (van Manen, 1990). Throughout the interview I focused on bracketing in the manner described earlier. Initially an unstructured interview format was used in which there was only as much topic guidance as was necessary to elicit the participant's stories (May, 1991). Although each participant did it somewhat differently, during the interview all seven participants spontaneously described their experience by telling me their story. Some participants entered their story through present day experiences and in order to explain it in more depth found it necessary to "go back to the beginning". Other participants told me a series of individual stories which culminated in their larger life story. And still others described their experiences in terms of eras. In telling me these stories, the participants used a combination of metaphors, sayings, and/or images to describe the feelings and sensations within their experiences. These initial conversations were one and a half to two and a half hours in duration.

Following each conversation the tapes were transcribed verbatim and I performed a thematic analysis on each transcript (Becker, 1986; Kvale, 1983; van Manen, 1984). After the completion of each thematic analysis, I wrote an interpretive summary of the conversation and gave the interpretive summary to the respective participant. This summary provided the starting point for the subsequent interview.

Conversation two: Reflection, clarification, and elaboration. During the second conversation the interpretive summary and the themes inherent within it became objects of reflection (van Manen, 1990). The second interview followed a more semi-structured format where themes that had emerged from the data were explored. Together the participant and I discussed "Is this what your experience of self-definition is really like?" (van Manen, 1990). Kvale (1983) describes ambiguity as an element of the phenomenological interview. Similarly, I found in this study expressions or statements which at times implied several possibilities of interpretation or seemed to contradict a previous statement. During the second interview I clarified as far as possible, whether the ambiguities and contradictory statements were due to a failure of communication in the interview situation, or whether they reflected real inconsistencies, ambivalences, and contradictions within the woman's experience (Kvale, 1983). During this second interview some participants also discovered new aspects or made connections between elements which they had not been conscious of earlier. This served to expand our understanding of the experience of self-definition. During this interview I also shared some of the themes which other participants had expressed, which either the current participant had not described or she had described but in a different way. This followed May's (1991) suggestion of looking for commonality and differences in participant's stories. During this process the participants often found it extended their own understanding or articulated something they had experienced but could not put into words. At other times, the contrast or difference between the other people's experience and their own, allowed us to gain more clarity and enlarge on

the descriptions. These second interviews lasted from one to two hours. Each was audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed in the same manner as the first interviews.

Conversation three: The focus group. Following the analysis of the second interview, each participant gave permission for me to distribute their validated and unidentifiable interpretive summary to all of the other participants. In this way, each participant had the opportunity to read the unidentifiable summaries of all the other participants prior to the focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to provide an opportunity for participants to dialogue with each other about the experience. Five of the seven women participated in the focus group. One was unable to attend due to a last minute circumstance that arose with one of her children. Another participant telephoned me a few hours prior to the group to state after much deliberation she had decided she was not feeling strong enough at this point to talk in a group about her experience. I supported her decision and stated that her phone call and honesty had been a significant contribution to the study. I view this participant's feeling of vulnerability and choice not to enter into a group situation, as information in itself about what women may experience during their process of defining self.

During the focus group participants further expanded on the experience of defining self by comparing and contrasting different experiences they had each had, and reflecting on those as a group. The focus group participants also expressed surprise at how similar the other summaries had been to their own. Although the experiences and content had been different, the themes and interpretations were very similar. As one

participant described, "I've been feeling really guilty cause I've been working and my little boy hasn't been happy in day care, after reading the summaries I could put that aside and say, its not something wrong with me, I could get some perspective about it". Although the conversation tended to be spontaneous and unstructured, I focused the discussion around such questions as "What themes were particularly meaningful for each of you in your experience of self-definition?" and "Was there was an aspect of your experience which has not been captured in this study?". The focus group discussion was audiotaped and transcribed. This transcription served as further data.

#### Data Analysis

The data analysis complied with the guidelines of thematic analysis as described by Hycner (1985) and van Manen (1990). Conducting thematic analysis, and uncovering thematic aspects in the lifeworld descriptions provide the foundation for identifying the structures of experience (Ray, 1990; van Manen, 1990). I began the thematic analysis of the data by transcribing the interview tapes verbatim and noting significant paralinguistic communications such as intonations, emphasis, and pauses (Hycner, 1985). Using the transcripts and tapes simultaneously, I immersed myself in the data as a whole (Hycner, 1985; Tesch, 1987). The interview transcriptions were read over several times (while at the same time listening to the tapes) to get a feel for the data. During this phase I asked the question, "What statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described?" (VanManen, 1984). While reading, I made notes of general impressions and specific

issues that arose, as well as circled or highlighted words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs which stood out (VanManen, 1984).

In the next phase of the analysis I delineated units of meaning (Hycner, 1985). At this point I asked the question, "What does this statement or paragraph reveal about the experience being described?" During this step I focused on units of general meaning (Hycner, 1985). These units of general meaning included words or phrases which seemed to express a unique and coherent meaning (Hycner, 1985). All general meanings were included irrespective of the research question (Hycner, 1985). If there was ambiguity or uncertainty as to whether a statement constituted a discrete unit of meaning I still included it and made a note to clarify this with the participant during the second interview.

The next phase of analysis included delineating units of meaning which were relevant to the research question. In this phase I asked the question, "Is this an essential constituent of a woman's experience of the process of self-definition, as experienced by this person?" If it appeared to be so, it was noted as a unit of relevant meaning (Hycner, 1985). If there was ambiguity or uncertainty as to its relevancy it was still included and a note was made to confirm this with the participant.

Once a list of units of relevant meaning had been illuminated, I examined the units to determine if any of the units of relevant meaning naturally clustered together. "Such an essence emerges through rigorously examining each individual unit of relevant meaning and trying to elicit what is the essence of that unit of meaning given the context" (Hycner, 1985, p.287). The process of forming the clusters involved a back and forth motion, where I continuously moved from the transcript, to the units

of relevant meaning, to the clusters of meaning as I made decisions about the clusters (Hycner, 1985). Following the clustering together of relevant meanings, I examined the clusters of meanings to determine if there were one or more central themes which expressed the essence of these clusters (Hycner, 1985).

Following the thematic analysis, a summary of each individual interview was written, incorporating the themes that had been elicited from the data. This summary provided a sense of the whole as well as provided the context for the emergence of the themes (Hycner, 1985). The individual summaries were then used as a springboard for the next interview with each respective participant. "During follow-up interviews, the first concern is to fill out these experiential descriptions with further examples where needed...(then the themes) may be reflected on in more dialogic conversations where both the researcher and the interviewee collaborate in the attempt to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in the light of the original phenomenological question" (VanManen, 1984, p.63). The participants comments served as further data for the study. With the new data from the second interview, the above process began again.

Once the data from both interviews had been analyzed, I looked for commonalities and variations in themes between participants. The first step was to search for themes common to all or most of the interviews (Hycner, 1985). These themes formed the general themes. The second step was to identify themes which were unique to one interview or were in a minority of interviews. These were considered the counterpoints to the general themes.

At this point the focus group took place. The audiotaped discussion was transcribed and analyzed in the same manner as the other two interviews.

The final phase of data analysis from the interviews was contextualization of themes (Hycner, 1985). The themes that emerged were placed back into the context of the experience of self-definition for women who are mothers. This is described in the discussion section of this study.

#### Trustworthiness of the Study

In determining the trustworthiness of a phenomenological study it is imperative that the criteria used to determine trustworthiness be congruent with the naturalistic paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Sandelowski, 1986; Salsberry, 1988). Guba & Lincoln (1985) have identified four criteria relating to tests of rigour in naturalistic inquiry which were used in this study. These four criteria include credibility, fittingness, auditability, and confirmability.

#### Credibility and Fittingness

Guba & Lincoln (1985) liken credibility and fittingness to internal and external validity. In essence they are the criterion against which the truth value and applicability of qualitative research is evaluated (Sandelowski, 1986). In this study, Hycner's (1985) four levels of validation were used. The first validity check was to validate the findings of the study with the participants. By continually moving back and forth from analysis to validation (which included further analysis) the interpretations (and ultimately the findings) were meanings which were co-created by the participants and myself. All participants acknowledged the fittingness of the themes with their life experience.

The second form of validation described by Hycner is having the researcher evaluate whether the findings "ring true" to the researcher. Having personally experienced the process of defining self while engaged in motherhood, the findings not only rang true for me, but also provided new and greater insight and understanding in relation to my own personal experience. As a nurse counsellor, I have also had the opportunity to work with women who are mothers and who are struggling with the process of defining self. The understanding and knowledge that emerged in this study corresponded with my experience of these women, both in regards to what they expressed and in what I observed them encounter.

The third check, that of examining the findings in light of current literature to determine the degree to which the findings fit or do not fit with the literature, is addressed in the discussion section of this study.

The last check described by Hycner is making the findings available to both women who are mothers and to nurses and health professionals working with mothers and families. The first aspect of making the findings available to women who are mothers I have done informally. I have shared my findings with people known to me who are mothers. These people have responded very excitedly about the similarities between the findings and their own experience. Professionally, I have had the opportunity to share the results of the study with a group of colleagues which included three psychologists and a nurse. These professionals described the meaningfulness of the results to their professional experience. As one psychologist described, "your results provide me with new insights and a new understanding of people I have known. I have a whole new perspective of what these women may have been experiencing".

### Auditability

Auditability is the criterion of rigour relating to the consistency of qualitative findings (Sandelowski, 1986). I have addressed auditability in this study by clearly articulating the decision trail I used in the study. The research procedure and data analysis was thoroughly described to provide insight into what was done and how interpretations of data were made (Osbourne, 1990). Following Sandelowski's (1986) recommendations I have included descriptions of:

1) My personal assumptions and beliefs regarding the experience of defining self for women who are mothers.

2) How pieces of data came to be included in the study and how they were approached.

3) A description of the participants and how they were selected.

4) The manner in which the data was collected, including the length of data collection and the nature of the settings in which data was collected.

5) How the data was reduced in regards to transcription, analysis, interpretation, and presentation.

6) A description of the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the themes is included.

7) A description of the techniques used to determine truth and applicability is included.

### Confirmability

Confirmability is the criterion of neutrality in qualitative research. "Confirmability as the criterion of neutrality in qualitative research, refers to the findings themselves, not to the subjective or

objective stance of the researcher" (Sandelowski, 1986, p.34). Sandelowski (1986) maintains that confirmability is achieved when auditability, credibility, and fittingness have been established. In keeping with this suggestion, I have discussed how I have met the criteria for auditability, credibility, and fittingness.

#### Summary

A human caring methodology was used to study the question: What is the experience of self-definition like for women who are mothers?. This methodology integrated aspects of interpretive phenomenology and feminist inquiry. The philosophical foundation for the study was discussed. The criteria for participant selection was outlined, and the steps for data collection and data analysis were delineated. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study as a whole and the standards for determining that trustworthiness were considered.

## Chapter 4

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to describe the experience of defining self for women who are mothers. Specifically, the research question which guided the study was: What is the experience of defining self for women who are mothers? During this study I came to a greater understanding of what it means to be in the world as a woman/mother. As I began to gain more understanding of the experience of defining self, I was reminded of Polanyi's (1969) assertion that we know more than we can tell. Throughout the research process I frequently had the experience of knowing and yet seemed to lack the words I needed to express that knowing. Similarly, the participants at times struggled to put their experiences into words. van Manen (1990) explains that often this ineffable nature of our knowing is a result of the lack of linguistic competence to articulate our knowing. Following van Manen's suggestion that what may lie beyond one person's linguistic ability may be put into words by another, I engaged in a dialogical process to explicate a more in depth knowledge and understanding of women/mothers' experience of defining self. This dialogical process included conversational interviews with each of the participants, a focus group with the participants, analyzing the transcripts of the interviews and focus group, and expanding on this analysis with further dialogue.

A second assertion van Manen makes about articulating our knowing is that something that appears ineffable within the context of one type of discourse may be made more explicit by means of another form of discourse. With this assertion in mind, following the data analysis I entered into a

different form of discourse with existing literature related to self-definition. With the participants' descriptions in mind, I re-visited the literature to compare and contrast the womens' experiences with existing theory. This second form of discourse furthered my understanding in two ways. First, it heightened my ability to articulate my understanding of the participants' experiences--to put my knowing into words. Secondly, I found that considering the literature in light of the womens' lived experience gave much more meaning to the literature. The womens' experiences embellished the existing theoretical knowledge concerning self-definition in a manner which contributed greatly to my understanding of the literature.

Since the understanding of women/mother's experience of self-definition arose through a dialogical process, and the articulation of that understanding was aided by both participant-researcher discourse and researcher-literature discourse, I have chosen to present the findings in a similar manner. I will describe the participants' experiences of defining self and at the same time incorporate literature which contributes to the understanding of the overall experience of women/mothers' self-definition. van Manen (1990) and Guba & Lincoln (1990) support this approach to the presentation of phenomenological research. van Manen asserts that the link between the research process and the results cannot be broken. Describing the findings out of the context in which they presented, results in the loss of all reality to the results. Since the research process in this study was dialogical in nature, I believe this dialogical process will better enable me to capture and communicate the depth of the womens' experiences.

When considering the findings in phenomenological research, van Manen also emphasizes that when one listens to a presentation of a phenomenological nature "you will listen in vain for the punch-line, the latest information, or the big news" (p. 13). Rather, it is an increased thoughtfulness and understanding about, and of, the phenomena which characterizes phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). In relating the findings of this study then, my aim is to enhance the grasp and understanding of the experience of defining self for women who are mothers.

I have divided this chapter into three sections. In the first section I introduce and describe each participant using a pseudonym. In the second section I provide an outline and description of the central themes inherent within the participants' experiences of defining self. The third section contains a discussion of the relationship between self-definition and mothering. van Manen (1990) emphasizes that the textual approach used in phenomenological research should largely be decided in terms of the nature of the phenomenon being studied. In considering this suggestion in light of womens' self-definition two aspects seemed significant. First, throughout the research process I was continually reminded of the deeply personal nature of this phenomenon. Most of the women found the research process to be a very penetrating, and at times, emotional experience. A safe and trusting context was required for the women to feel comfortable and willing to share these intimate aspects of their selves and of their lives. In creating this context, a number of the participants expressed a concern regarding confidentiality. Some of the participants understandably felt very protective of the personal details of their experiences, but

were comfortable having their experiences be part of a larger synthesis. The second aspect which was significant in deciding the textual approach to use in writing up this study, was how the understanding of self-definition arose during the research process. van Manen (1990) maintains that in reading a text the reader must be prepared to be attentive to what is said in and through the words. Similarly, in understanding human experience, one must be prepared to be attentive to the meaning that is in the experience as opposed to mistaking concrete descriptions or experiences as the thing (van Manen, 1990, p. 132). As suggested by van Manen (1990) I have therefore, focused on providing "rich descriptions that explore the meaning structures beyond what is immediately experienced"(p. 132). In order to do this I have moved beyond each participant's individual experience to create a synthesis of the whole. Although I have provided a brief description of each of the women who participated in this study to show the varied life experience of each woman in regards to her current life situation and resources, the experiences of self-definition are presented in a manner which highlights the experiences in their complexity. As van Manen (1990) describes "to write means to create signifying relations--and the pattern of meaningful relations condense into a discursive whole" (van Manen, 1990, p. 132).

### The Participants

#### Lorraine

Lorraine is currently in her mid-forties, and is a single parent of two teenage children. Prior to becoming a single parent, Lorraine describes herself as having what society typically describes as "the good

life, with all of the trappings". Lorraine and her husband were married seven years before having children. Both were professionals (Lorraine worked as a teacher) and each had very busy, active lives. As part of her process of defining self, Lorraine chose to leave her marital relationship. At the present time Lorraine lives in a small home, works part-time, and is in the process of developing a new career.

#### Marion

Marion is thirty-five years old, married, and a mother of three children aged 6-11 years. Marion and her family live in a fairly well-to-do area of the city in which she grew up. Marion describes growing up in a very traditional home where her father was the bread-winner and family protector, while her mother carried out the role of homemaker. Following high school Marion attended college where she took courses in early childhood education. In her early twenties Marion married someone from her church and worked at a clerical job to support her and her husband while he finished university. Since that time they have established a home and family, and Marion is currently working in the home. During the past year Marion has taken some university courses and is in the process of deciding what she would like to do in regards to returning to work.

#### Lois

Lois is thirty-seven years old, is married and has three children between the ages of 6 and 10 years. For the early years of her children's lives Lois chose to stay home and care for her children and family, although at the same time emphasizes that she also attempted to stay connected to the outside world. During the past year Lois has returned to work as a teacher and is enjoying once again having a career. Lois is also

currently working on a master's degree. Lois describes her family as financially comfortable with both her and her husband earning good incomes.

### Rachel

Rachel is in her mid-thirties and is a single parent with two children aged 5 and 9 years. Rachel describes herself as a creatress--an artistic kind of person who when becoming a mother "had to make a transition from a beatnik kind of life" to one which had some sort of organization and routine. Rachel has worked at varying careers including that of a singer, an artist with a cottage industry in her home, and working in the film industry. She is currently a student taking the final courses in a bachelor's degree at university. Economically Rachel describes struggling to feed her children and pay the mortgage with student loans and a small amount of child support from her ex-husband. As well as participating in interviews with me to discuss her experience of defining self, Rachel has shared poetry and personal writings with me. In presenting her words and experience I will therefore also be sharing some of these very deep and meaningful reflections.

### Evelyn

Evelyn is forty years old, is married, and has three children between the ages of 1 and 9 years. Evelyn was born and grew up in Britain. Evelyn's father was the headmaster in a very large private boys school, which Evelyn herself eventually attended. Evelyn describes growing up in a male world, where being a female was an added bonus. She describes having access to all of the resources and opportunities that her older brothers had, but also being treated as special because she was a girl.

After completing a degree at Oxford, Evelyn went to Africa and worked as a volunteer. Upon moving back to Britain she lived in a community in the highlands of Scotland where she met her husband. Currently Evelyn stays home with her three children and describes herself as busy doing all the things a mom does. Evelyn describes herself as a nuts and berry kind of person, and states that as a family they do not buy into certain activities and ways of our culture. Examples of this include not owning or watching television, not attending movies, and socially not going places where the whole family is not able to attend.

#### Anne

Anne is thirty-seven years old, married, and has three children between the ages of 5 and 10 years. Anne describes her family as working poor. Although they have never been on social assistance, Anne describes times of financial struggles. Examples include times when the only meat she could afford to buy was chicken necks to make stew, and times when she and her husband have not had enough money to buy Christmas presents for their children. Anne left high school to attend hair-dressing school but has since completed her grade twelve. Describing herself as resourceful, as the need has arisen Anne has worked at numerous jobs including picking rocks, upholstering furniture, running a home daycare, and working in live play productions. During the time I was interviewing Anne she was offered a job at her local community center as an outreach worker and program coordinator.

#### Diana

Diana is forty-four years old and a single parent of a nine year old child. Diana describes graduating from nursing school and marrying in her

early twenties. After being married several years and being unable to have children of their own, Diana and her ex-husband adopted a baby. Diana chose to leave her marriage approximately six years ago and since that time has experienced numerous changes in her life. Two of the biggest changes have been moving to a new city and returning to school. Currently Diana is taking courses toward a master's degree. Diana describes coming from a very traditional family, where she was very protected and safeguarded. She describes her father as being her "one last security blanket" and since his death last year she has found learning to depend on herself a new, and at times challenging experience.

#### The Experience of Defining Self for Women/Mothers

The description of women/mothers' experience of defining self will be divided into three parts. I will begin by first describing how the women conceptualized self, what self meant to them and how they experienced self. Secondly, I will describe the essential themes within the womens' experience of defining self. The third component of this section will be a discussion of the relationship between defining self and being a mother.

#### The Nature of Self

Three themes concerning the nature of self emerged in the womens' descriptions. These three themes included:

- 1) self as a multiplicity of parts
- 2) self as a relational process
- 3) self as a synthesis.

#### Self as a Multiplicity of Parts

As the participants described their experience of defining self they continually made reference to the different parts of their self. Evelyn

talked about her "intellectual part", her "spiritual part", and her "creative, nurturing part". Lorraine talked about the part of her self that liked to do well, yet described another part that challenged that need to excel. Diana referred to "the part of me that's my mother". Lois described how she expressed her "intellectual" part and her "organized" part, but had always been afraid to explore her deeper "spiritual" part. Anne talked of her "take charge" part that was at times in conflict with her "creative" part. Rachel talked of the "wild woman" in her, the "nurturing woman", her "male" part, and her "creative" part. During the focus group all of the women agreed that self was far from a single entity, but rather was made up of multiple characters or parts which expressed themselves at different times and in different situations.

This existence of multiple parts of self had relevance for the relationship between being a woman and being a mother. The women in this study viewed mothering as a role they held that at times induced certain parts of self to become more dominant and take center stage. For some of the women the role of mother had at times actually taken over self.

This concept of multiple selves has been described in the literature as well. Hermans & Kempen (1993) talk of the multiple I's which make up the self. Mair (1977) uses the metaphor of community of selves to describe self. As I listened to the participants describe their experience of self I was reminded of E. M. Forster's (1929/1984) concept of self as polyphonic novel. The women described numerous voices or parts, each of which had their own story line, but who at times were drowned out by the voices and story lines of other characters within self.

sometimes I think we need to define it you know to just label those parts of ourselves...then find those parts that we can understand or grasp them a little bit more, because I think that maybe parts of us aren't being allowed out or honored, so I think its really important to see us as having different parts and keep a balance on that. (Rachel)

As well as having different existing parts, similar to Markus & Nurius' (1986) idea of possible selves, the participants described the selves they hope to become. These possible selves were often somewhat in existence but the women only caught fleeting glimpses of them. Marion talked of her hope of nurturing her independent self, her risk-taking self, and her self-assured self. Lois expressed her desire to discover the parts within her self which were buried, and which she had not yet had the courage to explore.

#### Self as a Relational Process

Another essential characteristic of self as described by the participants was its dynamic nature. For these women self was not a static entity, but rather was an evolving, ever-changing process. In addition, it was not a separate intrapsychic phenomena, but a relational one.

another interesting thing for me being a mother is that these parts are in relation to my children, and I'm in relation with them and that's always evolving and changing but its always there. (Lorraine)

and the part of me that's my mother says do you really think you should be doing that dear and you should be staying home.

(Diana)

In referring to this relational nature of self, Rachel described the influence her partner and other people in society had on her evolving self.

His projection of mother had something to do with the mother stayed home...I was suddenly the dish rag...my self really suffered, I projected of course some of the things I picked up--the tradition of how I should be, and what it's going to take now. I started to get into what do I have to look like as a mother.

Numerous scholars in the field of womens' psychology have described this relational nature of womens' development of self (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, et al, 1991; Miller, 1991). Hermans & Kempen (1993) take this notion further and assert that self is not only developed in relation but self is a relation. According to these authors, self as a relational phenomena transcends the boundaries between the inside and the outside. Other people, along with societal roles and values, are integrated into and form some of the multiple I's within the self. Rather than the individual living in the context of society, the individual and the context are parts of a whole, with these parts being in dialogical relationship. Hermans & Kempen's notion of self as a relation corresponds with the participants' descriptions. Diana provides an apt example of others being a part of her dialogical self in the following quote,

For me that's why it's a struggle, why it's not just a matter of this is what I want this is what I'll do, those other parts are really active that I have to work with before I can decide how I want to be...and along with that goes a lot of dialogue that goes back and forth between the parts.

In referring to these other parts Diana was describing her parents, cultural norms and values, and the expectations of others which have become integrated into her being.

### Self as a Synthesis

Through this dialogue between the different parts, the women in the study described the self as synthesising the many parts into a connected whole. As the women became aware of the different parts within their self, and the story each played out, they describe beginning to exercise more choice regarding which voices or parts they tuned into. They deliberately listened to voices which they felt were more health promoting for them, and which expressed the parts which were closer to how they wanted to be. As the women concentrated on listening to these voices, some of the voices or parts which had previously been very meaningful and dominant in their life were dethroned and placed further in the background. An important aspect of this dethroning was that although the voices were no longer as dominant, they were still in existence and in different contexts or situations they moved to center stage once again.

Their voices are not as strong and I'm not beating myself up as much about it as I did before but it still makes me change paces a little bit, but then I pick up to my own pace again and don't let it bother me as much. (Diana)

Hermans & Kempen (1993) describe this synthesis as a valuation process. Similar to what Diana describes, Hermans & Kempen assert that by the nature of its dialogical potential, the self is equipped to confront the inside characters with one another, as well as confront the internal and external characters with one another. In describing the synthesis process, these writers use the analogy of a composer of contemporary music who invents new music by letting himself or herself be inspired by a vast array of sounds and melodies. In such a music composition, disparate elements are brought together to provide full expression of the composer's intent. Similarly, the women described how in their process of self-definition the self had worked toward synthesizing the many parts into a cohesive whole. This does not mean that self becomes one entity, but rather there is an interconnectedness among the parts, and an awareness of their interrelationships.

What I'm really reconnected with is all of me, the parts that I'm not particularly happy with, my whole self, that I don't just have to present to you the good parts that I don't always have to look like I'm in control that this is me, this part and this part and this part and that's how it is. (Diana)

Sampson (1985) emphasizes that this interrelatedness is essential if order within the self is to emerge. The participants described experiencing this order in different ways. For Marion it seemed like she felt chaotic a lot of the time. Marion described that there were parts in her such as her church, her parents, her community, and certain of her own beliefs which were not interconnected with other parts of her self. What she had found, however, was that as she stopped trying to suppress the

other parts and the interconnectedness between the parts grew, she experienced less chaos. Interestingly, although she felt less chaotic within, she experienced more chaos in her life due to other peoples' unfavorable reactions to her different self.

In summary, the self as described and experienced by the participants in this study seems to be a dialogical relationship of multiple parts. The parts within the self and the relationships between them, are ever-evolving and changing as the self goes through the process of self-definition.

#### The Process of Self-definition

As I listened to the women describe their experience of defining self, I listened for how they spoke of their experiences and linked the many elements within their experiences together. An essential aspect within all of the womens' descriptions was their use of narrative in describing their experience of defining self. The form of narrative used varied among the participants. Some women described needing to go back to the beginning, apparently needing to relate past aspects of their life in order to present their current experience. Other participants did not follow a chronological order but told their stories by weaving a thread through numerous episodes in their lives. For all of the participants, narrative served as the cohesive thread which linked all of the many themes within their experience of defining self. Following the womens' lead, I have therefore chosen to describe the womens' experience of defining self using narrative as the root metaphor of self.

### Narrative as Root Metaphor of Self

Our definition of self, or love, can only be given in the form of a story: The nature of human being can only be defined by recounting the history of what we are becoming; the dance of love can only be detected in the postures of desire that characterize us at various stages along life's way. (Keen, 1983, p.27).

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) maintain that "metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally" (p. 193). These authors contend metaphor unites reason and imagination into what they term imaginative rationality. Similarly, Mair (1977) asserts that when we attempt to understand anything unfamiliar or unknown we seem to resort to the use of metaphor. Carlson (1988) suggests that although we may not be aware of it, metaphors have been central tools in the descriptions of human development. Carlson points out that development itself is a metaphor, and identifies numerous meanings in the developmental literature inherent in the metaphor of development. Some of these meanings Carlson delineates include: to open out of its enfolding cover; to unveil or lay bare oneself; to evolve; to grow into fuller, higher, or more mature condition; to gradually unfold or bring into fuller view; to learn through life's journey; and life as an authoring of one's story.

In the process of using metaphors there is an act of transference, we act as if the events which we usually ascribe to one set of categories really belong to another (Mair, 1977). Since narrative was employed by the participants to organize their experiences, actions, and the meaning of

those experiences and actions into a cohesive form, I believe the narrative structure will best enable me to portray their experience of defining self.

Narrative as a root metaphor for self views self as a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes what one has been, what one is, and what one anticipates one will be (Polkinghorne, 1988). Through all of the interviews with the women this historical unity presented itself. The women described being a combination of all they had experienced, what they presently were experiencing, and what they hoped to experience in the future. Gergen & Gergen (1986) maintain the most essential ingredient of narrative is its capability to structure events in such a way that they demonstrate a connectedness or coherence, as well as a sense of movement or direction through time. Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that in conceptualizing self as a narrative the focus is not on sameness, but rather is on the process of actualizing what is potentially possible in one's life. Similar to these notions, in the stories of the participants the experience of defining self was focused on change and potential. The women described self-definition as an "ongoing process which will never end". The direction this process took involved a moving toward greater awareness and discovery of self, and toward the cultivating of a relationship between the inner and outer expressions of self.

### Defining Self

When presenting the findings of a study of this nature, it seems an almost impossible task to capture the depth and richness of understanding that emerged as a result of the participant's descriptions of their experiences. In an effort to do justice to the experiences they shared

with me, I have chosen to use the voices of the women wherever possible. The descriptor which labels each phase and theme within the process of self-definition is taken from the words of the participants. I also include numerous quotes to reflect the meanings inherent within each of the themes.

For all of the women their self-defining experience encompassed what they termed phases. Six of the participants described three very similar phases. These phases included: a) "Non-reflective doing", b) "Living in the shadows", and c) "Reclaiming and discovering self". The other participant, Evelyn, described her experience somewhat differently. Evelyn described her phases as being congruent with the part of herself she was developing at that particular time. Interestingly though, in analyzing her descriptions she does share a number of the themes expressed by the other participants. Evelyn's experience of defining self will be illuminated by comparing and contrasting it to the other participants during the discussion of the themes.

Although for ease of description I will present the three phases in a linear fashion, for the women in this study defining self was not a linear, straight forward process. The women described a continual back and forth movement both between and within the different phases. This back and forth motion included times when the women felt strong and clear which led to growth and movement forward, and other times when they felt vulnerable and unsure, which led them to retreat from the process or from their self. The women however, described both the strong times and the vulnerable times as being essential to the process of learning and discovering self. As Diana recounts:

It's slow, back and forth, its not like now I've seen the light now I see my path I want to take. But I think as well as being frustrating that's the part that's really making me solid in what I'm doing as well, cause even if I spiral backwards when I start coming back upwards I've got more strength.

### Non-Reflective Doing

Mom said she cried when she got a little girl. The doctor told her I was going to be a boy, but she got her doll...I was breakable, pink, and frilly. (Marion)

For six of the participants in the study, their early process of defining self involved a somewhat non-reflective taking up of roles and an acting out of a life that had been modeled for them by their parents and by others in society. Although the details of this experience varied among participants, within this non-reflective taking up of life, six main themes were described. These included:

1. I've got it all figured out.
2. Embracing a script.
3. Approval and recognition as a motivator in life.
4. Authenticity versus connection.
5. Denying parts of self.
6. Choosing the safety of the cocoon.

### I've got it all figured out.

It's really funny because back then I thought I had done it. I thought I had the whole world aced. (Marion)

During this non-reflective phase, the participants described believing they had the knowledge they needed for a happy life. As the women came of age and began making major life choices which structured their lives, they described thinking and believing that they were on their way to the good life.

In a lot of ways I was naive. Just thinking that life was just a straight road and I would just keep going down it and everything was a picnic. (Lois)

at nineteen I remember thinking oh I've got it all, no problem. (Anne)

In following this road to the good life, the women copied the actions of influential others, including members of their family and other people they considered models in society. All of their actions and choices were centered on helping them get to the culturally prescribed place to be.

I was the one that it appeared was successful, that I'd gone off to university, I'd gotten married, I'd married someone with a reputable profession, and we had the trappings of the big house and all the nice stuff, and then I had this nice beautiful daughter. (Lorraine)

In contrast to the six participants who described this belief that they had life all figured out, Evelyn describes a somewhat different process at this point in her life. Recounting how at seventeen she went off to Oxford she states:

I went because I was interested in thinking. I wanted to find other people who were thinking and figuring what was so important, having discussions about the meaning of life and

all that stuff you get into when you're a student...in both my experience and what I read (I was) a free spirit or whatever.

In reflecting on this differing experience, Evelyn described questioning the taken-for-granted of society even as a very young child. What she identified as helping her to do that, was the environment in which she grew up.

I've been very lucky actually, I've just been able to develop who I am....it may be the strata in society that I came out of but I think in Britain there is more of a regard for academic or mental or even spiritual searching in terms of there being a place for the eccentric whose following that course and that person is almost supported as a necessary part of society.

This approval of difference was something that was identified by the other participants as missing from their own environments. These participants described external approval as having a central influence on their lives, but the approval came by fitting in as opposed to being different.

In her model of womens' self-definition, Peck (1986) terms this external environment the social-historical time dimension. In Peck's model this dimension is depicted as an outer wall which encompasses the entire process of self-definition. Peck maintains that the flexibility of this wall will determine the degree to which a woman is able to vary her roles, and the freedom she has in which to define her self. The participants' contrasting experiences reflect differing degrees of flexibility in this socio-historical dimension. Similar to what Evelyn describes, it would appear that the women who had more flexibility in this dimension of their

experience were able to express more parts of their self and experience a more spontaneous process of self-definition.

Embracing a script. One way in which the women who were striving to fit in described accomplishing this goal, was by taking on the preconceived roles and expectations of others and of society. These roles included those of daughter, wife, mother, and so forth. Most of the participants describe the enactments of the roles as following the traditional cultural norms.

It's the same with everything that my mom put me in, kind of traditional, my brother played hockey, I did ballet, he played the trumpet, I did piano. (Marion)

Although these roles were often handed down intergenerationally, the women described happily accepting the roles and in fact feeling excited about enacting them.

There was some excitement, can I do this. There was a positive part, a challenge. (Rachel)

I was really excited and really committed. I just felt that I wanted to stay home and that, that wasn't a problem once I made up my mind to do that. (Lois)

the roles were things like becoming a wife, student so I was um, and throughout that I think for awhile I didn't question, it seemed like, I believed that's what I wanted, I mean, to have a partner, have a career, those things were always important to me. (Lorraine)

In enacting the roles the women portray a picture of traditional gender separation. The females became the family nurturer and their mates assumed the breadwinning role.

I had this idea about being a perfect wife...we did focus on his work and career...I guess I would do things like you know make sure we had a nice house, the cooking and the traditional things (Lorraine)

you know how it is, lunch is on time, up at seven the little apron kind of deal, baking cookies...I had this idea that I'd have polished nails and I don't know where I got these images but I think from childhood (Rachel)

do things like stay at home and you know breast feed my daughter, and I made my own baby food, and my own bread (Lorraine)

An interesting aspect of this enacting of roles was that the women often believed they were making personal choices that were different from the traditional stereotypical patterns.

somehow I think it had slightly different meanings for different couples I knew,...part of my role was not to be like I would do the domestic scene and the husband go to work, like that wasn't it, we both had careers and we both shared in the chores (Lorraine)

As the women reflected on this taking of roles during the interview, a number of them described reaching the realization that although they

thought they were stepping out of the confines of prescribed roles in choosing to work and sharing household tasks, they had in fact just assumed the role of woman/mother in the 1990's. Rachel for example, describes a period in her life when she decided to break free of the externally given role and go out and find herself. She describes feeling she needed to break free to prove "I'm not just a little flake who can bake cookies". What she discovered is this new her was just another role, society's idea of what a woman in the 1990's should be. Just as she had doubted herself as a wife and mother, she began doubting herself as a representative of the new woman. She recalls thinking to herself "can I pull this off, can I be as strong as these women are projecting onto me". She describes the pressure from different factions for her to conform to a certain image. Her partner and part of society were expecting the image of mother, while the womens' group she turned to for support, expected her to shed all domesticity.

There was this one image of me trying to be, really striving to be a mother image....(and this other) then feeling guilty for even wanting to be a mother, feeling terribly...ashamed that I was not out there doing this whole career trip.

The women described the roles they enacted as being unreal, and leading them to don a facade--even to themselves. This facade was of the perfect mother, wife, daughter, and so forth. A person with no flaws, who was on top of it all, for whom nothing was too much.

Patsy (the dog) had a soup bone and we had to cook it...I put it in the oven this morning and I was really pleased because I thought gee I should cook a soup bone every morning...sort

of an affirmation that I'm doing okay. I've got the smell of a roast cooking even though I'm vegetarian...that kind of image that I'm mother hen, I've got this whole scene happening, this whole nurturing, warm, wonderful scene (Rachel)

I had this thought of perfection that was so painful....I could never really let down my guard to be real with people and become really trusting and close (Marion)

The women describe this paradox between maintaining this perfect facade while feeling alone and vulnerable inside, and yet being pleased that other people believed they were flawless.

Its funny cause I can remember a girlfriend saying to me you know (Lorraine) you always appear like you've got it all together, but she was I mean lots of people tell me that, I said yeah it looks that way but on the inside that's not the reality, but also being pleased that I was carrying it off (Lorraine)

Approval and recognition as a motivator in life. The participants describe that their motivation for assuming and enacting the roles, was their desire for approval and recognition from others and the need to fit in, to be connected to people and to society.

it was important for me to get the best marks and I can remember even back in grade four and five, getting the best marks and getting that recognition. If I did, especially my mom would be really proud of me...being well behaved, having

nice manners so people would like me cause my behavior reflected on my parents (Diana)

I remember mom had a dinner party once when I was in my teens and I peeled all the potatoes, I helped serve and I just remember feeling so good because I just had done everything, I was a star...I did ballet for 15 years and I would perform in the living room (Marion)

I just have a need to be successful...I'm use to getting praise and I seem to need it...I think I feel valued because of it, its where I get my sense of self from a lot, because I see it through other people's eyes, I don't see through my own. (Lois)

The participants described the acquiring of this approval and recognition as being conditional. They reported being given both direct and indirect messages about how a woman should be and what a good mother is. In order to receive approval and to fit in, the participants used the external expectations to guide their choices and actions.

Something to do with probably self esteem, confusion about what is valuable in the first place, some sort of message that it's not okay to be just doing what I was doing.....there was this kind of feeling like what if I didn't complete my degree, that person did, they're better than me (Rachel)

ordinary, mundane drudgery, they're not appreciated. If your house is messy and someone walks in, they don't know that you've been reading stories to your children all afternoon or doing artwork (Rachel)

This external need for approval affected how they viewed themselves as people, as mothers, and the satisfaction they received from their mothering role.

I guess within a year it began to pale and I began to realize that I wasn't valued or I didn't feel valued unless I could, that I had a position, like a paying position, out in the work world. Where that came up was cocktail parties and all that stuff where people were saying, what do you do. I would feel like I had to apologize by saying I'm working at home (Lois)

This need for recognition often led the women to put their own needs aside in order to receive the recognition.

They came over in the evening to visit and they didn't go home. They just sat there and I was falling asleep. I knew I would have two babies who would need me. I was breast feeding them both, that I would have to breast feed in three hours. I usually went to bed so I could get some sleep. I remember just sitting there saying go home and yet I didn't have the courage to say it (Lois)

Interestingly, the women described knowing that this need for external recognition often blocked their growth and enjoyment of life. The women talked of working toward being more self determining, yet for most of them it proves to be one of their biggest struggles.

I'm hopeful there will be a time when I say I am who I am and be happy with that, and coming to that point I'm really happy with that and I'll receive the reinforcement that I've been seeking but I won't need it (Marion)

I am working at becoming more aware of my needs and voicing them. It's hard, but I'm getting there (Lois)

McBride (1990) contends that the right to be self-expressive and self-determining without fear or guilt has not been adequately supported in our culture. Similar to the experiences of the participants in this study, McBride maintains responding to external pressures by conforming to other's expectations has been a major focus for those women who wish to maintain relationships and fit in. An interesting paradox that was described by the participants in this study however, was that the donning of a facade of perfection actually distanced them from people. Throughout this period of acting, although they were supposedly connected to other people, they describe feeling very alone and lonely.

#### Authenticity vs connection.

To be different yet attached is one of the great challenges of human relatedness. Difference implies dispute; it implies one is good and the other bad...for the developing girl, being rooted in the family, most often mother, in a secure position of selfhood. When she expresses family values and priorities, she knows that she is good in the eyes of those who matter most to her. Therefore, she can value herself (Josselson, 1987, p. 171).

In meeting this need to fit in and be positively recognized, the women described two battling forces within them. One force argued for being authentic, to be who they were no matter what the cost. The second force looked at the cost of authenticity and argued for connection. To choose authenticity meant giving up the preconceived roles, and not meeting the expectations of themselves, others and society. During the "non-reflective" phase this battle was waged relatively unconsciously, and for all of the women except Evelyn, the connection side won. What this meant was the women began denying and/or quieting parts of their self. The parts that were muffled were parts which were not valued or accepted by their family or societal values and norms. On reflection, the women were able to identify indications of the battle such as inner rumblings, and a constant doing and searching to quieten the rumblings. Lorraine, for example, describes moving several times, changing careers, taking courses and so forth in an attempt to "fill the void". Marion describes having more babies and building bigger and fancier houses, yet still feeling restless.

The power of the desire for connection is reflected in Evelyn's experience. For the majority of her life Evelyn describes sidetracking the non-reflective phase and choosing authenticity. For example she describes an episode where in her teenage years her father wanted her to be confirmed,

I had some real questions about the basic tenets of the christian doctrine so I said no, I'm not going to sign this, there's a flaw in this and I'm not going to do it.

Evelyn related numerous other examples of her conscious attempt to not "buy what society is selling". There was one time however, when Evelyn

recounts "I did lose my own sense of what I could do". Evelyn told of becoming pregnant as a single woman. In making her decision about whether to continue her pregnancy Evelyn describes not "having a sense of being able to survive entirely on my own, and it would have been outside the support of my own family, it would have been outside the support of the community".

In reflecting on this experience with Evelyn, and discussing the battle between authenticity and connection it seemed that in some ways Evelyn shared a similar battle as the other participants described. Her family and community had a much broader range of acceptable behavior which allowed Evelyn to express parts of her self and still be connected. When it came to the threat of losing that connection however, as strong and independent as she was Evelyn felt she could not continue her pregnancy without that connection.

In deliberating about the process of individuation in girls and women, Josselson (1987) maintains what is critical in the development of self is not whether there is a separation from parents per se, but whether there is a reworking of aspects of self. What is essential for healthy development to occur, according to Josselson, is that women have a choice in the creation and expression of self. The participants in this study described this choice as being circumscribed by their need to be connected to others. If it came to a choice between being themselves or being connected, they most often chose connection. The women described learning to suppress self for connectedness and gradually integrating that into their spontaneous way of interacting with people. As Diana describes,

at first I did it cause my mom was very clear about what I was suppose to do, then I became adept at recognizing it, (at looking) at people's reactions (and acting accordingly).

Kaschak (1988) maintains this way of interacting reflects a sense of invisibility for women both outside of, and within their relationships. According to Kaschak, womens' boundaries "must remain reactive, unformed and situational, vigilantly other-oriented rather than precise and self-defined" (p. 116) in order to maintain relation and connection. Interestingly, the battle between authenticity and connectedness in the narratives of the women in this study did not end with the choice for connection. In subsequent phases, waging of this battle continued with different results. During the "doll" phase however, as a result of the loss of authenticity the women describe losing connection with parts of their self. This loss of connection had a major impact on the womens' self-definition. As Rachel describes, "I neglected myself for a long time, and realized the consequences, the very subtle consequences of neglecting the true self."

#### Denying parts of self.

we silence the reasons of the heart because we have chosen to follow a path of heartless knowledge, no matter where it takes us (Keen, 1983, p. 4)

Similar to Kaschak's arguments, Hermans & Kempen (1993) maintain that the possible positions the different parts of self may play in a person's life are organized and restricted by the process of institutionalisation by forces such as family, school, church, community life and so forth. According to these authors, certain parts and positions

are approved, while some are disapproved or even rejected by these institutions. What results is that certain parts of self become strongly developed, while others become suppressed.

Denying parts of self took many forms for the women in this study. For Lorraine and Anne it began with the taking on of preconceived roles, believing these roles would ultimately make them happy. For these women the messages from others were clear yet not necessarily direct. These women described it as similar to positive reinforcement. When they performed according to cultural norms and standards (eg. the perfect wife and mother), they received recognition and acknowledgement, so they continued to act in that way. On the whole, they were not consciously aware that they were denying parts of themselves, and in fact believed they were making their own choices. These women describe at times suppressing inner voices which were reverberating within them. As these voices clamoured for attention, the women would ignore them, talk themselves out of viewing the voices as important, and/or busily start doing something external which would drown them out. The women described this as a sort of external searching. With any feelings of dissatisfaction, they would look outward for something to quieten the feelings.

Diana and Marion describe the denial of self as beginning at a very early age. In contrast to Evelyn's broader range of acceptable (and her subsequent ability to express more parts of her self), Diana and Marion had a very narrow range of acceptable. Both women describe their mothers as very influential and overt in molding their behavior, and in

encouraging the donning of a certain image. Diana describes the image and role her mother had conceptualized for her,

my life was getting married and probably getting married to someone who could provide for me well...the message I got from her was go after someone professional.

In reflection, Diana described her mother as following a similar pattern of denying parts of herself which gave her joy. When Diana's mother pressured Diana to do the same, Diana describes feeling confused, yet thinking her mom had a lot more life experience and must therefore know better than she did. Similarly, Marion describes the intergenerational inheritance of womens' self-denial in her family.

my grandmother believes she gave her whole life and now it's payback time in emotional manipulation...my grandmother had a really hard time, she always felt really bad about herself, always felt like she was the black sheep.

For both Diana and Marion the insistence on following one prescribed way led them to not only lose connection with parts of their self, but also to lose trust in the self as a whole. As Diana describes,

I started doubting myself...maybe I started wondering if my mom's motivation too was she didn't think I was capable of handling it and in some ways I was almost relieved that I didn't have to.

Marion relates how she learned very early never to take risks, believing that she could not depend on herself. This lack of trust in her self and in her ability extended to all aspects of her life. She describes not even believing in her ability to think,

I had never really allowed myself or given myself permission to think that I could think. It was as though, ...(my husband) will do my thinking.

For Lois there was a feeling of fear and anxiety around connecting with certain parts of herself. She describes questioning social structures, politics, and "all sorts of things like that" in an intellectual way, but never questioning personal rules for living, personal values, or unexplored parts of her self. Lois slowly began to recognize her "rigidity" in this area and it "bothered" her. When she became a mother however, this pondering stopped and she actively assumed the traditional role, leaving these parts of her self unexplored.

Rachel describes parts of her self being suppressed when she became a mother. On one hand motherhood tapped into her "wonderful creative, and spiritual" parts, but on the other hand the everyday routine and work of motherhood, and the preconceived expectations of herself and others led to parts of her self being suppressed and not valued.

The women in the study conveyed a feeling that during the non-reflective phase they had compromised and at times betrayed their self. They describe disappointment in themselves, others and society in regards to this betrayal. Kaschak (1988) talks of this paradoxical position women are in. Kaschak describes womens' choice as being between

greater relatedness in a society that values individuality above all, or a striving to overcome her training and the attendant stresses therein only to achieve greater individuality (individuation-separation) in a society that values greater relatedness for women....she can choose either

damage to the self or damage to the self, since either choice carries for her a connotation at least partially negative and results in this negative evaluation being implicate within her own self-concept (p. 114).

Choosing the safety of the cocoon. During the non-reflective phase the women chose the safety of the cocoon. Diana describes the cocoon as all of the societal myths and stories that somehow led her to feel safe and secure in life. Lorraine describes these societal myths and structures as a foundation from which she moved out into the world. This foundation provided the direction and structure for her life. In a similar vein, Keen (1983) asserts that "adult status is won by internalising the central myth of a culture, adopting its official symbols of status, playing a recognized role, tailoring one's consciousness and conduct, one's loves and hates, to fit the tribal or group mores" (p.94). This assuming of adult status and myth was vividly described as occurring during the non-reflective phase by all of the women except Evelyn.

These mores provided a safe and sturdy infrastructure to life. Diana describes the idea of questioning that infrastructure as too scary to even consider. "I didn't want to see any way out of it...the option was to be on my own, and well (I believed) I couldn't depend on myself." Although this infrastructure seemed to provide security and direction, it also served to widen the hiatus between their internal and external connection and expression of self. Losing this connection with self, also meant losing the belief and trust in herself as a person. From a narrative perspective, their dominant story became one in which they believed they needed the foundation of the cultural cocoon in order to survive. Diana

and Marion in particular, describe believing they needed a hand to hold. Although they had actually been quite successful in various circumstances during their lives, they never felt safe or secure on their own. They seldom took risks or did anything out of the ordinary without the advice of others in their life. Marion describes taking a weekend trip away from her husband and children and feeling nervous and apprehensive the whole time. Diana describes even after several years of marriage, phoning her parents for advice before purchasing a car.

Howard (1991) contends that the young learn to tell the dominant stories of their cultural group. These stories shape their identities by providing a unifying theme to organize the events of their lives. Tavris (1992) asserts that the dominant woman's story in western culture is one of "passivity, chance and fate" (p. 302). Tavris maintains that what follows from these stories is the development and shaping of womens' identities. Tavris' suggestion that we can be imprisoned by cultural stories or liberated by them is reflected in the differing experiences of the women in this study. For Evelyn, the dominant stories in her social strata were for the most part liberating, the stories were liberal enough to allow the expression of her self. For Marion and Diana, the stories were particularly imprisoning. They followed what Tavris describes as the classic woman's story of both ancient and recent fairy tales such as Cinderella and Pretty Woman. In their dominant story the happenings were beyond their control, and they learned they must await rescue by a prince. For Lorraine, Lois, Rachel, and Anne the cultural story was also imprisoning, although somewhat less so than Diana's and Marion's. These women were able to express certain parts of themselves, while other parts

were imprisoned by the dominant story of mother and wife. Through this imprisonment they gradually lost connection with those parts of their self.

Overall, the non-reflective phase consisted of the taking up of cultural roles and norms. Throughout this phase the women chose to ignore and suppress any internal rumblings of discontent. To listen to the voices would mean to question the very foundation their life was built on. It seemed easier, and somehow less risky, to simply carry on "doing" what they were doing.

#### Living in the Shadows

Dear Claire,

Here is a dream I had a few nights ago. This evil voice kept calling me over the radio. I went down a long hallway and there was a door. I knew he was in there. I felt the darkness and I was completely consumed with fear. Paralyzed. I have had this dream twice before and both times on the eve of a major transformation. A shift. At first I couldn't bring myself to summon the light to protect me. But if I ran, it would consume me. It took everything I had to summon the courage and open the door and when I did it was gone. It was such a struggle to find that light and trust it. I woke up in a sweat. (Rachel)

Rachel's letter to her sister Claire captures the essence of "living in the shadows". During this phase the women describe how their imprisoned parts began to rebel. The quiet voices of discontent became louder, and gradually the secure foundation of their lives began to crumble. The women described seven themes in this phase including:

1. Starting to crumble.
2. Alone on a desert island.
3. What's the matter with you?
4. The fog begins to lift.
5. The volcano erupts.
6. Clawing my way out of a desperate place.
7. Bombing and devastation.

Starting to crumble.

Dear Claire,

Everywhere I turn there is a leak in the wall that needs to be plugged--a constant flow of demands and there is never a feeling of having any control or peacefulness. There is always something that needs to be done--someone I am neglecting--some meeting I am unable to attend--some bill that is overdue. I don't seem to be able to find the time to maintain friendships and lately I've been feeling very alone on this walk....Last week I went to start the car to get to class and it died. I came back inside and wept and wept. I really thought I had gone over the edge this time, but madwoman came to my rescue.

(Rachel)

As time went on and the women attempted to maintain the facade of perfect woman, wife and mother, the act began to take its toll. Gradually the strong foundation which had promised security and safety started to disintegrate. This crumbling process varied for different women in the study. Interestingly however, for all of the women the triggering of the crumbling process was somehow related to the fact they were mothers. For

Lorraine, Marion, and Anne it began in quite a dramatic way. In recalling the incident Lorraine states she can remember it as if it were yesterday.

we had built this big huge house on this big acreage and I'm still caught up in all that perfect stuff...so I have these two wonderful children, a girl and a boy, supposedly this wonderful husband and one day I remember my son spilt his milk. I started crying, and I thought there's gotta be more to life than spilt milk and changing diapers...I think I cried for three months.

Similarly, Marion describes her crumbling as being triggered by an incident in which her baby fell,

when (son) fell it really hit me, we need to look at who we are. It was like this is a little person here. It's not a doll. This is a person who I need to care for and nurture and guide, he's not just a feather in my cap.

Anne describes her crumbling process as triggered by the overwhelming demands of work, home, mothering, and so forth. She describes her experience as similar to burnout.

I remember one day I called (her husband). It was a few days before payday and so there wasn't a lot in the house but there was still stuff. Normally you just look in the cupboard and haul out stuff and just put stuff together, leftovers or whatever, for lunch. I couldn't do that any more. I couldn't think. I was absolutely numb. I couldn't resource all that together, and so I called him...I had been crying all day.

For Diana the crumbling process was triggered by her need to care for her daughter. Diana describes an incident in which her husband had promised to take her daughter to a Halloween party. When he failed to show up Diana describes "that was the straw that broke the camel's back...I might have been willing to take that but I'm not going to allow my child to be disappointed and live in that situation".

Lois describes a somewhat different process. Although she reached a similar feeling of being overwhelmed with the demands of motherhood following the birth of her twins, she continued to do it all. In reflection she recounts more of a gradual crumbling process, where she slowly began to look at the structure of her life and make changes. During the second interview Lois stated "I'm not as far as I thought I was". She described coming to the realization that she had not done the work she needed to do to make the changes she believed were necessary, and that she could see she had in fact "slipped back into some old patterns".

Evelyn describes her experience with her unplanned pregnancy as pushing her onto her next phase. Although she did not describe the experience as a crumbling process, she describes it as being a very difficult time in her life, where she reassessed and questioned life, and made choices as a result.

All of the women reached a point where the taken-for-granted infrastructure they had assumed for their life was questioned and began to crumble. Duerk (1989) asserts it is often a woman's pain and sadness which lead her to change her life. The women in this study describe experiencing pain and sadness, but for all of them mothering was in one way or another, a catalyst for the change that occurred.

Alone on a desert island

The timing couldn't have been worse to leave the marriage but I had to. Survival, the children. It was a big step and I might not have done it because of all the fear around losing security but the ship was on fire. (Rachel)

During the "living in the shadows" phase the women describe feeling very alone. Lorraine, Marion, Lois, Rachel, and Anne describe that because of the role and facade they tried to live out, they had not only become alienated from others, but were also estranged from their self and from life. Assuming roles, had meant an acting out of life as opposed to an experiencing of life. Since acting out the role and choosing connection over authenticity required a suppression of parts of their self, the women felt fragmented--who was this person inside? As Lindbergh (1955\1975) describes "when one is a stranger to oneself then one is estranged from others too... (and) it is the wilderness in the mind, the desert wastes in the heart through which one wanders lost and a stranger" (p.44). Struggling within this desert waste, Lois found a lot of people were quick to tell her who and what she was, but she began to question if what they said was accurate.

In relation to this knowing of self, Marion describes "I don't think I was given the opportunity to explore who I really was back then". Marion was unable to say whether she in fact enjoyed any of the activities she had engaged in during the non-reflective phase. She described that she did not really know what she liked or did not like, or what she was particularly drawn to, since she had never thought of it in that way. She had just done it because it was the right thing to do.

Lorraine describes how feeling "alone on a desert island" occurred gradually over time. Maintaining a facade meant she was separate from others, and also had to portray an image of being able to do it all on her own. "It's not that there aren't people there but it's like I have to do it all myself". This alone feeling helped spark the internal rumblings.

When the foundation began to crumble and the questioning began, the women felt overwhelmed. Lorraine describes, "when I started to crumble and things started to fall apart for me quite dramatically I decided I have to do something here, my life isn't working this isn't really me". This need to do something however, seemed overwhelming. The women were used to having a rule book for life, and suddenly there was no rule book, and no secure foundation, just lots of questions for which no one had answers. The women describe feeling very isolated with this need to do something. This isolation occurred in two ways. One way in which they experienced a feeling of isolation was being with people who up to that time had been the closest to them and finding they were not connecting. These people were not experiencing a crumbling foundation, and did not understand the women's struggle. The women also describe isolation occurring out of personal choice. Anne describes feeling very vulnerable and afraid and gradually becoming very isolated and obsessed with protecting herself and her family. Rachel and Lorraine describe losing a lot of contacts when their relationships ended. People who had been in their lives up to that time either drifted away or ceased being friends.

For Lorraine, Marion, Rachel and Anne this feeling of aloneness grew into a feeling of despair. As Anne describes,

(it was) very, very dark, it was almost like I was living in one of those big mansions that's all shadows and big doors and rooms... there was that lack of control over my environment because I didn't know.

Similarly, Marion describes a dark time in her process of defining self. For Marion the weight she had gained during her pregnancies, and which she had never lost, symbolized her inability to live up to the perfect expectations. In an attempt to regain control and once again reflect that perfect image, she began a series of diets. After numerous programs and attempts to lose the weight failed, she descended into what she terms the pit. Marion had difficulty describing the pit "it's like my memory isn't clear, I have to go in sequence". What she does recall though are the feelings of isolation, depression and lack of control. Marion also stated that as dark as it was in the pit, "at least I felt something". It was the first time she remembers really feeling and experiencing life. Rachel describes what she calls the black hole, where she lost touch with herself and everyone who was nurturing in her life. "I felt totally disconnected...I went into the dark chasm of myself and hid away".

Although during this phase the women experienced their mythical foundation beginning to crumble and began questioning life, where the majority of questioning was directed was at themselves. They describe themselves and others asking the question, "What is the matter with you?". As Duerk (1989) asserts present-day society expects women to maintain a doing attitude. Duerk further contends that society is afraid of the descent into depression, "suffering is feared and the sufferer is outcast"

(p.37). This fear, and pressure to perform, blocks the emergence of what Duerk claims may be womens' pathway into their own wisdom.

What's the matter with you?

A woman could be helped to understand her depression as a passage of initiation to claim her own soul and wisdom to be shared, later, with other women as they prepare for their own passage. She is taught, instead, to fear her experience and to loathe herself.

(Duerk, 1989, p. 37)

As the crumbling process occurred, and the women began to feel isolated, they describe struggling to understand what was going on with them--what was wrong. Initially they began searching outside of themselves. Marion's description of signing up for different weight loss programs was an example of this external attempt at getting control. Lois describes her decision to return to work. In reflection she states what really motivated her to return to work was to regain some sense of her self.

Rachel, Lois, Marion and Anne were critical of themselves and judged themselves as failures. These women described very strong and powerful belief structures operating within them which lead to self-criticism, blame and judgement. These belief structures included such beliefs as:

1. A good wife and mother is all-giving, kind and nurturing.
2. A good wife and mother never gets angry, or at least never expresses that anger.

3. The needs of good wives and mothers come secondary to other people's needs, and in fact if it makes life easier for others can be left unmet.

4. If things are not going well, I can make it better by doing more or trying harder (and it is my responsibility to do that).

In addition to this self-criticism, the women also describe receiving pressure from other people to get back to normal. Diana, Marion, and Rachel describe this pressure as sometimes taking the form of a penalty. One way in which pressure was applied by others was the withholding of affection, esteem, and approval.

Lorraine, Marion, Diana and Anne all describe seeking professional help. Lorraine chose to go to counselling and to attend workshops,

I started to get into therapy and started to gain some awareness around self and part of that was pretty harsh...and yet I believe in some ways it really saved my life.

Marion and Diana also describe going to counselling, but interestingly the reason for initially seeking counselling was to help their children who they were concerned about at the time. This counselling very quickly became focused on the women, however, with very positive results. Marion describes actually being listened to, validated and understood as a transforming experience for her. Diana recounts for the first time choosing to open the door and look behind it to see what was inside of her.

Anne describes a very unsatisfying experience when she sought professional help. Anne went to her physician seeking help,

I went to my doctor, he didn't want to give me pills and stuff. I think you're strong and you can do it yourself. But there was no help coming to me as to how to do this. Get exercise, eat right, get lots of rest. But you still have to deal with the issues that put you in that spot.

Anne describes eventually coming to the realization that she was not going to get the help she needed, and that the help would have to come from herself. She decided to go to the library to get some self-help books and describes a remarkable process of personal transformation as she used the books to help her look inwardly to explore what was going on for her.

Through the process of questioning themselves, the women began to question some of the taken-for-granted in their life. As this occurred they began to see their life and their world in ways they never had before.

The fog begins to lift

It was almost like some, like this fog started to lift, like it was lifted and I started to see things differently...I started to see the world differently (Lorraine)

As the women began to question themselves, they gradually began questioning the external world as well. As Lorraine described in the above quote, their blinders slowly lifted and they were able to see things they had up to that point not seen. What they began to see for the most part disturbed them. Lorraine describes beginning to see herself trapped in societal roles. Anne describes beginning to become aware of the expectations she was putting on herself. She looked around and realized she needed to change some of them. Anne gave the example of changing from

saying she needed to ask her husband for help to "no, I have to ask him to start doing his share". Anne stated it was a major step to get over believing it was all her responsibility, and describes how she slowly transformed her way of thinking. Similarly, Marion came to realize the existence of expectations, but her discovery consisted of illuminating the external expectations that were influencing her,

It was like they were just always there and when bringing them to the surface, actually saying them out loud, even writing them down. It was like, why, who says this?

Rachel described coming to new insights that helped free her from her constraining thoughts as well,

Hey wait, whoa, whoa...This maybe just isn't who you are. Maybe you are a poet and a creatress and so what if your house gets messy for a couple of weeks.

As the fog lifted, then, the women began to free themselves of the beliefs and expectations that constrained them. A number of them described simultaneously, feeling angry and antagonistic toward others and toward the cultural myths which had imprisoned them.

#### The volcano erupts

She's there, wild ugly woman, she screeches from your soul. She is your dark side, your teacher, never let her go from your sight. For she will destroy you with the light. She leads you to your pain. Respect that ugly creature for she'll be back, yes, she'll be back again. (Rachel)

All of the women except Evelyn (who does not describe this phase in her experience) describe feeling some form of anger and resentment during

the "living in the shadows phase". For Rachel, the anger was like a volcano which had been building in force and suddenly started to rumble,

I was compromising my sense of self. I had been, just allowing myself to...I was incredibly angry...it wasn't like a gentle awareness, it was like a volcano, she rumbled and there was no way I could deny it any more.

Lorraine describes becoming very antagonistic toward traditional roles and anything that symbolized the oppression of women,

When the blinders started to come off there was a lot of anger too, and of course nice perfect women do not get angry that is still a tough one for me, so when I would start to rant and rave around home and around my friends and family they would start.

Marion described feeling very angry toward her parents. Although she realized they did it in the name of caring, she found herself continually frustrated at their refusal to see some of what she was realizing. She also felt angry at their unwillingness to validate her feelings and insights.

Although Anne remembers feeling angry and several times being ready to walk out the door, she describes being more angry at herself because she was not expressing her needs to her husband. Lois described feeling very resentful at times toward her husband and other family members because of their expectations and lack of understanding. She described however, hanging on to the resentment. During the second interview she expressed how difficult it had been to read in the interpretive summary about her resentment. She said it was accurate, but it was hard to see it

in writing--as Lorraine had described, Lois shared the belief that nice women are not suppose to feel or act like that.

Downing & Roush (1985) have developed a model of feminist identity development which is reflected in the descriptions of the women in this study. These authors describe how women move from passive acceptance of traditional sex roles to revelation where the women feel anger and guilt over the oppression experienced in the past, and over their participation in that oppression.

#### Clawing my way out of a desperate place

I ended up trying to find myself, clawing my way out of this desperate place I was in and not too sure how to get out, but clawing (Rachel).

Rachel, Lorraine and Anne describe a dramatic period of pursuing a way out of the place they found themselves in. For Lorraine it eventually meant leaving the relationship. Although she does not remember consciously thinking she would leave, she describes how at a deeper level she had decided. Lorraine describes moving into a new home,

I was unpacking and as I was unpacking it was like this voice inside me, this inner voice kept popping out. It kept saying I'll just put these away for them here...not for us, it was for them. It was like there was this very clear split.

Rachel describes grabbing onto anything that she thought would help her learn more about herself. She began going to conferences and workshops desperately trying to put the pieces of her self together.

Diana describes making the decision to leave her marital relationship and staying in the city for a period of time building up the courage to move. At this point she remembers most of her decisions and actions were focused on what she needed to do as a mother to ensure her daughter would be well cared for. It was much later that she began thinking about her self. This is an example of how the role of mother at times dominated which parts of self were expressed and in fact were considered.

Marion describes a period of obsessively talking to people about her experiences. She talked with her minister, family members, and "anyone who would listen".

#### Bombing and devastation

As she first descends, she may sense only void. The conventions of her upbringing may not allow her to witness the pain and isolation within. Her task will be to witness her own pain...the pain of her subjective values crying out to her, pressing to emerge. She must bring those values to clarity and expression in the patterns of her daily life (Duerck, 1989, p. 23).

As the women began questioning themselves, their lives, and their worlds, they gradually began to make changes in their lives. For some of the women the changes they made were small and gradual. Lois described returning to school and work, and giving more of the responsibility for home and family tasks to her husband. Over the past few years she has continued making small changes to the way she enacts her roles, and to some of her relationships. Anne described altering the way she thought about her roles and responsibilities. She describes growing brakes, and

although she still has a need to be involved she makes conscious choices about what she specifically wants to do. Anne describes it as a "hanging on to some of what I learned and letting go of some".

For Marion making changes has been a difficult and confusing process. Marion describes being very committed to her church and religion. She describes a real conflict between finding her self and following her beliefs. What she has begun questioning is her parents' God. Marion described her ongoing process of discovering her own God and establishing a new and different relationship between her self and her God.

During the "living in the shadows phase" Diana made numerous changes in her life to live out her newly formed or illuminated values. She moved to a new city, returned to work, became a single parent, and said goodbye to old friendships that were not healthy. Similarly, Rachel and Lorraine describe leaving their marital relationship and making dramatic changes in their work and in their overall life styles. Lorraine uses the metaphor of bombing old structures to describe this change process. As she began bombing, the structures fell away leaving devastation.

What I think I was doing was bombing. ...Breaking away the walls. Sometimes when you are breaking those big ones, it's devastation. What happens with leaving my career, so now I'm not a mother like I use to be, I'm definitely not a wife...everything that was anything to me in my life is gone now.

Although all of the women underscore the positiveness of this bombing process, they also describe the struggle and the losses that have been associated with it. Anne recounts times when she has wished for a lobotomy

so she would not have to see what she saw, or want what she wanted. Rachel describes the grieving process she went through,

What came clear to me was that I was grieving, not only for my failed marriage, but for the lost ideal that I had identified myself with. At one time, this ideal fed me and sustained me by providing a construct for my faith (Rachel).

Lorraine, Diana and Marion also talk of the loss of relationships. All of these women describe the loss of the fantasy of the relationships they believed they had, as being painful. Similarly, Josselson (1987) contends the loss of a relationship entails more than losing a person. Similar to what the women described, Josselson asserts this loss can mean loss of a precious fantasy. As with any grieving process, the women describe the grief as never leaving completely. As new implications of the losses are realized, new grief emerges. The women were adamant however, that if given the chance they would not go back.

Overall the "living in the shadows phase" was a phase of transition. It began with the crumbling of a supposedly secure foundation, and contained continual questioning of self, culture, and life. Through this questioning and subsequent action, the major structures of the non-reflective phase were dislodged, altered and/or replaced. An important feature of this phase is that the women described it as ongoing. They continually re-visit and re-experience the themes within this phase, as they continue to experience life.

#### Reclaiming and Discovery

Rollo May (1975) maintains that a choice confronts all human beings and human being. May poses the question,

Shall we, as we feel our foundation shaking, withdraw in anxiety and panic? Frightened by the loss of our familiar mooring places, shall we become paralyzed and cover our inaction with apathy? ...Or shall we seize the courage necessary to preserve our sensitivity, awareness, and responsibility in the face of radical change? (p. 11).

As I listened to the stories of the women in this study, I was reminded of May's questions. What reminded me of those questions were the stories of courage the women told. Although the women did not describe themselves as courageous, and some did not even identify courage as an element within their experience, I heard and felt extraordinary courage throughout both the telling of their stories, and in the stories themselves.

May describes courage as "the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair" (p. 12). All of the women in this study demonstrated such a capacity. According to May, courage is not a virtue or value among other personal values, but rather is the foundation which underlies and gives reality to all other virtues and values. May contends that in human beings courage is necessary to make being and becoming possible. "An assertion of the self, a commitment, is essential if the self is to have any reality" (May, 1975, p. 13).

The narrative phase of reclaiming and discovery is the story of the womens' courage and commitment to reclaim and discover self. Polkinghorne (1988) points out that a story of life is not merely a story text, but rather life is lived and the story is told. Because the story is made up of actions, and is told and retold, the story is open to editing and revision (Polkinghorne, 1988). Such was the case with the womens' stories.

In essence, the women described beginning to author their lives from a different perspective, and with a different employment. The new employment focused on a reclaiming and discovery of self. Within this new employment the women describe seven themes. These themes include:

1. Reconnecting with self.
2. Balancing authenticity and connection.
3. Learning to "listen", "trust" and "nurture" self.
4. Realizing choice.
5. Shift from "doing" to "living".
6. Letting go of the cocoon.
7. Making new connections.

#### Reconnecting with self

Dear Claire,

I've been writing all these pictures of doom and gloom. How can I explain this? There is this other part of me. She is a mad woman. A fool. She is so strong and so full of humour. She holds her head up high and she's laughing all the way. She's fearless and wild. She is the one who is pulling me through this in style. She brushes me off and boots me out the door. She teases me when I am in the garden eating worms. She brings me hot sauce and red wine to go with them. She even offers to pick some dandelions and make a salad. Who is she Claire? She is not reverent at all. Yet she is so full of strength and love for life and she makes me laugh at my foolishness and she knows the world needs help. She can handle it. Perhaps she is Butterfly woman.

And that other part of me--that frightened, insecure part of me--is destructive. I need to find a place for her. The rejected child, the person who hurts from her failed marriage, who worries about what other people think, panics about a lot of things, thinks she is responsible for the whole world. Perhaps she needs to be cradled and loved. There is something missing. Something of gentleness--like a gentle mother who will let me cry or just love me and let me feel special--comfort me with warmth. (Rachel)

Rachel's letter provides a portrait of the women's experience of reconnecting with self, and of their authoring process. The women began to discover new parts they never knew existed, and reconnected with parts of their self they had not communicated with for a long time. Similar to Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the polyphonic novel, the women describe each part of their self as having their own individual story line. Authoring of self became a dialogical process of connecting the many parts and developing unifying relationships between them to form a cohesive whole. Lorraine, Marion, Lois, Diana, and Anne also described this reconnecting with parts of her self. As Anne explains,

It was recovering what I had lost and waking up more, waking up a lot more and ...that also helped me to define myself and say, hey I have neat stuff here.

While these women emphasized developing and nurturing the discovery and uniting of parts during this phase, Evelyn described her experience somewhat differently. Evelyn's narrative was more linear in nature. During different times in her life certain parts were dominant, while others were

put on the back burner. Evelyn gave the example of the present time while she is a mother, her nurturing, creative part is the central aspect of her self. The other parts "remain part of my self although they're not active at the moment...there'll be time later".

In contrast, the other women describe working very hard to let all parts have a part in their story. Anne, Lois, Rachel, and Diana underscored their struggle to ensure all parts are expressed. In particular, the women describe the difficulty balancing their mother parts and their individual parts, so that both were listened to and valued. Anne provides an apt description of how this balancing process can go awry.

it's where I am in this pit again and it happens really fast and you think well I know what the warning signs are, how did this happen to me and you sort of have to go back and look and go Oh! I see it snuck up on me and I didn't really notice, or I had to make a choice. Like I was going to school and I was running a family daycare, and I'd finished that and thought I'll spend this year having time with my son and stuff and I got offered a job after a month and it's a block away from my house, a place where I've been volunteering for three years, it's a really good opportunity so we hummed and hawed and decided we'd do it, and it was all of a sudden I had all this stuff happening and it's like, I could kill myself that I let this happen, but you don't know all the things.

Balancing authenticity and connection. The battle between authenticity and connection took a different turn during this phase. The women describe shifting toward the need to be authentic, thereby creating

more of a balance between the two forces. Peck (1986) refers to this balancing process and contends that women are engaged in a constant process of monitoring their own growth and change against the possible impact on the relationships they value. According to Peck, a woman's ability to make subtle changes in regards to the degree of involvement in relationships is a prime factor in a clearer self-definition. This requires that the woman is able psychologically to separate herself from dependence on the relationships as her sole means of self-knowledge. "Thus the attachment that is womens' vital contribution to society needs to be moderated by a degree of separation from those very relationships the woman needs and wants to maintain" (Peck, 1986, p. 280). The women in this study describe this element as perhaps the most challenging aspect of defining self while being a mother. Lois described how when she is with her children she subtly loses her own sense of self. Diana described a similar experience,

One of the biggest struggles I have now a days is the struggle between the part of me who wants to be an individual and has really individual needs separate from mothering roles, and um I have a big fight a lot cause I really need some time to be that part and feel on my own and yet to find the balance and be comfortable doing that and still maintain my mother parts.

Rachel describes at times rebelling from the demands of being connected as mother. She gives the example of just laying in bed eating bon bons to nurture the unconventional parts of her self. Lorraine described the mothering-connection having tremendous influence on her overall experience of self-definition.

when I left the relationships I also left my children with their dad and I was the one who moved out and I needed that time for me, but if I hadn't had children it would have been different and I don't know if it would have been so painful...you know a good mother doesn't leave her children for her self, that's selfish.

Evelyn describes a different experience of this balancing process. Evelyn described a strong connection between developing her self and her family. When asked about her self she frequently replied in the we. When asked to describe herself to me she replied, "What do we like to do? Basically we all enjoy being together as a family...We read, we walk, we go to the art gallery."

Evelyn does describe however, a very clear distinction between her family and other. As a family, they constantly question the cultural norms including traditional taken-for-granted such as school, movies, plays, and so forth. Evelyn's process of defining self is in direct and constant relation with her family. Using the notion of self as polyphonic novel to illuminate Evelyn's experience one could say that although there are numerous parts in existence, at the present time Evelyn's family is the dominant part of her self and the one which is in the figure position.

This balancing of authenticity with connection is a process which occurred gradually over time. Rachel used a metaphor of lions at the gate which I believe provides a poignant illustration of this process.

The lions at the gate protect us. Denial that I'm in a really bad situation. I'm being treated badly and I'm denying myself.

Those lions at the gate just stood there and as I found myself

in perspective and safety, gradually I could feel myself acquire things that would give me a stability. That's when I would let in the reality of who I was.

Learning to listen, trust, and nurture self

The difference between comfort and nurture is this: if you have a plant that is sick because you keep it in a dark closet, and you say soothing words to it, that is comfort. If you take the plant out of the closet and put it in the sun, give it something to drink, and then talk to it, that is nurture (Estes, 1992, p. 323).

Estes' quote is an apt description of the process of listening, trusting and nurturing self described by the women in this study. After years of locking away parts of self, using their energy to suppress those parts, and neither listening to, nor trusting the voices of those parts, the women describe their experience of learning to nurture self. All of the women describe now listening to the voices of self. For Evelyn this has been a fairly constant process. She described her tendency to just trundle along until she bumps up against things. At that point she explained there is an intellectual and an emotional response, which is followed by her turning to her spiritual part to sort it out. For the other women, this listening to self was a more recent undertaking. Anne describes "over the last few years I've realized that I have a really smart intuition and subconscious". Lorraine, Marion, Lois, Rachel and Diana all describe learning to tune in to the voices within rather than drown them out.

Part of this process of learning to listen has involved learning to trust the voices. For many of the women there were years of learning not

to trust the voices, believing that there was an external right and wrong to follow. When the internal voices would be in conflict with these external decrees, the internal voices would be silenced. Over time, the women described their loss of faith in the voices.

To begin to listen again meant finding the courage to risk since there was the fear that the voices may steer them wrong. The women describe however, discovering their voices to be similar to Estes (1992) analogy of a divining instrument or a crystal. "It is like a wise old woman who is with you always, who tells you exactly what the matter is, tells you exactly whether you need to go left or right" (Estes, 1992, p. 74).

As well as learning to listen and trust self, the women describe learning to nurture self. As Anne describes,

I've gotten a lot stronger in recognizing what my signs are. Knowing ahead of time, being able to move back to really early warning signs and saying, another month of this and I'm going to be in trouble. I have to do something now, that kind of stuff.

All of the women describe similar processes of monitoring how they are feeling and responding accordingly. Part of this response includes acting while the voices are still quietly communicating, as opposed to reaching the point where they are screaming for attention. Diana gives the example of responding when she has a glimmer of a headache, rather than waiting until she has a migraine. This monitoring process was described as developing new skills in self care.

A major challenge in regards to nurturing of self was the lack of support the women often experienced from others around them. Diana tells of shifting from being super woman, to choosing a lighter load. She recalls numerous instances where people questioned her "is that all you're doing?" or "what else are you doing?" Part of her learning has therefore necessarily included "not buying into other peoples expectations".

Lorraine described how this shift toward nurturing has occurred gradually, and she at times is surprised by it. She recounts experiences at work where everyone else will be in a mad flurry trying to meet a deadline "just like the way I used to be". She is surprised when she finds herself calmly sitting on the sidelines, not caught up in the calamity.

All of the women described the difficulty they had in balancing nurturing of self with the tasks of motherhood. They describe the work of mothering making life so busy they often forget to care for their self. They described that no matter how careful they were to not take too much on they often found themselves weighed down by the burden of all there was to do. They related stories of getting off track and finding themselves derailed. Estes (1992) provides a fitting description of what they described sometimes occurs,

Most of us would do better if we became more adept at watching the fire under our work, if we watched more closely the cooking process for nourishing the wild self. Too often we turn away from the pot, from the oven. We forget to watch, forget to add fuel, forget to stir. We mistakenly think the fire and the cooking are like one of those feisty house plants

that can go without water for eight months before the poor thing keels over. It is not so. The fire bears watching, for it is easy to let it go out (p.97).

Realizing choice. When Marion was asked what her process of developing self has meant for her in her life, she replied "choice". Marion described a central aspect of her experience was realizing the choice she had in her life. That realization of choice pointed to the potential within her life and within her self. The other women in the study echoed similar thoughts in regards to this theme of choice. Lorraine described realizing her choice in terms of her work. She made the decision to leave entirely the field she had worked in for over twenty years, and look at other options. Lorraine described some of the choices she had made as very painful, but she made them and they were necessary.

Anne talked about the realization that she had choice in regards to the expectations she was placing on herself. Once she realized that choice, she describes regaining control of her life. Anne also described learning to exercise choice in her interactions with other people-- realizing that people were who they were, and acted the way they acted, but she had a choice in what all that meant for her.

The influence of choice in the womens' lives is reflected by Evelyn's experience. Although she has put parts of her self on the back burner because of having a limited amount of time in her life, she described being very content. In discussing this with her, it appeared that what made the difference was the fact that she had freely chosen this. Evelyn stated that if ever something came along which she really wanted to do, or really needed, she would just make sure it happened. She had an unwavering

belief in the existence of choice in her life. With this availability of choice she did not feel she was missing out. Duerk (1989) maintains that the central task for women is to care, daily, for self and life, "to live as if the candle is lighted" (p.59). It was the realization of choice which allowed the women in this study to feel they were accomplishing this task.

Included within this theme of choice was the aspect of control. Many of the women described in the past using external methods of control. Examples of this included, doing more, trying harder, trying to change other people's ideas or actions, trying to control the environment, and so forth. During the process of self-definition they describe moving toward a more internal means of control. Rachel likened this to an active (as opposed to passive) process of surrendering. She describes this process as surrendering to the real self. Similarly, Diana explains,

I think sometimes the less control I think I have, the more I let go of, the more I end up having, cause the control I think I have really isn't my own control, it's external.

Shifting from doing to living. Marion described a change in her life when she entered the pit. Up to that point Marion explained she had never really felt anything. In recounting events from her adolescent years and the years when she was first married, she had difficulty remembering specific details. In reflecting on this difficulty, she questioned whether this was in part due to the fact that she was acting out a script as opposed to living her life. Marion describes since the time of the pit she has shifted from a doing mode to a living mode. Lorraine, Lois, Rachel, Anne and Diana all describe a similar shift from doing to living. Doing

for these women meant going through the motions of life without really being engaged in it. They did what was expected, followed the rule book and over the years got busier and busier doing. In the reclaiming and discovery phase the women describe a shift. By reconnecting with their self they have reconnected with life. This reconnecting with life has meant engaging in the struggle and the risk that sometimes accompanies it, as well as experiencing the joy of living it.

Letting go of the cocoon. Josselson (1987) describes the process of anchoring in which women attach themselves to aspects of the adult world to have a berth in it. According to Josselson, identity is an amalgamation and integration of these anchor points. The women in this study described this notion of anchoring when they talked about choosing the safety of the cocoon. During the "reclaiming and discovery" phase the women describe beginning to let go of this cocoon. Anne explained that she came to the realization that she was a product of her life up to that point. She described making choices about which parts she would hang on to, and which she would let go of. Diana used a metaphor of caterpillar to butterfly to depict her experience of letting go of the cocoon. Her words provide a vivid description of this process.

I have been in a cocoon, self-created, but mostly created by my growing up and I had this image that in poking out, I'm a butterfly now, and I've allowed myself to eat away at a lot of the cocoon that's kept me in. I've made a few flights, but I still come back to the cocoon once in awhile cause I'm still not quite adept at being out there in my new way of being. It feels wonderful when I'm out there but I still have to come

back to the safety that I'm getting from being in my cocoon. There's only a tiny bit of the cocoon left but I still check in and make sure that it's okay and kind of rest cause being this way and using my wings I guess is something I'm not used to...what I'm building out here is my own strength, you know when I'm using my wings I'm getting stronger, that's my foundation

In letting go of this cocoon the women describe having to work a lot harder to know the direction they want to go in, and to ensure they get there safely. Similar to being on a journey with no map, the women expressed that it was sometimes difficult not having the old rule book. Although they describe knowing the rule book was somewhat made of myth (e.g. marrying the prince and living happily ever after), it still provided some sort of security, false as it was. Without the rule book, they must put the time and effort into making their own decisions, and at the same time manage the fear or anxiety of not knowing if the decision is the best one for them.

Making new connections. The last theme which emerged in the "reclaiming and discovery" phase was making new connections. The women described the changes that occurred in their relationships with others and in the relationship between different parts of their self. As discussed under the theme of listening, trusting and nurturing self, the relationships within self became more nurturing. The women described being much less judgmental about the different parts of their self. In addition, they describe not harboring as much anger or guilt in regards to mistakes they have made.

The women's relationships with others changed in both who they chose to be in relation with, and what those relationships were like. Some of the women described distancing from relationships with some of the people who were very close to them. Similar to Miller's (1991) suggestion that it is not relationships, but the type of relationship that influences the process of self-definition, the women described the relationships they distanced from were the ones which seemed to somehow block their being in relation with self. Lois and Rachel for example described initially distancing from their children by returning to work. They felt they needed to do that in order to have any sense of self since when they were around their children their mother role dominated their self. Lois describes this as still occurring when she is out with her children. She states that others relate to her as a mother and she in turn expresses the parts of her self which fit with her mother role. Anne described withdrawing into herself and away from her husband when she felt she had lost connection with her self. Lorraine left the family home to live on her own while she struggled to regain a connection with her self. Diana describes ending friendships in which she found she could not be the way she wanted to be.

Peck (1986) describes the importance of flexibility and elasticity in women's relationships. Peck defines flexibility as the ability to redistribute emotional investment in relationships as the need arises, and maintains that flexibility is essential for the maintenance of emotional well-being and a clear self-definition. Elasticity refers to the degree to which relationships are responsive to a woman's changing needs. According to Peck, elasticity is the primary way in which a woman is able to exert influence upon the people around her, and to control the extent to which

other people's behavior affects her. Peck maintains that lack of flexibility and elasticity in relationships force a women to weigh the impact of any developmental change against the possible loss of relationships. "It creates a situation whereby a woman is forced, of necessity, either to live through her relationships (and their reflection of her impact on the world) or to attempt to change her relationships and life circumstances and to risk the concomitant 'loss of self'" (Peck, 1986, p.280). For all of the participants except Evelyn, their central relationships were to a more or lesser degree lacking in flexibility and elasticity. These women describe choosing to change their relationships and life circumstances, but in contrast to Peck's contention, during the reclaiming and discovery phase they did so in order to reconnect with self. Interestingly, since self was ultimately changed as a result of the changes in their relationships and life, perhaps in a manner of speaking, it could be said that the women lost the self they knew. Although the women describe this loss indirectly, over all they emphasized the gain.

In contrast to the other women, Evelyn did not describe this distancing process, or feeling the need to distance in order to be more in relation with her self. What is interesting to note is that in discussing her life she described it as a choice. Evelyn also maintained there was enough flexibility in her life and in her family relations that if she needed or wanted something she would ensure she got it. It appears that Evelyn perhaps had enough flexibility and elasticity in her relationships to make them responsive to her needs and choices.

The women describe the relationships they have maintained and evolved during this phase as being of a different nature than other past ones.

They describe having fewer important relationships in their life, and the connections within those relationships as having more depth, honesty, and acceptance. Within their relationships the women describe feeling like they can be who they are, without any pretence or fear of rejection. Rachel and Marion described finding it difficult to meet people whom they can engage with in this manner. Marion in particular, stated she still felt very alone and had not been able to find people who were open to her being authentic. Marion describes sharing some of her experience with other women in her present circle and having them all emphatically state they had not experienced anything similar.

Another aspect the women described was the relationship between their internal and external self. During the reclaiming of self, the women worked at having their internal and external being in-relation. During the non-reflective phase their external self often expressed something very incongruous from their internal self. At times their external being was focused on drowning out their internal being. Lorraine described how although she thought she was searching for self during the non-reflective phase, she realizes now that external searching (by going to workshops, changing jobs, moving, and so forth) was geared at quieting the inner parts as opposed to responding to the messages. With internal and external in relation, the external actions are focused on responding to the internal messages.

Overall the phase of "reclaiming and discovery" was a period of growth and empowerment. Using their courage and commitment to life, the women describe re-authoring their stories. For each woman the reconnection

with the many parts of self led to balancing connection with authenticity, making their own choices, and experiencing life in a more meaningful way.

#### Is the Butterfly a Butterfly?

It is the twilight zone between past and future that is the precarious world of transformation within the chrysalis. Part of us is looking back, yearning for the magic we have lost; part is glad to say good-bye to our chaotic past; part looks ahead with whatever courage we can muster; part is excited by the changing potential; part sits stone-still not daring to look either way. Individuals who consciously accept the chrysalis, whether in analysis or in life's experience, have accepted a life/death paradox, a paradox which returns in a different form at each new spiral of growth (Woodman, 1985, p.14).

Similar to Woodman's description, the women explain that as the process of self-definition carries on, they continue to make new discoveries about their self. Throughout this process there are periods where they feel more assured and positive about their experience and about those discoveries, and other times when they feel vulnerable and uncertain. This variation was observed by me during the research process. I met with the women at different times over a period of approximately two months. At varying times the women displayed a range of moods and feelings about their overall experience. At times they were exhilarated as they spoke of their process of defining self, and at other times they described feeling tired and vulnerable. This back and forth motion which the women described was an essential element of their experience. With this back and forth motion

they moved between the phases and themes. The different parts of self, each with their own story line, seemed to influence this back and forth motion. Depending on which part or parts were dominant at a given moment, the women experienced different phases and themes of the process. When for example their supermom part dominated, the women described finding themselves pulled back to living out certain themes in the non-reflective phase, and feeling like they were not being a good mother.

As well as moving back and forth between phases, the women also described simultaneously experiencing different phases and/or themes. How I came to understand this simultaneous nature of their experience was by considering the nature of self. Since self consisted of multiple parts, and the story lines of the different parts of self were grounded in certain themes or phases, depending on the part or parts which were dominant at any moment, those phases and themes would be part of the women's experience. Diana's description of the conflict between her mothering parts and her individual parts reflects this simultaneous experiencing. Some of her mother parts were grounded in the beliefs and values of the non-reflective phase, while her individual parts were grounded in the values of the reclaiming and discovery phase. Diana described the mothering parts dominating the individual parts, however she was becoming more aware of this and working to change it. Hermans & Kempen (1993) emphasize this notion of the different parts of self being in conflict. These authors also describe the self as being in a position to juxtapose the other positions and place the parts in a particular structure. Hermans & Kempen's (1993) contention that the self may agree and even foster a temporary dominance of one part or parts, in order to

express and balance the possibilities of the self as a whole, reflects Diana's experience. Diana's working toward changing the mother parts domination, was her attempt at balancing the possibilities of the self as a whole.

In spite of the back and forth motion, all of the women described their ever-increasing ability to balance and express the possibilities within their self. The women described that the parts which were grounded in the "reclaiming and discovery" phase gained more strength and began to dominate more often. As a result they felt their overall experience of self-definition was one of self growth and expansion. As Diana describes,

I thought I was sophisticated before and actually I was so primitive, I mean I was just existing I wasn't living and that's why I always felt like a doughnut like there was a piece of me missing.

The women also described the realization that the process would never end. This never-ending aspect was both anxiety producing as well as exciting for the women. Lorraine described experiencing occasional dismay that after all of the work and struggle she still did not know if "the butterfly is a butterfly". When other parts of her self dominated however, she found this never-ending notion inspiring. Marion explained that although the process of self-definition was a struggle, it was also filled with potential. Her previous story had a beginning a middle and an end, and she knew what was coming by watching her mother and her grandmother. She stated that her new story was never-ending, and because of that was filled with possibility and hope. Similarly, Diana maintained that she never wanted her doughnut hole to be filled, if it was full that would

mean the end of growth, and the growth was what living was all about. Estes (1992) captures the expression of the women in this study in regards to self-definition, when she asserts,

To try to diagram her, to draw boxes around her psychic life, would be contrary to her spirit. To know her is an ongoing process, a lifelong process, and that is why this work is an ongoing work, a lifelong work. (p. 20)

In summary, for the participants in this study the experience of defining self was an ongoing process which consisted of three phases. These phases were not linear but rather the women describe moving back and forth within and between the phases. Table 1 provides an overview of the central themes inherent within the three phases. The table also describes the essential characteristics of each theme.

#### Mothering and Self-definition

Throughout the process of self-definition mothering was a central thread which was interwoven within and amongst the participants' experiences. As described, the role of mother often influenced the parts of self which were valued and expressed. As a result, the women described mothering as both an opportunity for self-definition and a potential hinderance to self-definition. All of the women described a complimentary and mutual relationship between the experience of self-definition and mothering.

Table 1

Experiences of Self-definition: The Themes

Themes	Characteristics
<b>Phase 1: Non-Reflective Doing</b>	
I've got it all figured out	Non-reflective, following existing road, models after others, strong in convictions
Embracing a script	Acting roles, perfect facade gender separation
Approval and recognition as a motivator in life	fitting in, performing, needs put aside, external judgement of worth, conditional approval
Authenticity versus connection	unconscious battle, suppress inner voices, follows society norms, needs put aside
Denying parts of self	doing vs living, roles vs self, external searching, external authority, loss of trust in self, betrayal of self
Choosing the safety of cocoon	cultural infrastructure for life, safety and security, cultural narrative dominates
<b>Phase 2: Living in the Shadows</b>	
Starting to crumble	doing it all, crises in mothering, triggering of crumbling process
Alone on a desert island	alienated from self and others, isolated, who am I? vulnerability, fear, despair
What's the matter with you?	self-judgement, expectations of self, external pressure, seeks outside help

The fog begins to lift	sees world differently, questions beliefs, new awareness and insights
The volcano erupts	anger at self and others, antagonistic, resentful, feels compromised.
Clawing my way out of a desperate place	grabbing at life, building courage, leaving relationships
Bombing and devastation	makes changes, alters roles, relationships, loss and grief, transition
Phase 3: Reclaiming and Discovery	
Reconnecting with self	discovering new parts of self, self as polyphony of voices, re-authoring self
Balancing authenticity and connection	authenticity, rebellion, lions let guard down
Learning to listen, trust, and nurture	listens to inner voices, risking, caring for self, monitoring self
Realizing choice	self-potential, internal control
Shift from doing to living	feeling, experiencing, struggle and joy
Letting go of the cocoon	self as foundation, no rule-book, gains strength
Making new connections	distancing from relations, embraces new relations, deeper connections with self and other

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Mothering: An Opportunity and a Restraint

All of the women in the study described mothering as providing an opportunity for self-definition. Through mothering the participants describe discovering new parts of their self, coming to know existing parts of self in more depth, and experiencing the possibilities within their self to a greater degree.

Rachel described how the process of conceiving and bearing a child connected her to parts and depths of her being she never knew existed. She describes "just being in awe of the whole process", "my breasts could produce milk...my love for these children", they all played "a powerful part of shifting my image of self". She describes really coming to understand and believe in the mind-body connection and wholeness. Similarly Anne stated motherhood gave her a new perspective on life,

It was such an incredible experience...I made another human, I gave birth to another human. Getting my grade 12 shouldn't really be that much trouble. Do you know what I mean? When you put it in perspective I think it helps you see what is really important in this world and what isn't.

Lois describes motherhood as helping her discover the depth of her ability to love and care for another human being. She describes having been the youngest in her family and being very self-centered. When she had children she became selfless. Lois describes the experience of loving her children so much that she would give up her self, as being an incredible lesson. This lesson included two aspects. First was the discovery the depth of her ability to care for, and to give to another human being,

These children mean so much that I would stop anything and

give everything up in a moments notice for them. I've never felt that way in my life before. I feel you have to be a mother to experience that. You can say that to someone but until you have actually had a child and experienced that love, that bond that's there.

The second aspect of the lesson was her discovery of how valuable her self was, and the importance of not giving self up even in the name of caring.

Another way in which the women described mothering as an opportunity for coming to know and define self was in regards to their day to day living of life. As Anne describes,

I think kids can really ground you as long as you don't let society unground you. There is a lot of stuff out there that can just really take you and sort of dump you, knock you for a real loop. You can get really caught up in it all and lose your way.

Anne describes this grounding occurring continuously as her children question her about her actions, her choices and her priorities. Through the questioning of her children, she begins to question her self and ask "Why do I do that?" and "What is so important about that?". What she has discovered is that a lot of her assumptions and beliefs have never been evaluated, and through this process of questioning has chosen to let a lot of them go. The other women in the study describe their children as having a similar influence on them. In the process of guiding their children they begin to notice the sign posts that they themselves are following. This

awareness has led them to become clearer about their values and make more conscious choices about life.

Miller (1991) emphasizes that although the caretaking aspect of womens' lives has been severely criticized as the culprit which blocks womens' development of self, all growth occurs within emotional connections. Miller contends that the attending and responding to the other nature of caretaking is the basis of all psychological growth. According to Miller, it is through this interplay of experience that a woman develops a sense of her self as a person. The womens' experiences support Miller's assertion of growth occurring through connection and relation with others. In particular, for the women in this study the relationships with their children were perhaps the closest and most influential relationships in regards to their psychological growth and development of self.

Although motherhood is an opportunity for self-definition, it was simultaneously described as potentially impeding the process. The two main ways in which the women described motherhood as blocking their process of self-definition were a) when the institution of motherhood decreed how mothering should be done, and b) when the instrumental work of mothering was so all-consuming that it left no time for their self work.

The womens' descriptions reflected Rich's (1976) contention that the "institution of motherhood" blocks the creativity and joy that is inherent in mothering. These women felt pressure both from themselves and from others, about how they "should" mother. When they failed to live out these expectations, they describe feeling guilt and anxiety over not being a "good enough mother". As described by Rich (1976) one of the central

characteristics expected of a mother is that she be kind, nurturing, and selfless. Although the women describe enjoying the nurturing aspect of mothering, the selfless part was more difficult to achieve. The women described attempting to carry out this mandate, and several of them became quite selfless. What occurred, however, as the nurturer received no nurturing (since that is another rule the women identified as being within the institution of motherhood) was the crumbling of their mythical foundation. This crumbling foundation began by the rebellion of the parts of their self who were being excluded from life.

The women in the study describe the following of this motherhood mandate as blocking their spontaneous and natural way of being a mother. Rachel describes that to carry out the mandate one is required to be an "administrative coordinator and I'm not at all that kind of person". As the women have defined their self more fully, they have begun to discover who, and how, they are as mothers including what strengths they bring to their mothering experience. Subsequently, they describe having richer relationships with their children, as well as enjoying life more fully.

The second way in which motherhood hindered the process of self-definition was when the essential instrumental tasks of mothering took up most of the women's time. The women describe that they were sometimes so busy surviving and keeping things together at home that they did not have time for anything else. If this carried on over a period of time, they began to feel overwhelmed and at times slipped back to old patterns. The women describe this doing of motherhood as partly the nature of mothering, and partly tied to the expectations inherent in the institution of motherhood.

### Self-definition and Motherhood: A Complementary Relationship

During the focus group one of the main topics discussed by the participants was the relationship between the process of self-definition and being a mother. The women described how the two were inextricably linked since mother was part of who they were, and therefore a part of their self. The women described that self-definition and motherhood were in a reciprocal relationship, with each influencing and being influenced by the other. Similar to the earlier discussions about the balancing of dominant parts, the women describe the institution of motherhood as being a dominant part of their self. As the women have worked at defining self, they have begun to balance the mothering parts (including the part representing the institution of motherhood) with the other parts of self. As mentioned earlier however, this balancing was a major challenge for most the women in this study.

As the women have experienced the process of self-definition, and have identified and begun expressing more parts of their self they describe their mothering as changing. The women explained that one of the major reasons their mothering has changed is that in letting go of the cultural script they were playing, they have lost the rule book they once followed as a mother. All of the taken-for-granted rights and wrongs are no longer necessarily givens. As they have begun questioning these assumptions and beliefs for themselves, they have also begun questioning them for their children. The women describe this as having a very positive effect on their children.

It's exciting in one way cause there's lots of potential and there are lots of choices, you know there are more choices in

some ways and I guess having children it's my only hope that I'm providing some kind of positive role model for them that they will have choice in their life too, so Okay you don't have to follow the script.

The women also describe this lack of a rule book as making mothering more challenging, and more anxiety provoking. They described the energy it takes to be continuously figuring out and questioning what the best way is. Anne for example, described the constant flow of subtle messages she needs to process and sort through,

Oh society, you know cause you get it, you get it with Barbie dolls and GI Joe commercials, you get it just with a lot of social innuendos and out right statements, Oh go off and marry a doctor you know that stuff that we get from our parents, and that they say to our children sometimes, and you have to stop and look through it and just say we don't buy into that...and it's hard work as a parent cause you're constantly going Oh well, will it matter a year down the road, it's really confusing.

Rachel described worrying whether her challenging of the norms and values of our culture will in some way have a detrimental effect on her children,

One of my daughters was talking and saying what kind of person she wanted to marry, and I was going, well are you sure you even want to be married, and we were having this conversation and I thought I can't believe I'm even saying this...and I didn't want to frighten them and it was awkward for me and I

was really freaking out inside going Oh what are you doing here you might be ruining, or there's a real threat that I might be doing things unconventionally and that somehow I'm wrong.

Overall the women expressed that defining their self has made everything different. The following quote from Lorraine captures the essence of the influence that defining self has had on their mothering experience.

I'm so glad and thankful. I think that we are all real lucky. I think they're damn lucky that I've gone through this transition. I really do. I think in the long run, even though I don't have a lot of the material trappings to provide for them, I think I'm providing them with something else that I think is far more important, that's going to really help them in their lives...I think I'm providing them with a role model that is showing them even though there is struggle involved there are other things involved too, like a value of self and that a person has choices.

## CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experience of defining self for women who are mothers. A human inquiry process was employed to study the lived experience of women as they define self while actively engaged in motherhood. The research findings were presented in three sections. The first section described the research participants in the study. The second section delineated the nature of self and the process of defining self, including the central themes inherent within that process. The third section described the relationship between self-definition and mothering.

To facilitate the articulation and thereby the understanding of the research findings, the findings and related literature were presented in a dialogical manner. As the participants' descriptions were presented, relevant literature was used to further elucidate the essential structure of the themes. This interaction between the research findings and the literature simultaneously served to give life to theories and concepts described within the scholarly literature. Of particular significance to the findings of this study was the work in the field of narrative psychology. As discussed, the women's experiences embellished the central ideas within the narrative theories of self.

This final chapter will include a discussion of the study's implications for helping professionals, implications for women/mothers' health, and implications for practice. As part of the discussion of practice, a framework for health promoting practice will be presented. Following the presentation of the practice framework, the study's

implications for theory building and research will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study will be described.

#### Implications for Helping Professionals

I can remember when my kids were babies and I knew I needed that support so I always tried to seek that, you know support groups and stuff but the thing about that when I look back on it now is that there was a script again, you know if you were a good mom you did the breastfeeding thing, you made your own baby food and that kind of stuff,...somehow there's got to be some changes, just validating the process of my self as a self, you know yes I'm a mother, and also a woman, validating as a person, all these parts of myself (Lorraine)

Lorraine's quote captures the essence of what the women described as a central concern in their seeking of support and help from professionals. The women described professionals who came with their own assumptions and beliefs about what a good mother is and does, and as a result had certain expectations about what they as women should be doing and experiencing. As Lorraine describes, receiving help often meant fitting in to yet another script and role. In considering the results of this study in regards to nurse/counsellor practice, I believe the most fundamental implication is the need for helping professionals to be aware of the assumptions and biases which guide their practice. For helping professionals to possess this awareness, they will need to go through their own self discovery process. Heise (1993) maintains that discovery of self allows a person to know what his or her values are and thereby have awareness of how they are influencing both their perceptions and actions. With this awareness, comes

the ability to choose how they will be and what they will do in a given situation (Parse, 1981). Heise (1993) contends that although nurses and other helping professionals espouse values which emphasize nonjudgemental care, respect and honoring of diversity, fostering of human potential, and self-responsibility and choice for clients, these values are often not expressed in actions. The women in this study described that after receiving help they sometimes felt more deflated, since the expectations the helpers came with added to the pile of expectations they were already struggling to live up to. The women who received what they considered valuable help from professionals describe that help as including, (a) empathic understanding, (b) having their feelings and experiences acknowledged and validated as important, (c) being given the opportunity to question and explore those feelings and experiences in an open and trusting environment, and (d) feeling valued and respected as a person of worth.

I believe the results of this study point to the need for all helping professionals to have a knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and values which influence their practice, and to question whether those beliefs do, in fact, foster the valuing of women and their process of self-definition.

#### Implications for Women/Mothers' Health

One body of knowledge that I have not discussed in regards to the results of this study, but which I believe has significance is the health literature. Throughout the interviews the women intimated numerous times about the complementary relationship between their experience of self-definition and their overall well-being. The womens' health and well-being

seemed to fluctuate as a result of how clear and strong they felt in their self. As the women moved toward more frequently being in the reclaiming and discovery phase, they described feeling more in control of their own well-being and beginning to make conscious choices to nurture and care for their self.

Traditionally the concept of health has been related to physical well-being (Davidson-Rada, 1993). In recent years, however, many nurse theorists have helped to expand the conceptualization and understanding of health (Newman, 1986; Parse, 1981; Watson, 1988). This recent conceptualization views health as a holistic concept which includes all aspects of a person's being. Parse (1992) maintains that an individual experiences health as a process of human becoming. According to Parse "health is (man's/woman's) unfolding...lived experiences, a nonlinear entity that cannot be qualified by terms such as good, bad, more or less...it is not Man adapting or coping. Unitary Man's health is a synthesis of values, a way of living" (Parse, 1987, p.160). Similar to the participants' description of their experience of self-definition, Parse's description of this unfolding process includes choosing unique ways of being which simultaneously includes the paradoxical unity of conformity-nonconformity and certainty-uncertainty. Newman (1986) considers health to be a process of personal transformation. For Newman, health is the ongoing and ever-changing "expansion of consciousness". Watson (1988) defines health as "unity and harmony within the mind, body, and soul" (p. 48). For Watson, health also includes a degree of congruence between the perceived self and the experienced self, between subjective reality and external reality, between the ideal self and the self, between

one human and another human, between a persona and nature, and with the person's sense of separateness and aloneness (Brouse, 1992). These concepts are all ones the participants in this study discussed in relation to their process of self-definition.

Overall, in considering womens' experience of self-definition in light of these notions of health there appear to be many similarities between the experience of defining self and the experience of health. Some theorists seem to imply that self-definition is a part of the health experience (Watson, 1988), others intimate health is the unfolding process of defining self (Newman, 1986; Parse, 1992). When contemplating the relationship between self-definition and health in light of the results of this study, a narrative framework comes to mind. From a narrative perspective, the relationship between self-definition and health could be transposed from self-definition being part of health, to health being part of self. With narrative as the root metaphor of self, narrative is the thread that links all of the many life events, experiences, and stories together into a cohesive whole. Viewing self as a polyphonic novel, health could be perceived as one of the many story lines within the self. Since there are multiple story lines, some of which are conflicting, Parse's (1990) description of the choice and commitment of health could be thought of in regards to health becoming a dominant story and character in the expression of self. As the health part of self becomes more dominant and is expressed, more health choices would be made and more health behaviors engaged in. From this framework, the focus of nursing practice would be on facilitating the expression and development of those parts of self which

emphasize health and health choices (as opposed to the traditional practice of focusing on fostering healthy behaviors).

#### Implications for Practice

This study points to the complementary relationship between women/mothers' experience of self-definition and their experience of health. When considering the implications of this study for practice, therefore, I believe it is important to consider the research results in light of health promotion.

The World Health Organization (1988) defines health promotion as "a process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health...a mediating strategy between people and their environment, synthesizing personal choice and social responsibility in health". A central element within health promotion is empowerment. Wuest & Stern (1991) describe empowerment in health promotion as a revolutionary process. In contrast to the notion of empowerment as a charitable process where power is given or bestowed on powerless people, in health promotion the empowerers are the people experiencing the process. In describing their process of defining self, the women in this study in essence also described their experience of health promotion and empowerment. As the women moved through the process of self-definition, they describe becoming more aware of the detrimental effect living out roles was having on their health and well-being. Most of the women described not being engaged in life, but rather acting it out from a distance. As they began listening to their inner voices and expressing more parts of their self, they described realizing the existence of choice in their lives. This awareness led them

to consciously begin monitoring their actions and responses, and to make choices that were self-nurturing and health promoting.

In considering the womens' experiences in regards to implications for practice, I believe the process of self-definition would best be supported by following the philosophy and practice of health promotion. Such a philosophy includes a belief that all people have power as a potential (Gutierrez, 1990) and focuses on providing a context for people to realize that power. Relating the results of this study, the literature concerning the process of self-definition, and the health promotion literature I have integrated the central aspects into a framework for nursing practice which may serve as a useful guide for supporting the process of self-definition (and thereby the promotion of health) in women.

The building of the framework began by reflecting on the integral aspects of the womens' experiences. In keeping with the philosophy of health promotion, during the focus group I engaged the women in a dialogue concerning their needs in regards to defining self, and the essential requirements of helping professionals. The womens' descriptions brought to mind the work of Paulo Freire (1989). In essence, the women in this study described a process of liberation from oppression, and a movement from dehumanization to humanization. I have, therefore, incorporated Freire's ideas into the building of this practice framework. Prior to describing the framework I will discuss the relationship between the participants' experiences and Freire's work.

#### Self-definition and Freirean Liberation

Freire (1989) contends that dehumanization is both an historical reality and an ontological reality. The dehumanization Freire speaks of

includes the lack of freedom and expression of all aspects of a person's humanness, and/or of his/her self. Freire's words have meaning for the women in this study. Similar to Freire's description of oppression the women describe their knowledge of their oppression as being impaired by their submersion in it. The taken-for-grantedness of their roles and their world led them to not question societal norms and values. Freire describes how initially the oppressed identify with their oppressor--the oppressors act as their model for humanity. The women described following such models as they took on the roles and lives which would get them to the good life. According to Freire, one of the basic elements of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is prescription, with the behavior of the oppressed being prescribed behavior. Similarly, the women in this study described fitting in to societal prescriptions in order to gain recognition and to be connected to others. Just as the women discovered a paradox between authenticity and connection, Freire describes

the oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it...The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided, between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting him; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors (p. 32).

Freire maintains that in order for liberation from oppression to occur and humanization to rein, a dialogical approach is necessary.

Freire's pedagogy focuses on making the oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed. According to Freire, as oppressed people reflect on their experiences they become engaged in the struggle for liberation. The womens' experiences in this study exemplify Freire's notions. As the fog began to lift, they describe reflecting on and questioning their life situation and looking at what was leading to it. Anne's example of realizing the strength and influence of her internal expectations and her work to change those expectations, illustrates this engagement in the struggle for liberation.

Although Freire's description of dialogue is mostly directed at dialogue between people, similar to Bakhtin's notion of self as polyphonic novel he does allude to the existence of others within the self. "They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized" (Freire, 1989, p. 32). Freire's ideas seemed to complement the narrative conception of self as a polyphony of characters and voices. In building a model for health promoting practice I have, therefore, integrated aspects of narrative psychology with Freire's suggestions for liberation and empowerment. Since the model flows out of the principles of health promotion, I believe the model provides a foundation from which to promote women/mother's self-definition and health.

#### A Framework for Health Promoting Practice

The model presented addresses the underlying assumptions guiding health promoting practice, the goals of practice, and practising actions. The model evolved from the understanding gained through the dialogical process of this research study. The model does not, therefore, make

generalizations about women/mothers' experiences of self-definition but, rather, focuses on presenting a framework for practice which would assist in illuminating the uniqueness of each person's experience. I have built the model from literature which pertains to people in general. For this reason I present it in a general manner. Following the presentation of the model, I will discuss the implications for women/mothers' health promotion.

### Beliefs and Assumptions

1. Self is composed of a number of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, characters not illuminated by a single authorial consciousness or merged in the unity of a single event (Bakhtin, 1929/1984).
2. The characters within self embody independent and mutually opposing viewpoints, all of which are engaged in dialogical relationships (Bakhtin, 1929/1984). Thus, the inner world of the person can be characterized as an interpersonal relationship.
3. The differentiation between self and other is simultaneously an orientation to the other and a separation from the other (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). The inside and outside world function as highly open systems that have intensive transactional relationships (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).
4. The dialogical self is a social self, in that other people may occupy positions in the multivoiced self (Hermans, Kempen, & vanLoon, 1992).
5. People's experience is a multiple structure of the threefold present and includes "a present about the future (expectation); a present about

the past (memory) and a present about the present (attention)" (Polkinghorne, 1988).

6. People's experience is "punctuated" not only according to one's own life but also according to one's place within the longer time spans of history and social evolution (Polkinghorne, 1988).

7. The social historical context is a prime source of values, beliefs and norms, and helps shape people's experience and self. This shaping can submerge people's consciousness and lead to restriction of choices, limited resources, and a state of perceived powerlessness (Freire, 1989).

8. Submersion of people's consciousness leads to dehumanization, where the process of self-definition is blocked, and parts of self are denied expression.

9. Humanization includes the discovery of self, personal power and choice. Humanization reflects a process of self-definition.

10. Self-definition/humanization requires reflection and action upon self and the world in order to transform it. Just as people may be oppressed in the outside world, parts of self may be oppressed internally. Liberation includes, therefore, the liberation of suppressed parts of self both internally and externally.

11. Human struggle and pain are often inherent elements of the process of self-definition/humanization.

11. "Dehumanized" people are able to (and must) play the primary role in their humanization process (Freire, 1989).

12. Health promoting practitioners must have an unyielding trust in people. "A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the

people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust" (Freire, 1989, p. 47).

13. The process of self-definition/humanization is never-ending. As contexts change and new situations arise, the self continually transforms as it interacts with itself, with others, and with the world.

#### The Goal of Health Promoting Practice

The goal of practice is to promote health through the facilitation of the process of self-definition and humanization. Emphasis is on supporting the expression of the multiple parts of self. Supporting this expression of self involves building a system of decentralized governance within the self (Sampson, 1985). Health promoting practitioners support this evolution of decentralized governance by encouraging people's growth in self awareness, dialogical relationships between parts of self, and dialogical relationships between the parts of self and the world.

#### Health Promoting Practice

I want someone who is not going to judge me and is not going to look at me through their focus as a woman, I want them to look at me as a person, just look at me and we'll avoid all that judgmental stuff, without their ideas of what a mother should do and be (Diana)

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of health promoting practice is what Carl Rogers termed unconditional positive regard. Rogers (1961) maintained that the psychological safety necessary for self-definition and humanization to occur was established by three associated processes. These processes include:

1. Accepting people as of unconditional worth. According to Rogers, when practitioners view people as of worth in their own right, and in their own unfolding (regardless of present condition or behavior) a climate of safety is created. Within this climate of safety people gradually learn they can be whatever they are without need of facade.
2. Creating a climate where external judgement and expectations are absent. When external judgments are absent, people are free to be open to experience, and begin to recognize their own likes and dislikes.
3. Empathic understanding. Rogers maintains it is empathic understanding which provides the ultimate in psychological safety.

If I say that I 'accept' you, but know nothing of you, this is a shallow acceptance indeed, and you realize that it may change if I actually come to know you. But if I understand you empathically, see you and what you are feeling and doing from your point of view, enter into your private world and see it as it appears to you--and still accept you--then this is safety indeed. In this climate you can permit your real self to emerge, and to express itself in varied and novel formings as it relates to the world (Rogers, 1961, p.358).

A fundamental requirement of health promoting practice, therefore, is both believing and acting in a manner which reflects unconditional positive regard of people. Relationships between health promoting practitioners and the people they are working with are characterized by genuineness, mutual respect, open communication and informality (Gutierrez, 1990).

A second aspect of health promoting practice is the appreciation of the multiplicity of self. In contrast to working with self as a single

entity, the health promoting practitioner endeavors to understand the multiple experience of self, and the myriad of meanings any experience may have for people. In addition, the practitioner recognizes the paradoxical and at times conflictual nature of people's experiences. The health promoting practitioner seeks to understand these multiple perceptions and experiences.

A third aspect of health promoting practice is trusting in the ability of people to make their own choices and carry out their own actions. Lord & Farlow (1990) suggest that health promoting practitioners view themselves as facilitators of empowerment versus teachers of health, and focus on promoting people to gain more control over certain aspects of their lives, as opposed to doing for them. Practitioners can not promote health if they continue to view themselves as experts in other people's health (Bopp, 1989). The role of the practitioner therefore is not to necessarily alleviate pain by making it better, but rather to support people through their pain. Following Estes (1992) differentiation between comforting and nurturing, the practitioner focuses on nurturing the process of self-definition and the experience of health.

Central characteristics of health promoting practice which can serve to guide interactions include:

1. Creating a climate of psychological safety.
2. Employing a collaborative rather than a hierarchical relationship.
3. Setting a context for change versus specifying a change.
4. Using dialogue to foster critical reflection and perspective transformation.

5. Maintaining respect and trust in people's ability to discover and choose for themselves.

Specifically a framework for health promoting practice includes four components. The first component is listening to women to understand their experience of defining and expressing self. Listening to women describe and reflect on their experience enables both the women and the nurse to gain an awareness of important aspects within those experiences, and to understand the meaning the experiences have for the women. The second component, participatory dialogue, provides an opportunity for questions to be raised by both the women and the nurse regarding issues or concerns related to their experience. These questions invite the women to reflect on their experiences and to illuminate the everyday-taken-for-granted roles and patterns in their lives. The women and the nurse explore, examine, and co-create a picture of how self is defined and experienced. Inherent within this picture are recurring patterns and themes which may influence the womens' experiences and behaviors. Through the third component, pattern recognition the women are able to gain an awareness of how roles and patterns are helping or hindering their process of self-definition and their overall experience of health. As these patterns, themes, and the beliefs that underlie them are illuminated the women are able to move to the fourth component, envisioning action and positive change. Within this component the women can make choices to maintain or change their existing roles, behaviors and beliefs.

Overall, the health promoting practice framework presented integrates concepts from narrative psychology, health and health promotion. This framework could serve as a guide for helping professionals as they

interact and support women/mothers' experiences of self-definition and health.

#### Promoting Womens' and Families' Health

There are two important aspects to remember when considering the findings of this study in regards to practice. The first aspect involves the recognition of the process nature of the experience of self-definition. Although for ease of description the themes are presented in a linear fashion, the women in this study did not experience them in that manner. It is essential, therefore, that practitioners not consider or use the phases or themes linearly when attempting to understand womens' experiences. The second aspect to keep in mind is the nature of the knowledge generated. Since this study was phenomenological in nature, it was focused on gaining understanding of and sensitivity to women/mother's experience of self-definition, as opposed to discovering knowledge which was generalizable. It is necessary to remember, therefore, that the recommendations made as result of this study are based on a greater understanding of what might be essential elements of women/mothers' experiences. It would be antithetical to the philosophy of health promotion and to phenomenological understanding to assume all women experience self-definition in the same manner as described in this study. It is possible that other aspects within the experience of self-definition might have emerged with different participants. The findings of this study, however, can serve as useful considerations when promoting health in women and in families.

The results of this study reveal numerous insights to consider in the promotion of health for women and their families. Perhaps one of the most

important insights is the relationship between women's process of self-definition and health promotion. As the women moved toward reclaiming and discovery of self they simultaneously became engaged in a process of health promotion. The women came to realize the power and choice in their lives, and began to act in ways which were more self-nurturing. In addition, the women described how, as they defined a clearer sense of self, they became clearer about their values as a parent. This clarity led them to begin making conscious choices about what was best for their children as opposed to following societal norms. The women also described acting as role models to their children, demonstrating and teaching their children that they did not have to follow a script but, rather, could exercise choice in their lives. As I listened to the women describe the changes in their lives and in their parenting, it became apparent that they had become health promoters in their own lives and within their own families. This discovery underscores the value of encouraging and supporting women/mother's process of self-definition.

The women in this study provided insight into what factors both helped and hindered their process of self-definition. These factors could be aspects to consider when interacting with families as a health promoting practitioner. The women, for example, describe flexibility and elasticity of relationships as fostering self-definition. Working with women and families to support such relationships would help create a context for individuals within families to have the freedom to define self. Questioning family members about the freedom they have to express all parts of self within their family, and about the freedom for conflict

and dialogue within the family, would also foster a context of freedom for self-definition.

I believe the results of this study also speak to the importance of practitioners promoting women and families to ascertain their own needs, and to determine the actions that would best meet those needs. In receiving professional help, the women described needing help to look within and to develop the skills necessary to listen to, trust, and nurture self. Health promoting practitioners can support this process of looking within, and provide resources to women and families to develop self-nurturing skills. It is, however, up to the families to wield the resources and determine their value. Freire (1989) describes the banking form of education in which knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable. Freire contends that this banking form of helping and education maintains and even stimulates the attitudes and practices which mirror oppression. To promote conscientization and promote health, Freire contends there must be acts of cognition which are stimulated by dialogue. The role of the practitioner, then, is to foster this process of dialogue and reflection. In contrast, many programs aimed at promoting family health take the banking form of education. Traditional approaches to marriage preparation classes, prenatal and postnatal classes, and parenting courses often focus on imparting information as opposed to fostering dialogue and exploration of the meaning of these experiences in the lives of the women and families encountering them.

Cushman (1990) describes the current western self as the empty self. According to Cushman, inner emptiness is expressed in many ways, such as low self-esteem, values confusion, eating disorders, drug abuse, and

chronic consumerism. Cushman points out that in order to develop self-loving and nurturance many psychologists argue one must have a nurturing early environment. Cushman questions, in a world filled with empty selves, "Who is to provide this environment?". I believe this study points to the potential in women who are mothers to be able to provide a nurturing environment which fosters the development and expression of self in children. In order for these women to realize this potential however, it is essential they be supported in their own process of self-definition and health.

#### Implications for Theory and Research

Perhaps the most significant theoretical implication of the findings of this study is the demonstration of the reciprocal relationship between human caring inquiry and scholarly literature. Phenomenological researchers describe the importance of being aware of existing knowledge so that one may simultaneously be sensitized to what may exist in a particular experience, and yet hold that knowledge in abeyance and thereby stay true to the phenomena being studied (van Manen, 1990; Oberg 1987). During this research endeavour, I discovered the value of using such an approach to elicit greater understanding of the participants' experiences of self-definition.

After conducting my initial analysis of the first interviews and confirming it with the participants, I used the literature to assist the participants and myself in further extricating the essential structures within their experiences. An example of using the literature in this manner was my use of Bakhtin's (1929/1984) notion of self as polyphonic novel. During the interviews, the women described a number of paradoxes

within their experience. They described, for example, simultaneously having a strong belief that the changes in their mothering had been very positive for their children and yet being worried that these changes may be harming their children. Another theme that had emerged in the women's descriptions was the constant reference they made to different parts of their self. In reflecting on these two themes within the women's experiences, I was reminded of Bakhtin's description of self as a multiplicity of characters who each have their own story line, and who are at times in conflict with each other. By using the polyphonic self as a framework, I questioned whether there was a link between the existence of paradox and the many parts of self. Through further dialogue with the participants in which I briefly shared Bakhtin's idea and asked them to compare and contrast it with their own experience, together the participants and myself were able to reach a deeper level of understanding of the interrelatedness of the various aspects of their experience. Bakhtin's theory of polyphonic self served to help the women articulate what initially seemed both to them and to myself, a confusing contradiction in their experience.

Overall, this complementary relationship which exists between human caring research and scholarly literature, implies the value of employing literature as part of the research process. The dialoging with the participants about the similarities and differences within and between their experience and the literature, can provide a further level of analysis and interpretation and thereby create a deeper level of understanding.

As discussed, the results of this study point to the relationship between women/mother's self-definition and their experience of health. Further research is necessary to further explicate the nature of this relationship and its influence on women's lives. The participants described the need to inquire into how women actually spend their time, "how much is put into self, other, and how that in the long run affects health".

The women in the study also expressed a desire to know more about the influence of their own process of self-definition on their children. This research could take many forms. Some of the women in this study spoke of distancing from their children and other family members in an effort to define their self. Researching the effects of this on family health as a whole, and on the relationships within the family would be important. The women also described the beneficial effects their process of self-definition had on their children. Research is needed into these benefits, as well as into the overall influence of mothers' process of self-definition on children's definition of self. It would be interesting for example, to investigate what the essential aspects of parenting are in regards to ensuring children have the freedom to define and express the multiple parts of self.

Evelyn's contrasting experience points to the variation which may exist within women/mothers' process of self-definition. Further interpretive research is required to continue the quest for greater understanding in order to uncover the richness and complexity of this experience.

A dominant theme within the descriptions of the womens' experiences was the influence of culture on their definition and expression of self. An ethnographic study to determine in more depth the cultural influence on womens' experience of self is required. In addition, since culture seems to play such an influential role in womens' self-definition, it would seem important to consider context in future research into womens' adult development.

The participants also expressed the wish that they could hear other womens' stories of defining and living the multiplicity of self. The vulnerability they sometimes felt was do to what they termed the lack of crones to follow or look to for inspiration. A narrative study to describe the individual stories of women would, therefore, be valuable.

Finally, I believe that health promotion's emphasis on the use of participatory research is a valuable idea for researching the needs of women in regards to supporting the process of self-definition. Participatory research is aimed at developing understandings, while simultaneously bringing about change (Carson, 1986). Participatory research into womens' experience of self would facilitate a more in-depth analysis of womens' and families' needs regarding the fostering of the process of self-definition.

#### Limitations

Following the contextual world view which guided this study, it is essential to consider the contextual nature of the research results. North American culture undoubtedly influenced the experience of the women in this study. Although I attempted to include women of different ages and with different life situations such as number of children, marital status,

and availability of resources (including education and socioeconomic levels) I did so with the intent to gain a more in depth understanding of the possibilities inherent within women/mother's experience of self-definition, as opposed to making the results of this study generalizable to the greater population. The phenomenological nature of this study make the findings of this study valuable for understanding and working with women/mothers. Assuming that these findings reflect the experience of all women who are mothers however, is both contrary to the underlying philosophy which guides this study, as well as an erroneous assumption. The results of this study in fact, point to the variation within women/mothers' experience of self. These differences are an important aspect to consider.

#### Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experience of defining self for women who are actively engaged in motherhood. The participants in this study described their experience of the nature of self, the process of defining self, and the relationship between self-definition and mothering. The research study and the ultimate understanding which emerged from it, was enhanced by using scholarly literature to elucidate the participants' experiences of defining self. The results of this study are congruent with, and embellish, many of the theoretical concepts in the narrative theories of self. In addition, for the participants in this study the experience of defining self was related to their overall experience of health and well-being.

Miller (1991) contends that in coming to understand womens' development of self we must turn our attention to coming to understand the

experience of women as it is lived in their day-to-day-life. I believe the results of this study reveal the depth and richness which exists within the lived experiences of women, as well as the knowledge and understanding that is waiting to be illuminated by further exploration into its depths.

One fundamental aspect of the experience of self-definition as described by the women in this study is its' everlasting nature. To begin the process is to make a commitment to live and to be all that the self is. I believe the following words capture the essence of what for the women in this study, it meant to define and nurture self:

To love the self is not to come upon an unchangeable image or essence, but to welcome all the diversity of experience into consciousness. To love myself is to proclaim that I will live in a democratic rather than a dictatorial relationship to the plurality within. I will allow all my subpersonalities, contradictory impulses, alien wills, strange desires, forbidden needs to live together within the commonwealth of my consciousness. Once my self-image has been shattered, I will always be more than I can know. I will never wholly understand myself. The complexities that have been interwoven to form me are equal to the complexity of being itself. I can no more comprehend the width, height, depth of myself than I can embrace the totality of the world. Thus, knowing I will never be the all-knower, I learn to accept what I cannot comprehend. Loving myself, I accept the mystery that I am. I open myself to be more than I can know. (Keen, 1982, p. 164).

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APPENDIX A  
NOTICE OF STUDY

# Women and Mothers: The Process of Self-Definition A Research Study

Research has shown that it is often a challenge for women to develop and maintain a sense of their own personal identity and at the same time be caring and involved mothers. I am wanting to explore what the experience of coming to know and learn about oneself (developing a 'self') is like for women who are mothers, and to gain an understanding of how women evolve a sense of identity while actively engaged in motherhood. Would **YOU** be willing to share your experience? If so, I would be very interested in talking with you. My name is Gwen Hartrick and you may reach me by calling 658-4532. Please leave a message so that I may return your call. All interviews are confidential. Scheduling of interviews is flexible, requiring two interviews of approximately 1-2 hours duration. You may withdraw from the study at any time. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

## Participant Consent Form

Investigator: Gweneth A. Hartrick

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the study examining women's definition of self while mothering.

I understand that my involvement in this study is completely voluntary and that I may decide to withdraw at any point without negative consequences.

I am aware that I will be interviewed (2-3 times for approximately 1-2 hours duration) by the researcher Gwen Hartrick and asked a series of openended questions relating to my experiences as a woman and mother. This interview will be tape recorded and the information on the tape will be destroyed after the research is completed.

I am aware that my involvement in this project will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. Confidentiality will be ensured by assigning code numbers to participants. These code numbers will be used to label audio-tapes and transcripts. The code number which identifies me will be kept in a separate file cabinet. On completion of the study the identifying information will be destroyed. In addition the results of the study, published or unpublished, will in no way identify me.

\_\_\_\_\_(signature)

APPENDIX C  
FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

## Focus Group Consent

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the post-interview focus group for the study examining women's definition of self while mothering.

I understand that my involvement in this focus group is completely voluntary and that I may decide to withdraw at any point without negative consequences.

I am aware that I will be asked to participate in a group discussion regarding the findings from the individual interviews conducted by the researcher Gwen Hartrick. The researcher will pose a number of questions related to the findings to direct the conversation. I am free to participate as little or as much as I wish.

I am aware that my involvement in this focus group will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. In addition I have been informed by the researcher of the confidential nature of the discussion and agree that although the general findings may be discussed outside of the group, I will not divulge any specific or personal information about the people involved in the group, including their identity and/or the information they shared and discussed.

In addition, I am aware that the results of this focus group, published or unpublished, will in no way identify me.