A Phenomenological Inquiry into Mothers' Experiences of Daily Family Rituals

by

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ABSTRACT

Family rituals are implicated in healthy family functioning and reveal the values and beliefs of particular families. The research on their form and function is extensive; however, despite women's central place in the family, few inquiries have deeply explored women's role in and unique experiences of their family's daily rituals. This thesis examines three mothers' lived experience of daily family rituals through a series of interviews that invited participants to deeply explore their own family's daily rituals, their part in those rituals, the feelings and meanings they evoke and how they influence their understanding of themselves as mothers. Every effort was made to protect participants and foreground their voices. The narratives are presented under pseudonyms chosen by the participants. These provide a view of each woman's experiences with the phenomenon. A synthesis of the narratives and the literature explores the meaning of daily family rituals in participants' lives in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of those experiences. Implications of the research and recommendations for counselling and further research are explored.

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I

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The research on family rituals and their use in therapeutic settings is extensive (Fiese, and Kline, 1993; Imber-Black, Roberts, and Whiting, 1988; Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, 1977; Wolin and Bennett, 1984;). Both my reading and my personal experience suggest that family rituals are found in almost all families and that they can reveal the values and beliefs of particular families. Functional, affirmative and adaptive rituals are implicated in healthy family functioning (Fiese, 1992; Gruber and McNinch, 1993; Miller, 1998; Roberts, 1988; Schuck, and Bucy, 1997). This thesis explores three mothers experiences with their family's daily rituals, the values and beliefs that they reveal and their relationship to each woman's understanding of herself as a mother.

Qualitative inquiry in general, and phenomenology in particular, requires the researcher to begin the investigation by considering her own experience with the phenomenon because that experience is implicated in the research (van Manen, 1990). As I read and prepared for the research, I became almost obsessed with recalling and exploring my own family's rituals and with hearing the stories of others. I explored my personal experiences of family, of daily family rituals and of how they influence my understanding of myself as a mother. I sought to understand what I know, feel and believe about family, daily family rituals and motherhood from my own lived experience, to bring to consciousness aspects of my experience that

had been embedded in my understanding of who I am, because they had been a part of my everyday life. As well, I considered what has it been like for me to be a mother, who was for the most part, responsible for the rituals in her family.

However, after exploring the family rituals in their totality, I realised that the topic was simply too complex for this inquiry. Following a significant amount of reading, discussion and thought, I refined the inquiry, limiting it to an examination of daily rituals in individual families. Because they occur with such regularity, examining daily family rituals can uncover essential elements of what it is to be family, how that differs from family to family and the place of particular members within the family. As I am deeply interested in women's experiences within their families, I chose to examine mother's stories of their family's daily rituals.

Telling Stories

It appears that story making is an inherent part of being human. We reveal who we are and what we believe by the stories we tell. In ancient times, our understanding of ourselves and of our world came exclusively from the stories that were told to us, and that we in turn told to others. We understood that these stories were not literally true, but that they contained the essence of truth and meaning (Parry & Doan, 1994). However, beginning around the time of Plato, western culture began to abandon this subjective and relative approach to understanding and truth in favour of a search for the one truth that would be objective, real and true for all. For centuries, this turning aside from understanding and meaning to pursue the ultimate truth became the goal of science and learning (Parry & Doan, 1994).

Ironically, these universal truths can lack the meaning and connectedness that stories of individual experiences possess, ultimately missing the essence of the phenomenon being explored. Rogers (1999) argues that as individual experiences are reduced to percentages and statistical probabilities, the unique aspects of those experiences are lost. Currently many social researchers are returning to the narrative. They are listening to the stories of those who have had personal encounters with a particular phenomenon. These stories can evoke a universal understanding. Uncovering the essence of an experience, they can provide an observation of the human condition that is both individual, and universal. It is this essential truth that I hope to portray in this thesis. The ancient stories sought to explain the origins of our world and answer the incongruities found in life and nature. These stories seek to uncover the essence of daily family rituals for three mothers at this moment in time. It is my intention to present these stories with an attitude that honours the tellers. To this end, italics are used to foreground participant's voices.

I have chosen to use the pronouns she and her throughout the thesis instead of she or he, he/she, s/he, his or hers, or his/ her because I find these to be either unwieldy or confusing. Although I am aware that not all researchers are women, I have made this choice because the principles in this project are.

Purpose

The research on family rituals, their form and function is extensive. However, what appears to be missing are inquiries that deeply explore women's role in and

experience of their family's daily rituals. This inquiry seeks to address this absence in a limited way. It considers two main questions: a) what role do mothers play in the development, maintenance, and performance of their family's daily rituals and b) what do these rituals mean to them as mothers? Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore daily family rituals from the mother's perspective. A series of interviews invited participants to explore their own family's daily rituals, their part in those rituals, and the feelings and meanings that are evoked by them.

Fulfilling the Purpose

The thesis begins with my own story. My experiences with daily family rituals provide a context for this inquiry, for the investigation into other women's experiences. Knowing about my own experiences has made me wonder about theirs. What has been their role in these rituals? How do they feel, both about the daily rituals themselves, and their place in them? What do their family's daily rituals mean to them as mothers? And what impact do they have on family functioning? As well, my experiences influence what I ask, what I hear, and what I report. Examining my own experiences through a personal reflection has helped me to be aware of my assumptions and biases about families and their daily rituals.

I then provide an explanation of my research stance, what I believe about researching and why and how this impacts this inquiry, as well as a description of phenomenological research. This is followed by a description of the research process, the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the research. A review of

the current literature on the family in general, mothering in particular, and of rituals in the family, provides a context for the participants' narratives.

The participants' stories are introduced with an explanation of my interests, preconceptions, my relationship to the participants (Peterson, 1994), and a description of how their stories are presented. Each woman's story is presented in a chapter titled with the pseudonym that she chose for herself. Because it is each woman's unique experience, her own story, and her own understanding of that story that is the focus of this research, there is no comparative analysis of the stories (Parry, 1991).

The thesis concludes with a discussion, recommendation, and reflection chapter. The discussion considers the themes and essences found in the narratives in relationship to the literature on family rituals and explores the implications of the inquiry for family therapists. Recommendations are then proposed for counsellors and for future research in this area. Finally, a reflection on the research process and the impact that it has had on me is offered (Peterson, 1994).

Expectations

It is my hope that through this process, images have emerged that capture the essence of how these particular women experience daily rituals in their families. It is also my hope that the report shows the way that participants' experiences are lived and how that way of living contains the meanings of the experiences (Peterson, 1994). Although I do not anticipate that the experiences of these women will echo that of all mothers, or even most, I do expect that their experiences will

resonate with some parents and encourage them to explore their own experience of and attitudes toward daily family rituals. In addition, I believe that it will add to available knowledge of the place of daily rituals in contemporary families.

Limitations

There are limitations inherent in this research project. First, I am a relatively new researcher and interviewer. Although I sought to acquaint myself with the research process before embarking, I learn best by doing. As a result, the process was one of learning about and exploring the challenges of a phenomenological approach, interviewing, analysis, and writing. As well, while it is not the goal of phenomenological research to produce generalisable knowledge claims (van Manen, 1990), it is important to note that, in fact, these claims cannot be made. Finally, although I attempted to raise my awareness of my taken for granted beliefs and assumptions about family, family rituals and mothering, I believe that cultural influences are complex and difficult to completely raise and put aside. Therefore I expect that these have had an influence on the research.

Chapter 2

PERSONAL REFLECTION

A basic tenant of qualitative research is that the researcher does not stand on the outside as an objective observer. Instead, her experiences of, and beliefs about, a particular phenomenon are an integral part of the process. She decides what to study, how to study it, and what to report. Who I am and what I believe is in this project and this thesis, whether I overtly describe it or not. My inclination is to avoid this part of the thesis because I am not comfortable telling my story. Parry (1991) states that

> [a] person has difficulty telling a story about herself to the degree that she has been unable to find her own voice with which to describe her own experiences. Instead, and in place of this, she has been precisely telling a story in other voices, accepting other people's descriptions of her experiences. (p. 43)

This is a part of my truth. I have spent my life telling the stories of others. However, I believe that part of the work of writing a thesis is finding one's own voice, and so I present the story of my experiences with, and understanding of, family and family rituals. I tell it in an attempt to provide the reader with an awareness of the roots of this project.

My experiences of family are numerous and diverse. They begin in my family of origin, include my education and work experiences, and the creation, dissolution and reorganisation of the family that includes my children. Although my understanding of family has the same roots as my experiences, it also includes the

social, historical and cultural messages that I have received and what I have learned from my training and work with families. Astute, caring professors during my Early Childhood Education training taught me to question those things, like privilege and the social system, that I had taken for granted. My tenure as Director of a Family Resource Centre and as Executive Director of a Daycare allowed me to see how hard families worked to provide for their children and how society frequently seemed to be working against, not for them. I have seen parents struggle with the constraints of gender and class, and watched them become increasingly unsure of their rights and responsibilities as parents.

These experiences and understandings of family also inform this research. Gubrium and Holstein define family as "a collective representation (a 'social object') that is meaningfully revealed through discourse " (1990, p. 9). The following is my personal discourse on family. It is presented in order to acquaint the reader with the experiences and understandings that engender this research, and to bring to consciousness my assumptions about family, daily family rituals and mothering.

Early Influences

My mother's family was small, close, and infused with abandonment and loss. In contrast, my father's family was large, somewhat distant and sometimes estranged. I also grew up with an extended family, people not related by blood but who nonetheless loved me and with whom I felt safe and at home. As a child it seemed that the walls of our small two bedroom home were ever expanding and contracting with the comings and goings of extended family members. This began

when my parents married and my mother's grandmother and my father's daughter moved in with them. It continued as my great-grandmother died, my sister married, two cousins came to live with us for varying times after their parents died, and my brother was born. I remember just knowing that my family could, and quite possibly would, change at a moment's notice.

All this left me with an understanding of a family as a collection of people, who may or may not be closely related, but who live together to support and help each other. However, family was also about rules, many, many rules. There were right ways to behave, and wrong ways. These were partly based on society's expectations, but also on what my parents would and would not tolerate. I knew that breaking the rules could mean banishment, and I learned to live so that this did not happen. I learned to be a good girl, and I learned to be quiet. As I write this I am aware that this would not be my parents' experience, or even my brother's, but it is mine.

My Own Family

Growing up in the fifties, coming to age in the sixties and seventies, and starting a family in the eighties, I was pulled by my traditional upbringing on one hand and the promise of the women's movement on the other. Although it had not been my experience, I expected that when (certainly not if) I married, my family would consist of a mother, a father, two or three children, and a dog. When I was first married, I worked and my husband went to school, and things were quite equal. But, once we left the life of graduate student and supporting wife, we moved into

a more traditional family form. My work became the extra income. I became responsible for the household. And we acquired a puppy. We knew that soon we would be starting a family (it seems that we were not a family without children) and wanted the dog to get used to us before children arrived. We were following a path set out for us by expectation and precedent.

The pressure to start that family came from all sides. Everyone around us was somehow invested in our having children. My husband was an Anglican Priest and I was living a non-traditional life for a minister's wife. I had my own car, worked in a neighbouring town, and made and sold stained glass treasures at local craft fairs. I felt that I was living this most traditional of roles in a non-traditional way. I can remember causing small scandals by wearing pants to church, jeans to go "downtown" (hard to find in a town of 400) and going to bingo with a friend. I laughed these off. I believed that unlike my mother, I was a new woman who would not be constrained by any role, let alone people's antiquated idea of what a minister's wife should be.

I did not think that I would ever change. I did not expect that I would ever bend to the expectations of husband, parents, parishioners, and community. But I did. The changes began with our first child. It was a slow process, but looking back, I can see the progression from rebel to wife. I guess I noticed that things were easier for my husband when I broke fewer rules (and each one was such a small thing). It was so much easier to just go with the flow. But, one by one the compromises changed me, and fifteen years later the transformation was complete, and it was as if I was my role (well, almost, there was still a little of me left in there

somewhere). Today I not surprised by how strong the influences of culture and custom were in my life or by how unaware I was of their influence. I now understand that cultural norms become taken for granted and become how things should be. Today I am divorced and temporarily living 3000 miles from my children. I miss them terribly. I also miss the daily rituals that were so much a part of our family.

Rituals in Our Home

Like the participants in this inquiry, I was a stay-at-home mom for most of the time the boys were little. I loved being at home with the boys, but I also felt isolated and alone. We had a few rituals that stayed basically the same for years, changing just a little with the changes the boys went through as they grew. We had others that developed to fill a need in the family, to help us get over a rough spot or deal with a particular issue. The following are stories of rituals from when my children were little.

When the boys were infants they slept when they were tired, often falling asleep as they nursed. I can still feel the weight of their warm little bodies on mine as they fell into a deep and satisfied sleep. As they grew older and slept through the night, bedtimes became first more routine, and then more ritualised as various elements became entrenched as necessary parts of falling asleep. Although these were gentle, quiet times, times that moved them from the business of the day to the quiet of the night, neither a bath nor Mom reading them a story were part of the ritual.

Baths in our house were all bubbles, squealing, and playfulness, not particularly suited to settling down for a quiet sleep. Stories were much the same. I seemed unable to read or tell a story quietly. Voices for each character and a dramatic flare that tended to wind up, not cool down, accompanied each story. And so, unlike many families, neither a bath nor a bedtime story were part of our nighttime ritual. It wasn't that they weren't bathed or read to, just that this did not usually happen at night. Instead, we had lots of reading times during the day and they were bathed when they were dirty.

But they always did have a snack. So it was into jammies, and then to the kitchen for something in their tummies, and then the round of kisses and hugs. Whoever was in the house was included in this part of the ritual. The more the better, as the time was stretched as much as possible. Then they washed, brushed their teeth and selected books to "read" until they fell asleep. As they learned to count higher and higher, the number of books they could choose rose from one or two to ten. This was so important to them. As I remember it, their nighttime "reading" was the most important part of their bedtime ritual. Teeth and faces could be missed, actually so could kissing Mom and Dad, but not their books, there was no way that they could they be missed. When we travelled, we always had to take a raft of books with us so they could "read" before falling asleep. Even when they were exhausted they chose their books. They might not stay awake long enough to look at them, but they had to be chosen. This ritual continued for years with only a few changes. Others filled a need and then were discarded.

My favourite short-term ritual also happened at bedtime. It was not unusual for me to develop a ritual to help my children deal with their problems, fears and worries. I can easily remember the first night we dealt with monsters under the bed. It was a warm night, maybe June or July. They had played outside all day. The activity that goes with active, boisterous, and imaginative children was a regular part of most days, but this day had been particularly exhausting for all of us. Darkness was just falling and they had been settled into their beds in a room that they shared for only a few minutes when the oldest one called out. "There are monsters under the bed."I don't believe in telling kids that what they say isn't true, and how do I know, maybe there were monsters under their bed. I can remember thinking all the way down the hall, "What am I going to say? What am I going to do?" I had to come up with a solution, and fast.

And so began a ritual that, although short lived (we only did this for about five or six weeks) seemed to do the trick. It's also one that the three of us still talk about. And maybe one day they will do it with their own kids. Anyway, when I got to their room, I exclaimed with definite determination, "Well that is simply not acceptable. They can come back and play tomorrow, but right now they have to go home to their own beds. Their Mommies and Daddies must be wondering where they are." To the amazement of my children, I ushered the monsters out of the room (being careful to get all who were hiding under the bed, in the closet or behind the bookcase), down the hall, and out the door. I was firm; they all had to go. Not one was allowed to stay the night.

My boys watched "Sesame Street" every day and "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendack was one of our favourite books. so they knew about monsters, the good ones you played with, as well as the scary ones. I believe that treating the monsters as guests who had overstayed their welcome, averted something, although I'm not really sure what. I remember being pretty pleased with myself. I also remember being quite embarrassed as I explained to a babysitter about five weeks later how to usher the monsters out of the house so the boys could sleep. Even just writing about this, some eighteen years later, I can't help but smile.

We had other daily family rituals, lots of them. There were mealtime rituals: how we decided who set the table, or who chose what dip to have with the veggies. And then there was the year they just had to have cloth napkins. And then there was Gross Night. There were lots more; while many are long forgotten, a few will never be. These rituals say a lot about me as a mother, about what I valued, what I cared about, and what my role was. I valued treating children with respect, and encouraging agency, choice, responsibility, creativity, playfulness, revealing the wonders in books and stories can and establishing the connections that mealtimes and rituals can foster. I cared that my children had opportunities to explore and develop their interests, their abilities, and their potential. I believed that being a mother meant helping my boys to open their hearts and minds to the joys of life, while developing the skills to cope with it's challenges.

I love being a mother, and of all the things that I have done in my life, it is the one of which I am most proud. By choice and design, I did it differently than other

mothers that I knew. I expect that their Dad would see it differently, but in my experience, I was the family ritual maker. I thought that it was my job. My family of origin and the one I subsequently created were both packed with rituals. The actual ways that the rituals played out changed over the years, but the structure and message were the same: We are family and that is important.

I took on my job as a mother and as ritual maker with great enthusiasm. I looked for ways to incorporate rituals into our lives and turn regular routines into rituals. However, as I write this, I am aware of my body, of how I am constricting, pulling in. I loved the small traditions and everyday occurrences that defined us as family, but they took their toll. And when I stop and consider all the work, and the fact that this work often went unnoticed, I am saddened. I came from a family of rituals and I took that into my own family. I did what I felt was necessary to construct those elements that I felt would strengthen our family, would provide continuity and would allow us to celebrate what it meant to be us.

Questions

But while on one level I believe it was worth it, on another level I wonder if it was all necessary. And I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't done all of it? Would we have not been a family without all that fuss? Did the small routines and regular games really provide cohesiveness? I wonder what the rituals that I created and maintained did for my family? Family therapists argue that rituals are like glue for families (Imber Black and Roberts, 1988). But although there was a lot of glue, in the end my family was lost, or at the least reconfigured. But then, could

it have been that our rituals and their adaptability that softened the loss of family for the boys when their Dad and I separated? So many questions, so few answers.

Other, less personal questions have also preoccupied my thoughts since I began the preparations for this inquiry. As I approach this research, I recognise that the family has changed from what it once was, and there does seem to be less cohesiveness, more disturbance and, perhaps coincidentally, there seem to be less rituals. However I wonder, is the lessening of ritualisation somehow to blame for the differences, or is it symptom? And does it follow that the addition of more rituals will shore up shaky families? I don't know the answers to these questions. When I talk to colleagues and classmates about this research, those who are mothers have definite, strong and often contradictory opinions, though few answers. It seems that this is a subject with which mothers, including myself are struggling, but not neutral.

I can't answer these questions and concerns and neither do I expect this project to do so. When I began this research project, all I could remember was the feeling of being a family that accompanied our rituals. Now I am beginning to remember the work, the sense of frustration that it all seemed to fall to me. I am beginning to remember how I could be overwhelmed by the obligations inherent in our rituals. And now, after finishing the interviewing and analysis, and in the midst of the writing for this thesis, I seem to have more questions than answers. Maybe that is as it should be.

Assumptions

Embedded in my the preceding narrative are my assumptions about families, family rituals and mothering. My story suggests that I believe that: families live together to provide help and support; society works against families; married is the norm; a family is comprised of mom, dad, two or three children and a pet or two; family equals children and children equal changes; the influences of culture and custom are strong; being at home with young children can be isolating; rituals tell you about your family, who you are and what you value; rituals are the mom's responsibility; rituals are a lot of work; rituals are necessary for families to be strong and that being a mother means being creative. This process of writing and analysis made me aware that although I am understand that the both institution of the family in general, and mothering in particular, have experienced many changes in the last five decades, my hidden assumptions remain entrenched in an earlier era. The awareness of these assumptions allowed me to attempt to put them aside during the interviewing, analysis and writing, so that my taken for granted beliefs had less of an effect on what I asked, what I heard, and what I reported.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH STANCE

Various research approaches explore phenomena from different vantage points. Reason and Hawkins (1988) argue that there are two basic ways that people reflect on and process their experiences: explanation and expression. Explanation requires a standing back from the experience to analyse, discover or invent concepts that are then related to a theoretical model. Expression, in contrast, allows the meaning of the experience to become clear by requiring the person interested in the phenomenon to partake of the experience and discover the hidden meanings in the experience. Because I wanted to explore mother's lived experiences of daily family rituals, this inquiry focussed on expression and the insights that this strategy can uncover. This was consistent with my personal approach to research.

I approached this inquiry from a constructivist, existentialist, and feminist perspective. I believe that these approaches complement each other and are particularly suited to this inquiry. Constructivism emphasises the individual's active participation in her own life as well as the interdependence of persons and their environment (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995). Existentialism reflects the understanding that each individual, and her particular experiences are unique and that neither is expendable or replaceable. It is concerned with what is experienced and seeks to understand the meaning of those experiences (Frankl, 1967). Feminism reflects a commitment to the appreciation of women's experiences,

beliefs, relationships, actions, and history that accepts their perceptions of how institutions, social groups and individuals work together, understanding that some of these experiences will be shared and some will be unique to a particular woman or group of women. In this way, I believe that feminism seeks to reclaim what has been lost, acknowledge what has been overlooked, and value what has been devalued (Brannon, 1999).

Feminist research is contextual, interpersonal, and involved in day to day realities. Its focus is on human agency, but agency within a society that is both created by the individual and creates the individual. This approach assumes that neither the researcher, nor the research are value-neutral (Sprey, 1990). Feminism and feminist research also challenge all forms of hierarchy, including that which exists between researcher and participant (Chaplin, 1988), requiring that all efforts be made to move towards equalising the power differential inherent in research projects.

My experiences with existentialism led me to a search for the meaning in lived experiences. My commitment to constructivism is reflected in my belief that individuals construct meaning within the contexts in which they exist and that this meaning is multi-determined, inter-subjective and pertains to how the individual lives in the world. My feminism has persuaded me that valuing and acknowledging women's unique experiences with respect to a particular phenomenon is essential to the understanding of that phenomenon. I believe that phenomenology is consistent with each of these particular stances.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology seeks to uncover meanings and essences, examining lived experiences in order to consider a phenomenon as individuals consciously experience and create in within their particular contexts. As well, it is a respectful stance that foregrounds the individual's unique experiences over generalised claims. The goal of phenomenological research is to explore the meaning of a phenomenon for those who have experienced it, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences. It involves intentionality, a consciousness of the experience, and how it and the self are related. Phenomenologically, the self is seen to be an intuitive and thinking being who brings to consciousness the experience of the experience and in the process becomes aware of the connection between the experience and the self as the knower of that experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) maintains that phenomenology focuses on the appearances of an object, seeks meanings from these appearances and arrives at the essences of the object through both intuition and reflection. It is concerned with the whole of the object, with examining it from all angles, is committed to descriptions not explanation, and is rooted in the personal interest of the researcher. As well, what is known and who knows it are interwoven, and the data are experience and perception. As participants examine their experiences, they become more able to describe the different meanings intrinsic to the consciousness of those experiences. Eventually they arrive at a cohesive meaning that incorporates the whole of their experience.

Phenomenology seeks to avoid the tendency to construct a predetermined set of fixed procedures and techniques that would rule-govern the project (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen describes six research activities that he believes the researcher must accomplish: 1) turn to the nature of a lived experience which interests them and commits them to the world; 2) investigate the experience as it is lived rather than as they conceptualise it; 3) reflect on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon; 4) examine what it is that gives the experience its special significance; 5) describe the phenomenon through writing and rewriting that is inspired by the essence of the phenomenon and; 6) finally balance the research context by considering the parts and the whole (pp. 30-33).

In addition to these activities, phenomenological research must be grounded in a laying open of the question. The research question is carefully constructed and every activity relates to that question. In the process, as qualitiees of an experience surface, the person is directed, both by the interviewer and by their own interest, to new understandings. This laying open begins with an examination of the current research to provide background information for use in the interviewing, analysis and writing of the project. The literature review can also alert the researcher to assumptions and biases that may influence their understanding of the phenomenon. It continues with a personal bracketing of the topic by the researcher.

Bracketing or epoche refers to the process of a suspending one's belief in the reality of what is known, of abstaining from ordinary ways of perceiving, and of refraining from making judgements in order to isolate the pure phenomenon as it is experienced by the informant (Spiegelberg, 1975, p. 5). According to the

phenomenological method, when we bracket, we recognise that what we see is real, that there is no truth except that which is revealed by the participants, and we accept that knowledge is individual, not universal. We begin by making explicit the assumptions, beliefs, understandings, biases and theories that are part of own understanding of the phenomenon in order to set them aside (Moustakas, 1994; Spiegelberg, 1975). It is a critical questioning of the natural attitude, of the taken-for-granted knowledge that we live by.

Exposing an informant's life-world, the world of their every day living, requires a tentative exploration. The researcher does not assume that what she knows is what others know. This leads to an intentional suspension of presuppositions and judgements, both about the phenomenon and on the descriptions provided by informants (Ashworth, 1996, Ashworth & Lucas 1998). The researcher attempts to know as much as possible about what they know and believe about the phenomenon and set that aside, so she can enter the life-world of the participant unencumbered by her own biases, pre-judgements and preconceptions. She also sets aside what she believes she knows about the phenomenon from science, media, friends, family and personal experience so that the interviews, descriptions, analysis and reporting will be as undistorted as possible (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Interviewing

Phenomenological interviewing asks questions about meaning that invite informants to describe the meaning and significance of a phenomenon in their lives.

These questions are not meant to be solved, but to assist informant, researcher, and reader to better understand the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). The goal is to describe direct experience with the phenomenon as it is lived. In developing the questioning, it is essential that the interviewer be clear about the phenomenon being investigated, her connection to that phenomenon and the purpose of the inquiry. This clarity provides a touchstone for the researcher during interviews.

Different researchers approach interview preparation differently. Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that interview design is like planning an adventure vacation. Researchers have an overall idea of what they want to see, and they may have some specific things that they feel they must see, but they do not lock themselves into a fixed itinerary. While it is essential to keep in mind the original research question, it is also important to be flexible, and to allow the informant to lead the interview. The research design continues to be formed as the researcher listens to the stories of the informants and hears the meaning inherent in those stories. As themes are analysed from one set of interviews to the next, these are culled to those that seem most salient to informants. Questioning in subsequent interviews depends on the analysis of previous ones. Therefore, the questioning is more than just a mode of data collection. It serves as an integral part of the emergent design of the research.

In addition to adapting the design to follow the essential themes from one session to the next, questions are also adjusted for each particular informant, to stay with the elements of the issue that they are interested in, and to specifically respond to their particular answers. The interviews themselves follow a

developmental path. The first interview concentrates on defining the construct in the informant's words, and gathering as many stories as possible. The goal of the next interviews is to cull the number of themes being investigated and expand on the stories. And then, in the final interview the researcher attempts to understand the salience of these experiences for the individual (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The planning therefore ensures that the essential sites are visited in the course of the journey, and that unplanned, but interesting side trips are accepted as part of the adventure.

Kvale describes the interviewer as a "traveller on a journey that leads to a tale being told upon return home" (1996, p. 4). He suggests that exploring without a map, roaming freely and at times seeking specific sites constitute the method of research interviewing. This exploration leads to an answering of the original research question through conversations in which researcher and informant wander together through the landscape of the issue, telling and receiving stories of the landscape. Because the purpose of the interviews is to provide an understanding of the person's lived experience, their life world, it requires an openness to the other's experiences and a search for narratives that can portray the essential meaning of those experiences.

The purpose of the interviews is to gather stories from participants that describe what is being studied from their own experiences. Because the stories constitute the data, the quality of the interview determines the calibre of the final research product . The storytelling involves both storyteller, the participant, and story recipient, the researcher. It is the researcher's responsibility to provide the

teller with space to deliver the story by limiting their participation, encouragers that sustain, not impede, the telling (Lerner, 1992). This is not to say that the researcher must remain silent. Her stories too have their place. However, this is an information gathering exercise and the researcher's role is to encourage her participants to share their stories.

An important aspect of this encouragement is motivating trust so that informants feel comfortable and are willing to provide complete and authentic descriptions (Denne & Thompson, 1991). Rapport between researcher and informant helps provide the rich and detailed descriptions needed in a phenomenological inquiry. Rapport building is more about being than doing (Moursund,1993). It is an attitude of acceptance of the person, their views, thoughts and feelings, through respectful listening, without judgement or prompting and by being honest and open with them about oneself and the research. Repeated interviews encourage rapport to build, allowing informants to peel back the layers and reveal the essence of the phenomenon.

It is also important that the researcher is aware that research interviews are not simply conversations between two equal partners. The researcher specifies both the situation and topic, guides the interview, conducts the analysis and writes the report. In order to respect and honour those who volunteer to share their experiences, she must be aware of, and seek to diminish the power differences between herself and the informants. This is accomplished through intentional and conscious consideration of the research process and the interviewing, and how these might affect participants.

In addition, the type and form of questions assists informants in accessing and recounting rich detailed descriptions. Questions need to be open-ended to encourage the person to elaborate on their answers and focus on the topic under scrutiny. How a question is framed affects the answer. "What" questions can lead to facts, "when" to the sequence of events and "how" to reasons. These have their place, but they encourage the description of facts and justifications rather than inviting people to get lost in telling their story. In contrast, "could" questions are considered maximally open, setting the stage for the person to share openly (Ivey, 1994). For example: "Could you describe how you were feeling when that happened?" or "Could you tell me more about that?"

Doing the Research

My commitment to the principles of constructivism, existentialism, and feminism led me to my believe that a phenomenological method was best suited to uncovering women's experiences with daily family rituals and to understanding the meaning of their experiences for them as mothers. My reading about phenomenology and the phenomenological approach to research confirmed this belief. The next chapter outlines the research process. It describes how participants were selected and the steps I took to ensure that the research was conducted ethically. It also describes the interviewing, analysis and reporting procedures that I undertook.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH PROCESS

My reading and reflection allowed me to design this project based on phenomenological research methods, with an understanding of family rituals from the inside out and the outside in. However, the design remained emergent. I developed a research plan that could be fluid enough to deal with unexpected developments in the process. Basically, I knew where I wanted to go, but was not exactly sure how, or even if I would get there. This flexibility, consistent with a phenomenological approach, allowed the participants to direct the course of the inquiry through their descriptions of their experiences with the phenomenon. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to interview in a manner that encouraged a thorough exploration of their experiences with their family's daily rituals.

In accordance with van Manen's (1990) six activities, I began this inquiry by involving myself in family rituals, in what interests me about them and how they commit me to the world. I talked with others about rituals, my family members and members of other families, I read about them in terms of family dynamics, and because I am training to be a family counsellor, in terms of family therapy. I also created personal narratives about their place in my own life. My emersion in the topic allowed me to be aware of, and as a result, work to put aside what I knew about the phenomenon from other sources (Moustakas, 1994). During the data collection and analysis I sought to uncover the essential themes that characterised

daily family rituals from the women's own perspectives, rather than from what I knew about them from other sources, and to examine what it is that has given these experiences their special significance in their lives.

The thesis attempts to depict the essential elements of daily family rituals as the participants have experienced them, through a process of writing and rewriting. This process was inspired by the essence of the phenomenon that emerged in the interviews. In the process I have attempted to balance the research context by considering both the parts and the whole. This considering the parts and the whole is an important part of ensuring the quality of the research. Each theme, and the participant's words that support the theme should relate to the overall theme. In this way the parts support the whole and the whole provides insight into the parts (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It is my hope that engaging in these activities has resulted in a work that adequately represents the life-worlds of the participants.

Participants

Participants in this type of research project must be familiar with the issue and willing and able to share their experiences. In this case, they had to be mothers who experience daily rituals in their families, who agreed to share their experiences with the researcher, and who if possible represent a range of experiences (Rubin & Rubin 1995). The three women who volunteered for the research fit these requirements. Each one mothers young children. Each one experiences daily rituals in their lives with those children. Each one expressed a strong desire to participate

and each one represents a range of mothering experiences: a blended family, a two parent family, and a single parent family.

Volunteers were recruited from members of a local playgroup. Because of my involvement with this group, many of its members were both aware of and had expressed an interest in this project. These women were provided with information about the purpose of the research, expected time commitments and the potential benefits that volunteers might expect. Once the project received procedural and ethical approval, the participants were contacted and interviews were arranged for times and venues that were convenient for both the participant and myself. My concern in selecting an appropriate venue was that the participants' feel comfortable, accepted and valued. In accordance with the women's desires, most of the interviews took place in participants' homes, however two participants came to my home for their last interview.

The participants did not receive any financial benefit from their participation in the project. However, all three mentioned that the process gave them an opportunity to reflect on both their mothering and their family's rituals, and as a result they felt that they had benefited from both their participation and the reflection it engendered. In addition, those who wish to will have the opportunity to attend the thesis defence and receive copies of the final report.

Each woman participated in three interviews of about one and one half-hours each. In addition to the interviews, time was spent with participants, both before and after each interview in an effort to maximise their comfort level and ensure that they were not disturbed by the content of the interview.

Ethical Considerations

Every effort was made to treat participants with dignity and respect in each phase of the inquiry. Before agreeing to participate, they were openly and explicitly informed of all aspects of the project. In addition, they were required to sign, and they received a copy of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) at the beginning of the first interview. This form contained: the title and the nature and purpose of the study, how the research related to my program of study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, how and where they interviews would be conducted, the steps that would be taken to ensure their confidentiality, contact information for the principal researcher and a number to call at the university if they have questions, problems or concerns about research, information about possible benefits and harm that they might experience, time commitments, and compensation (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1993). Although the women were encouraged to commit to the completion of the inquiry, they were advised that they were under no obligation to participate or to continue with the research, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty.

It was not anticipated that informants would experience any harm as a result of this study. However, because of the potential of this type of research to expose and raise emotional issues around parenting and one's family of origin, careful debriefing was conducted to ensure that informants were not distressed by their participation. Informants were fully debriefed after each interview, thanked for their participation in the study and given an opportunity to ask questions about the research and their current and continued involvement in it. In addition to debriefing,

I attempted to further reduce the possibility of harm by not making interpretations that went beyond the participant's self-understanding or by leading them (Kvale, 1996). As well, although I felt that it was unlikely that the women would be distressed by their participation, arrangements were made for a trained counsellor who had an established rapport with the participants and was aware of the goals and details of this project to provide counselling as needed.

In addition to considering how the interviewing might affect participants, protecting research participants from harm requires attention to matters of confidentiality. Steps were taken to ensure that participants were not identifiable in any manner through the research process, the final report, or storage of the data. Each informant chose a pseudonym that was used on tapes, transcripts, notes and in the final report. As well, all data will be securely stored and kept on file by the researcher for five years, and then destroyed to ensure that confidentiality is maintained.

To ensure that participants were accurately represented and comfortable with the quotes used in the thesis, they were given the opportunity to read the parts of the final document in which they were quoted or described, prior to its publication. They had the right to request the deletion of information or quotes that they feel could identify them, or that they are uncomfortable with. None of the participants have requested that parts of the thesis be removed. This option remained available until the final product was given to the University for binding.

Interviewing

As stated in the introduction, this inquiry considers two main questions: a) what role do the three mothers who participated in this study play in the development, maintenance and performance of their family's daily rituals and b) what do these rituals mean to them as mothers? Because the purpose of the research was to explore daily family rituals from the mother's perspective it was essential that the interviews invited the participants to deeply explore their own family's daily rituals, their part in those rituals and the feelings and meanings evoked by them.

Each interview was taped using a portable tape recorder and an omnidirectional microphone. Before meeting with the participant again, I listened to each tape carefully to hear the data contained on it, and hand transcribed the parts of the interview that related to daily family rituals, including the questions and answers. I used this information to prepare a list of areas to explore in the next interview. The goal was to uncover the layers of meaning with the experience and follow the essential themes that emerged from one session into the next.

Every attempt was made to put participants at ease. The goal was to create an atmosphere of safety and trust that allowed participants to freely access the deeply held beliefs and feelings about their family's rituals and their feelings about those rituals. This strategy was employed throughout the interview process. At times we would move away for the discussion of rituals to a more neutral topic and at others I would disclose information about rituals in my own family. This was a

rapport building technique that happened more or less frequently depending on the comfort level of the participant.

First Interview

Careful preparation preceded each interview. I re-read some of the material on daily family rituals, considered my research question and what I wanted to cover in the interview. I was quite nervous before the first interview with each participant and sought to control this by preparing thoroughly. Before the first interview I developed a page with notes to myself: things to remember, the main types of questions and what they are expected to reveal. I went over this information and used it to centrr myself before the interview began. The reverse side of this sheet contained possible main questions, things I wanted to cover when probing deeper and, most importantly, a definition of daily family rituals:

> What I mean by daily family rituals is those things that happen in your family almost everyday They could be your family's way of putting kids to bed or organising homework or special things that happen at meal times. They are when somebody does one thing and everybody knows what will come next. It may have started very innocently, you just did something one supper time and then you did it the next night or were asked to do it and then here it is days, weeks, or months later and you are still doing it. That is a daily family ritual. It is unique to your family and it says something about who the family is and who the people in it are and what they believe.

I prepared this definition from what I understood daily family rituals to be in order to provide a consistent definition that I could read to participants, as I was not sure that I would be able to remember it under the pressure of the first interview. It was read to each participant at the beginning of the first interview, once the

Informed Consent Form had been signed. I kept the sheet visible during the interview to help me stay focussed.

I then engaged with the participant in a reflective conversation about their understanding of daily family rituals, with the understanding that the meaning of ritual might be different for different families. My goal was to ensure that when we talked we understood the other's frame of reference. The questioning proceeded with me probing to encourage the informant to clarify and complete their stories and asking follow up questions in an attempt to uncover the layers of the phenomenon. For this exploration to be successful, in addition to holding a common understanding of daily family rituals, it was essential that both the participant and I know what each meant by the various terms that surfaced in their narratives. I sought to clarify the meaning of expressions used during the interview because a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to ask what a particular term means, and not assume a common understanding.

Although I did prepare some possible questions in advance of the first interview, the form of the questioning was not predetermined. Participants were encouraged to examine the different kinds of daily rituals that they experience, the various elements of those rituals, and the contexts in which they occur. The goal was to explore daily rituals at this moment in time. They were allowed to explore rituals from their families of origin and to examine them in terms of the culture and context in which they and their families lived, but the focus was how these related to their own family's rituals as they are presently experienced.

At the end of the interview, participants were asked to pay attention to their family's daily rituals in the time until the next interview, to discover more about the ones they had just talked about and to identify ones that they had not remembered this time. Participants were then debriefed to ensure that they had not been disturbed by the session, and thanked for their participation. I also made sure that the time and venue scheduled for the next interview was convenient.

Second Interview

The second interviews built on the data gathered in the first ones. Because each woman's experience with daily family rituals was different, the questions in these interviews were also very different. The goal was to discover more information about, and more layers to the rituals that had already been described. In addition an opportunity was given for participants to talk about rituals that they had not described the first time. They were asked to continue to be aware of the rituals as they happened, but this time they were also asked to consider what they meant to them. Participants were debriefed, as in the first interview, to ensure that they had not been disturbed by the session and they were thanked for their participation. I also made sure that the time scheduled for the third interview was convenient.

Third Interview

The third interview proceeded much like the second one, with the questions following up on what had been already said. In addition more questions were asked

about what the woman valued, about her family, their rituals and her place in those rituals. I also asked more meaning questions during the third interview to explore the stories more deeply. As this last interview drew to a close, I asked each woman if there was anything else she wanted to say. Once that discussion was completed, participants were again debriefed, and thanked for their participation. I reminded them that I would be asking them to review the parts of the thesis in which they are quoted or mentioned and that they would be welcome to attend the thesis defence. The last interview tape was then listened to and the portions that described daily family rituals, or the woman's experiences of and beliefs about herself as a mother, were transcribed for the analysis.

Analysis

The goal of the analysis was not to interpret or explain informants' experiences, but to uncover the meaning or essence of the phenomenon that is contained within them. Ideal interpretations and explanations are not just unreachable in this approach, they are not a desired goal of phenomenological research (Moss, 1992). Instead, I attempted to understand the stories in terms symbolic communication contained within the rituals that participants described. However, throughout the process I had to restrain myself from comparing and contrasting the participants' experiences. I forced myself to consider each narrative on its own, rather than in relationship to the others.

The analysis of phenomenological data demands that the researcher sit with the informant's words in order to explore the world that those words disclose

(Walsh, 1996). Each tape was listened to as soon after the interview as possible to cull themes and quotes for subsequent interviews. The data analysis began in the midst of the interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As the participants answered one question, I analysed their responses to prepare for the next question. As well, once each interview was completed, I began to sort what had been said into possible themes. By the time I had finished the set of interviews with each participant, I has a basic sense of the essence of daily family rituals for the participant, for their families, and how these rituals were connected to their understanding of themselves as mothers. Notes were made when the tape was listened to and quotes were hand transcribed with their position on the tape recorded for later identification. Once all the interviews were completed, the tapes were transcribed and a final analysis of the data from all interviews was performed.

As I read through the transcripts once more to begin the process of sorting the data to uncover the essence of what had been said, one statement seemed to capture that essence for each participant. Because I believed that this statement represented a life theme for each woman, the data were then sorted into sub-themes that supported this theme. My goal was to ensure that the theme and the supporting sub-themes worked together in a reciprocal way so that each category enhanced the understanding of the theme, and the theme enhanced the understanding of the sub-themes. The analysis of each interview and each set of interviews was judged to be complete when the different sub-themes could be made into patterns that worked together to create a coherent unity (Kvale, 1996). It is

important to note that, although not all the narratives could be included in the thesis, none were excluded because they did not fit with the theme statement.

This was not as neat and simple a process as it is described here. It took time to complete the process. In addition, with one participant I chose the theme statement and built sub-themes around the theme. I then began to organise the data into a unified narrative. Unhappy with the result, I left the work for a day. When I returned, I reorganised the data and tried again to write the chapter. Still, it was not capturing the essence of the interviews. I did this two more times before I accepted that I would have to begin again. And so I put aside the original statement and the sub-themes and the stories that went with them and began again. I choose another statement that was more representative of what the participant had shared and reorganised the data into new sub-themes. I cannot access or describe how I knew that the first theme did not work and the second one did, except that there was a sense of unity in the second that was missing in the first (Kvale, 1996; Moustakas, 1990).

Implicated in the analysis and theme identification were the various ways that we come to know what it is that we know. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) argue that women have unique ways of knowing. They identify common feelings in women that impact the stories they tell and those they hear: being silenced, feeling disconnected, feeling the need to obey those in authority, maintaining their place, having difficulty conceiving of their self as unique and individual, and the sense of not being heard. Because the participants in this study were all women, their stories were examined for the presence of these themes,

which, when found, were included in the thesis. As well, I believe that these themes were implicated in my analysis, however, because they are such an integral part of my being, I was unable to extricate their influences from the other influences that affect the way that I hear data.

In addition to the ways of knowing that are unique to women, I believe that my tacit knowledge was implicated in the analysis. As I listen to the tapes and reflected on the interviews, there were times when I knew something about the essence of the phenomenon for a particular woman without actually knowing why, or how I had gained that understanding. This was particularly evident as I chose the themes and sub-themes; a phrase or sentence would stand out in the midst of the narratives and I would "know" that this was especially salient.

> Such knowledge is possible through a tacit capacity that allows one to sense the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or parts. Knowledge of the trunk, branches, buds, flowers . . . ultimately may enable a sense of the treeness of a tree, and its wholeness as well. This knowing of the essence or treeness of a tree is achieved through a tacit process. (Moustakas, 1990 p. 22)

This process of accessing tacit knowledge allowed both the vague and the detailed dimensions to come together as a whole. My understanding of both the dimensions and the wholeness of daily family rituals for these women then gained clarity through further self-reflection and evidence seeking. The identified themes came from the words of the participants but I believe that my tacit knowledge allowed me access to understandings, life themes, and sub-themes that I might have otherwise missed or dismissed.

The test of whether a sub-theme was essential or incidental was whether the phenomenon retained or lost its fundamental meaning when a particular sub-theme was deleted from the analysis. At the beginning of the analysis I identified numerous sub-themes and sort the narratives according to these sub-themes. I sought to combine these to produce a more clear picture of the participant's experience. At times a sub-theme could be subsumed under another heading without changing the fundamental meaning of the participant's experience with the phenomenon. However, there were also times when this process changed the relationship between the narrative and the themes and sub-themes in such a way that an essential component of the meaning was lost. This part of the analysis was very difficult. However, the goal was the development of a narrative that provides the reader with a description of the lived experience of the phenomenon, which reveals its essential nature.

This interpretation of meaning was accomplished through the hermeneutic circle in which part interpretations of the text were tested against the meaning that was generated by the text as a whole (Kvale, 1996). In the hermeneutic circle, the researcher sets aside her biases in order to hear the text. What she hears then leads her to new prejudgements, which are in turn set aside. Understanding remains tentative, held lightly, and subject to re-evaluation (van Manen,1990). For example, at times, I was faced with choosing one instance of the same story over another. I endeavoured to hear what each of the stories said about the phenomenon and the participant's experience with it, in relation to the text as a whole. I sought to do this within the awareness of my assumptions and biases. As

well, I made my decision lightly and tentatively, returning to it a number of times to allow for new understandings.

Reporting

Well written qualitative reports paint a vivid picture for the reader of the phenomenon under study (Rogers, 1999). They contain thick descriptions that outline the context in which the phenomenon is experienced, describe the intentions and meanings that have organised that experience and relate the experience as a process, providing the reader with a feeling of conversing with the participants through the writer (Denzin, 1994). However, meaning is not found just in the literal content, but also in the form or rhetorical structure of the text.

Because some meanings are more clearly expressed by how one writes, than in what one writes, I tried to be attentive to form as well as content. I wrote and rewrote in an effort to uncover more of the essences of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Each woman's story was rewritten a number of times, always in light of her original narratives. With each rewriting it seems as if I found a new layer to the meaning she ascribed to the phenomenon. As well, the editing became more than just correcting grammar and syntax; it was a part of the creative process as I sought to create a finely crafted piece of writing that reflected both the essence of the phenomenon, and myself as author of the research and the report.

However, I was also aware that generating a thesis is not just a matter of literary technique. The writing is not just a supplementary activity, but in fact, an integral part of the discovery process, and the essence of research (Richardson,

1994; van Manen, 1990). It was my goal, as I wrote, to take what I already knew and what I was learning and fix it to paper. To do this I had to take the internal, that which was a part of my nonconscious understanding and make it external, bring it into consciousness, in order to uncover the essence of the phenomenon for each participant. Ueland (1987) argues that we do not understand until we try to write the story. I found that as I wrote and rewrote each part of the thesis, my understanding grew. I believe that each rewrite focussed my attention closer and closer to the essence of the phenomenon.

My goal was not a depiction of the absolute nature and function of daily family rituals, or of mothering, or to compare and contrast different ways of mothering, but to provide an exploration of the essences of particular mothers' experiences of family rituals. I endeavoured to write a thesis that contained narratives that imparted an image that was replete with the essence of the phenomenon and persuasive, both because of its aesthetic form and because it is validated by its impact on the reader (Kvale, 1996).

Chapter 5

CONTEXT

Preparation for interviewing includes careful conception of the project (Kvale, 1996). An important part of this process was a review of the literature on family, mothering, and rituals. Although some argue that the literature review should be performed after the interviews have been completed (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1993), I believe that conducting the review before the interviews began helped me to understand the issue more completely, and therefore interview more competently.

The function of the review is not to explore the topic completely or to describe truths about the phenomenon, but to introduce the topic and provide a context for the inquiry. An inquiry into women's experiences of daily family rituals is necessarily set within the social context of the family and women's place in society. It also implicates women's experiences of mothering. After examining both these areas, the literature review presents a survey of the research into family rituals in general, daily family rituals in particular, women and family rituals, and rituals and family therapy. Because the analysis revealed what I believe is a basic life theme for each participant, an examination of life themes completes the literature review.

The Family and the Social Context

Each one of us spends most of our lives in a family. We begin our lives in our family of origin, then as adults, most of us create a new family, a family of origin for our children. Through this chain of families, the basic rules of our culture are passed from one generation to the next. Despite this reality, the family of today is radically different from families through human history. In the last one hundred years the family has undergone unprecedented change. At the beginning of the 20th century, children received only a basic education. They were needed to help support the family, either by working on the farm, in the family business, or by apprenticing with a local business or tradesperson (Bradbury, 1996).

One hundred years ago, few families were isolated. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, or other adults often shared the family home and neighbours were close and available when needed. Today, families are increasingly independent, mobile, and significantly smaller in size. As well, scientific and social advances have expanded women's choices and these new choices, including birth control, education, and careers have impacted the family. As well, many more families are supported by two incomes. Although couples say they are in favour of equality in a marriage, this has not yet translated into an equal division of the household labour (Stats Canada, 2000). In the same way, women still are more likely to be offered and accept jobs that replicate the work of homemaking: jobs like teaching, nursing, and caring for young children. These jobs are of less status and tend to provide less financial reward than the work of men (Baker, 1996).

Bradbury argues that at no time in Canadian history was there a traditional and universal family form that provided a safe, secure and loving home for children. This is a nostalgic, romanticised view of the family, but it is also ahistorical. This kind of home did exist, but it was by no means the norm. For much of Canadian history it has been legal for men to use extreme force in disciplining their wives and children and children often worked long hours in appalling conditions. The concept of family has been renegotiated throughout history and continues to change in response the cultural, economic and social conditions (Bradbury, 1996).

When I was growing up, those around me defined family as two parents, a number of children, and probably a pet or two. Although this was not my experience I knew that this was what "family" meant. Still today we tend to speak of family as if the word described a specific configuration of members. However, Giele (1997) contends that it is not the particular composition, but the characteristics of intimacy, informality and the particularity of relationships that define a group of individuals as a family. She argues that while the reality of the family has changed, public policy and opinion have not kept up.

Some charge that the changes that the institution of the family has experienced are ruining families and hurting children. Others argue that the family is naturally evolving. Popenoe (1993) reviewed the factors that he believes have contributed to what he calls the decline of the American family: an increase in individual rights, an increased divorce rate, a lower birth rate, changing marital roles and family structure, a widespread retreat from marriage, and non-family living for

young people. He argues that many parents are unwilling to invest the time, effort and money that family life requires.

While Cowan (1993) agrees with Popenoe that the American family is experiencing problems, he understands the problem very differently, considering the family under attack rather than in decline. He contends that it is the social context: violence, poverty, and a lack of social supports that threatens the family, not the new structure and function of contemporary families. He argues that Popenoe's reliance on statistical data, in lieu of in-depth study of the lives of real families, provides a superficial analysis that does not take into account the social conditions in which families live. In addition, he argues that Popenoe's findings are not consistent with those of other family researchers. Cowan's own research shows that most parents are in fact highly committed to their children and families.

Popenoe's argument is not unique. Baker, a Canadian researcher, states that "since the beginning of written history, conservatives have predicted the decline and death of the family" (1996, p. 316). However, she found no indication that the desire for meaningful and lasting relationships is declining, but instead, that the motivation to build and maintain a solid family life is still very high. Statistics show that a higher percentage of Canadians experienced marriage, legal or not, in the last decade than at any other time in history (Baker, 1996). In contrast to the belief that individuals are responsible for the decline in family values, Baker believes that both personal and family life reflect the larger society, especially the economic conditions that families must contend with.

She points out that Canada experiences higher child poverty rates that many industrialised countries, especially those in Europe. She argues that child and family poverty is related to unemployment, declining minimum wages, the loss of full time jobs, increase in part time and temporary positions, lack of childcare options, work force inequalities like segregation and lower pay for women. Yet despite a rhetoric of supporting parenting and eliminating child poverty, governments have done little to enhance the laws that would support families (Baker, 1996).

The participants for this inquiry live in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia in a time of economic challenge. The rates of child poverty in this area have increased dramatically over the last ten years (Raven & La Tulippe-Rochon, 1999), and the provincial government is currently making unprecedented cuts to education, health care, and social programs. Many members of the playgroup from whom the participants volunteered struggle daily with the effects of low incomes on their families' lives. These challenges influence where families live, what food they can put on the table, and even what presents Santa can bring and impact family functionning. Because the respondents in their research linked being poor to a lack of ritual in their childhoods, Rosenthal and Marshall (1988) argue that a lack of economic resources may contribute to differences in ritualisation. Further, children in homes that are impacted by negative social conditions can fail to develop the social and coping skills that are taught through family rituals (Gruber & McNinch, 1993).

It seems that rather than address the concerns of families as societal concerns, governments situate the responsibility with the individual. Constructing

the difficulties associated with parenting as belonging to the individual rather than to the society as a whole fails to consider the complex nature the family and its relationship to society and suggests that all members of a society have the same opportunities (Kelly, 1998). As well, the individual who most often is deemed responsible for any family problems is the mother (Caplan, 1990).

Giele (1997) describes the tensions between feminist and familist ideals, between the needs of the individual, for example the mother, and those of the family as a whole, and the children in particular. An example of this tension can be found in the most popular child rearing books, which assert that, for healthy development, a child must have one primary caregiver at least until the age of three. Hays (1996) argues that while the language has become more inclusive, it is women who buy these books and to women they are directed. Personally, I have heard both men and women express their opinion that if women would just be less selfish, and did what they were supposed to do, stay home and raise their own children, children would be better off and we could return to the golden age of families, the 1950's (personal communications, 1976-2000). And yet, others are asking if this golden age ever existed. Those of us raised in the 1950's are well aware that having a mother at home did not protect children. Despite this, rhetoric about the ideal of the 1950's family abounds. But on what is it based?

Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako (1982) suggest that most of the rhetoric about today's family is predicated on culturally constructed and critically unexplored ideas of what families are really like. Women, because of their biological ability to bear children, have been thought to be intrinsically different from men. Defined as

nurturing and relational, women were relegated to home and denied equality. In contrast, men were seen as naturally uninvolved in their children's lives (Hawkins, Christensen, Sargent & Hill, 1995). These divisions, along with the social construction of the family, as it has been experienced, were believed to be natural and biologically determined. Cheal (1991) argues that these ideas, though outdated, still influence how society conceptualises both the family and familial roles.

Athough, in recent years feminist researchers and others have challenged these societal beliefs (Belsky, Lerner & Spanier, 1984 Marsiglio, 1995), we continue to live in a patriarchal society. Although it has come to be known as rule by men, patriarchy literally means a system where fathers rule. It is characterised by male dominance, male privilege, and the subjugation of women. "In a patriarchal kinship system children are born to men out of women" (Rothman, 1994, p. 141). This understanding of the family with men leading and women providing what they need is centuries old. Since the beginning of recorded history, the advancement of men has been seen as progress for human beings. But, Greece was not a cradle of democracy for women or children, there was no artistic and intellectual renaissance for women, at least not at the time of what we call the Renaissance, and while the age of enlightenment may have expanded men's rights in politics, education, and work, it narrowed women's opportunities (Tarvis, 1992). The patriarchal system sees women as biologically destined to their role as mothers. Ironically, that same system denigrates women and their work, including their mothering.

This inquiry is situated within the family, at a time when it is experiencing many changes, including changes to the roles of women and the expectations of

mothers. The women interviewed for this research project have been influenced by these changes and because experiences are affected by and interpreted through the cultural climate, their experiences of daily family rituals are also affected. The following discussion of mothering examines what it is to be a woman and a mother in today's society.

Mothering

Being a woman today means negotiating one's identity in a time when society's understanding of what a woman is seems constantly under revision. While it is true that women have made strides toward equality in the last century they still carry the bulk of the burden for their family's health and welfare, being responsible for both the care of their children and, as necessary, their parents (Stats Canada, 2000). In addition there is pressure to have the perfect body and the perfect house, to be the perfect wife and the perfect mother and to be independent and resourceful and yet not make more money or be stronger than their husbands (Tarvis, 1992). Mothers still encounter strong societal messages to put aside their careers, at least for a time, and devote themselves to their children, despite the fact that women and children can be plunged into poverty as a result of that choice when the relationship ends (Hays, 1996; Woollett & Phoenix, 1991).

In defining their identity, women face another dilemma. The Western definition of psychologically healthy, mature individual is one that is differentiated and independent (Caplan, 1995). However, this is in direct opposition to the Western definition of a good mother as someone who always puts her family's,

especially her children's needs ahead of her own. Women are raised to be connected to others. They are taught that serving others, first men and then children should be their main goal in life (Hays, 1996, Miller, 1986). A part of this is the romantic notion of mothering as a labour of love, of mothers falling in love with their children. It is not that mothers do not love their children, but that there is no evidence that this loving is a biologically determined part of being female (Weiss, 1998). Everingham (1994) links the idealisation of mother love to the patriarchal belief that women are inherently more nurturing than men. As nurturing is seen as a private act between mother and child that is necessarily carried out within the private space of the home, mothers are seen as more natural within the home than outside of it. It has been my experience that, while society does not expect men to be satisfied by the work of the home, it is surprised when women are not.

Mothers are also disproportionately blamed for any problem their children might have. As a mother of children with a congenital disease, I have been asked by relative strangers and friends alike, if I drank, took drugs or did something else that was inappropriate during my pregnancy. Although the numbers of those who have made such comments is quite low, I felt very clearly the message that if something was wrong with my children, either I, as their mother, did something to cause it or I should have done something to prevent it. Their father did not receive the same message (personal communication)

Mother blaming is a routine occurrence in Western society. This is true of reports in psychological journals, as well as the popular press. In an investigation of journals in 1970, 1976, and 1982, Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1985) found

that mothers were consistently described less favourably and as more blame worthy, regardless of the gender of the writer or the year of the article. Although the trend is toward assigning less blame, women are still aware that when their children have problems, they are likely to be cited as the cause (Caplan, 1990; Evans and Swift, 2000). Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1985) found that mothers have been held responsible for over seventy psychological problems in clinical journals. This is impressive, however, the question remains, if mothering is a natural biologically determined quality of women, how can they cause so much damage to their children (Caplan, 1990; Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale, 1985)?

Everyone has an image of what it is to be a mother, because in some way or other we have all been mothered, and that mothering, and how we feel about it colours our image. For women, this image is often re-coloured when we ourselves become mothers. We often revisit the images from our childhood and from this new place of personal experience, reconsider what it is to be a mother. However men, who cannot revisit their concepts of mothers in the same way that women can, still powerfully define, through their influence on culture, what mothering is. I believe that it is time that mothers are asked what it is for them to be a mother, and to redefine mothering according to their voices (Tarvis, 1992). In the same way, as mothers are generally the ritual makers in Western families (Laird, 1988), it is important to ask them about their family's rituals.

Family Rituals

Rituals appear to be a part of what it is to be human. In some way, they are

found in all social organizations including, and perhaps especially, in the family (Bossard and Boll, 1950). Doherty in conversation with Miller (1998), states that

> [a]ll mammals are ritualists, and we're no different. It's part of our nature to love the predictability that rituals give. Children particularly love them and will insist on them, Rituals have a nonverbal and preverbal resonance, so that young children don't have to be highly verbal in order to participate in them.

However, despite the universal nature of family rituals, and their importance to family functioning, until the last part of the 20th century, the study of ritual in family life was restricted to anthropology and ethnography, and rituals and their impact on family functioning were only examined in primitive cultures. In 1950, Bossard and Boll published *Ritual in Family Living: A Contemporary Study*, the first examination of American family rituals. They define ritual as

> [a] system of procedure, a form or pattern of social interaction, which has three unvarying characteristics. First, it is definitely prescribed. This is the way a thing is to be done. Ritual means exactness and precision in procedure. Second, there is an element of rigidity. The longer the prescribed procedure continues, the more binding its precision becomes. And finally, there is a sense of rightness which emerges from the past history of the process, i.e., the oftener the repetition of the prescribed procedure occurs, the more it comes to be approved. This distinguishes it from mere habit. To deviate from the procedure is wrong, not wholly on utilitarian grounds, but also because it breaks the rhythm and the rapport. (1950, p. 16)

After Brossard and Bell, numerous family researchers examined rituals in an effort to understand their place and function within the family. Cheal (1988) identifies three theories of family ritual that inform current research. Social theory suggests that family bonds are preserved by the personal and social interactions inherent in family rituals. Structural-functional theory argues that rituals stabilize family roles and responsibilities in the midst of the rapid changes experienced in

industrial societies. In constructivist theory, as a social construction, rituals are a system of symbols that a society uses in social interactions that maintain the social order. Each of these theories consider rituals an important element of both societal and family functioning.

Research identifies family rituals as complex components of a family's life. In their seminal research, Wolin and Bennett (1984) identified three basic types of family rituals: 1) family celebrations, holidays, and special occasions that are celebrated widely in culture; 2) family traditions, rituals that are idiosyncratic to the family; and 3) important regularities or daily rituals, dinnertime, bedtime, storytelling, and regular weekend activities. They argue that the power to support group functioning is in the three underlying processes of all rituals: transformation; communication; and stabilisation and in the two underlying dimensions: family commitment to ritualising; and family capacity to adapt rituals.

Transformation refers to the transitional period when preparations for the ritual are made and members move from one state of being into the next, from the getting ready to the actual playing out of the ritual. Communication has two distinct but interactive components, the ritual's emotional and symbolic content. Within the ritual, both familiar emotions and meanings are experienced. As well, rituals add a predictability to family life that has a stabilising effect on its members. Some families have a high level of commitment to ritualisation. They pay attention to the past and plan for the future and they tend to be more hierarchical and rigid. In contrast, other families have a low level of commitment. These families are more present oriented and more apt to espouse an egalitarian approach to roles and power. Whether

families have a high or low level of commitment, their rituals are most relevant and effective when they are flexible and can adapt to the changing needs of the family (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

Thus, family rituals are more than just the practice of routines or activities. A central part of family life, they are both symbols that families use to organise and mould their experiences, and condensed expressions of the family's interactions. Their importance to the family is in the meaning that family members attach to the ritual (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, & Schwagler, 1993). For better or worse, rituals maintain, create, and coordinate the social structure within the family and the family's world. As well, they shape the identity of both individual members and the family as a whole (Baxter and Clark 1996; Laird, 1984; Roberts,1988). Rituals declare for family members that this is the way our family is, defining the family, both for family members and for society (Wolin & Bennet, 1984). They also provide a sense of continuity because of their symbolic connection to the past and to the future (Rosenthal & Marshall, 1988). These qualities are an integral part of family life and appear to be present in the different kinds of rituals. Bush (2000), an associate editor of *Today's Parent* magazine, puts it this way: "Rituals are important not so much for what is said or done but for the results they yield, the sense of 'we-ness' that grows out of a shared experience and the feeling or rightness that comes from their repetition."

Roberts (1988) asserts that rituals, including family rituals, can be identified because they contain six key elements: 1) repetition in action, content, and form; 2) acting or doing, not just thinking or saying something; 3) special or stylised

behaviour which are symbolic and set apart from their common usage; 4) order, with a beginning and end and a possibility for spontaneity; 5) an evocative presentation where in the staging and focus create an attentive state of mind; and 6) a collective element in which there is social meaning. These elements remain integral to the rituals even as they change and adapt over time. The changes are both inevitable and desired because the ongoing construction and deconstruction of family rituals reflects predictable transformations within the family as it moves through its life cycle and responds to its unique challenges (Haines, 1988). While these elements may be more easily identified in celebrations and traditions they are also found in those rituals that happen daily (Roberts, 1988).

Daily Family Rituals

Within each family, there are special times that happen day after day. While daily routines fit this description and are recognizable, repetitive and important for structuring a family's life, they lack symbolism, sense of anticipation, and desire to participate that accompanies a ritual (Schuck & Bucy, 1997). Daily family rituals tend to be unique to a particular family and say something about who that family is, who the people in it are, and what they believe. It could be an unusual way of putting kids to bed or playing outside after supper or the special things that happen when one family member leaves or comes back. They are known, not for their content, but for the meaning that those involved attach to the activity. Activities that are routines in one family can be rituals in another, if the members attach special

significance to what they are doing. This can make it difficult to distinguish a ritual from a routine.

The most frequently enacted type of family rituals, daily rituals also vary the most between families and over time (Schuck & Bucy, 1997). While family celebrations and routines may vary little from year to year, and for some families, from generation to generation, daily rituals tend to respond to the different requirements of a family at different time in its developmental cycle. They are the least focussed and intentionally planned of the three types of rituals described by Wolin and Bennet (1984). Unlike celebrations and traditions, these daily occurrences can happen without overt planning and preparation, and can take on an involuntary or automatic quality which can hide them and their meanings within the family structure. They become just what happens in our families, and can come to represent how we believe families should interact.

As well, they are experienced differently by different family members. For example, one of my favourite family rituals was putting in my father's cufflinks, but my mother hardly remembers that I used to do it. It is important to me because of the meaning that I attached to it; for me it meant a father daughter connection that I cherished. In this way some rituals engage the whole family, while others engage only some of its members. But, regardless of the actors, these powerful expressions of who our families are and who we are in them, shape our relationships, define the boundaries of the family and define our identity, values and beliefs within that family (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998).

Some families are rife with everyday rituals and the stories that explain how each one became established in their families. Others are almost bereft of both. Research and therapeutic practice suggest that the presence of daily rituals has a positive organising effect on family life (Imber Black, Roberts and Whiting, 1988). They can provide family members with a sense of stability, cohesion, uniqueness as a group and identity as a family, and can help to strengthen and maintain family bonding and functioning (Baxter & Clark, 1996; Fiese, 1997; Wolin & Bennet, 1984).

For children, daily rituals transmit family values and beliefs and can bolster resiliency (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998). They can provide children with a sense of security and serve as protective elements, helping them cope in face of disruptions like divorce and alcoholism. They are also positively related to adolescent self esteem and negatively related to adolescent anxiety (Fiese,1992; Fiese & Klein, 1993; Wolin, Bennett & Noonan, 1979). Therapists argue that family rituals are beneficial for family members, especially children, and consider their development an integral part of family therapy (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998; Whiteside, 1989).

However, rituals can also impact negatively on family functioning. Those that are filled with tension, conflict, or unspoken directives and rules can provoke anxiety. Expectations can be unrelated to the reality of the family's everyday functioning. And when rituals fail to adapt to the changing needs and developmental stages of the family, they can become obligatory observations that are devoid of real meaning for family members, (Reiss, 1981; Schuck & Bucy, 1997; Wolin &

Bennett, 1984). There are many ways that rituals can loose their meaning and negatively affect family members. For example, forcing family members to visit relatives each week, against their wishes can inject negative meaning into a ritual that might have been valued. Developmentally, a beloved bedtime ritual of Mom and/or Dad kissing all the stuffed toys, as well as the child, may lose its charm as the child ages.

As I prepared for this research, I had numerous conversations with mothers about their daily family rituals which revealed another component. Daily family rituals do not just happen. Some rituals take time and effort to plan, execute, and maintain and someone has to remember and be willing to perform them. But, who is it that is responsible for the family's rituals? Who decides how they will be performed? And to whom does the work fall? Even when the rituals are positive for the family in general, and for its members in particular, when only one person is responsible for the daily rituals, for ensuring that all the required elements are attended to each day, that person can feel burdened by that responsibility and experience these rituals negatively.

Women and Family Rituals

Family rituals tell us who we are and this extends to our understanding of gender because the social construction of gender identity and roles are shaped by and expressed in the family. It is in our families that we learn to be who we are, what is expected of us, and what value we have (Laird, 1988). The repetitive and somewhat hidden nature of family rituals means that the messages are reinforced

over and over and we are likely to be unaware that they are being given. Women cleaning up after a family celebration while the men, who may have contributed nothing to the preparation of the meal, relax, and watch the game, is an overt expression of women's place in the family. However, these expressions can be hidden in daily rituals because they seem to develop out of what works best for the family, including the mother. But who sits where, who gets served first and best, and whose meal is interrupted when more milk is needed, can powerfully define who we are, and for children, who they are supposed to be. Laird (1988) explains that

> Ritual is probably the most potent socialisation mechanism available to kin and other groupings for preparing individual member to understand the group's meanings, carry on its traditions, and perform those social roles considered essential to its continuation. Through ritual, as males and females, we learn who we are to be . . . to what we can aspire. (p. 333)

Throughout the world, rituals associated with men tend to be more public, dramatic, and colourful to bestow power and authority and to entrench men's superior place in society. In contrast, women's rituals define their domain as domestic, celebrate their role as nurturer and caretaker, and assign them to a particular male. In the United States, rituals have awarded men the public domain with the greater power and prestige that accompany it, and women the private domain, with the aspects of deference and subordination that accompany it (Laird, 1988).

Societal rituals are used to tell women and men who they are and what is expected of them. For example, still today women are given in marriage as the

precious gift of the male head of one family, to the male head of her new family. Although it is argued that this act is simply symbolic, many women still give up their birth name for the name of her new husband. In addition, the couple is seldom asked to share a kiss to seal their vows. Instead grooms are told that they may kiss their bride, which in its origin was to symbolise ownership. Although few today see husbands as owning their wives the language serves to tell the woman who she is and her position in the family. Laird argues that women's inferior position continues because women earn less that men and "earning power buys the right in marriage to make decisions" (1988, p. 336).

In the family, women are usually more involved in the daily functioning and as a result, the daily rituals than men are (Stats Canada, 2000). Cheal suggests that from a constructivist standpoint the "more extensive involvement of women in family rituals may be explained as a result of their greater dependence upon the private sphere within the sexual division of labour" (1988, p. 639). Most of the household duties, including the daily rituals or routines of meals and bedtimes, which require a significant investment of time and effort continue to be performed by mothers, especially those who do not work outside the home. Cheal (1991) suggests that this is because women's personal lives and work are fused in the tasks of parenting and nurturing. This has changed somewhat in the past few decades. Today, fathers participate in the family's daily rituals, they may even take the initiative in some, but for the most part the mothers are still responsible for most of the household work (Stats Canada, 2000).

Rituals in Family Therapy

Discussions of family's rituals can play a significant role in family therapy. The therapist can assess whether the elements that define family rituals are present in the family's life together. These can then be judged according to type, processes, and dimensions to ascertain the extent and operation of rituals in the family (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Family rituals can provide a place from which families can explore the dissonances and the meaning or lack of it in their lives. The structure, meaning, and persistence found in a family's rituals can paint a picture of how the individual members function as a unit (Schuck & Bucy, 1997). With the assistance of the therapist, families can identify areas of strength and weakness to provide a framework from which to rework or rebuild their relationships and begin the process of healing. Thus, in the therapeutic setting, rituals can provide a point of entry for therapeutic conversations about individual family members or the family as a unit and can be used to assess family functioning, resources, priorities, identify areas of concern, and provide a framework for therapy (Fiese, 1997; Rogers & Holloway, 1991).

Rituals have the potential to be used in a wide variety of family therapies and with the various issues that families face. In *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy* (Imber-Black, Roberts, & Whiting, 1988), various writers describe the use of family rituals in: couples therapy, therapy with children and adolescents, sexual therapy, and women and with issues like: rites of passage, adoption, alcoholism, blending families, psychiatric problems in the family, and political trauma and oppression. Within each of these areas, discussions about the family's rituals can identify areas

of concern and lead to resolution of particular problems. For example, the arguments of new couples can be seen as efforts to shape their new family's rituals. Each partner has an understanding of what is essential to family life that was developed in their families of origin. They may want to incorporate a particular ritual because of the warm feelings of family it evokes, or avoid another because of painful memories. Therapy at this point can help new couples establish family rituals that are meaningful to both members, honour their families of origin, and enhance how they function as a family (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998).

Although rituals have been identified as important for family functioning (Friese, 1997; Baxter & Clark, 1996; Wolin & Bennet, 1984), there is not an optimum level of ritualisation to which families must strive. However, Roberts (1988) has identified six modes of family ritualisation that do affect the efficacy of the family's rituals: 1) underritualised: families tend not to pay attention to or celebrate family changes or participate in cultural rituals; 2) rigidly ritualised: behaviour is prescribed and the rituals tend to stay the same rather than evolve over time; 3) skewed ritualisation: one tradition or side of the family is emphasised at the expense of ritual aspects of the other; 4) hollow ritual as event not process: events have little meaning and are celebrated out of a sense of obligation; 5) interrupted or unable to be expressed openly: because of sudden changes or traumatic events in the family or the culture, families are unable to completely experience ritual processes; and 6) flexible: an ability to change and adapt their rituals over time, in response to the family's changing developmental needs. A flexible approach is seen to be most productive because it ensures that the rituals are robust and meaningful.

Effective rituals provide families with special times to both mark and rework their roles, rules, and relationships. The therapist can assess the family's ritual topology as it relates to the three kinds of family rituals and design interventions to help the family to create rituals that more appropriate to the family's developmental stage, more responsive to individual needs, and more reflective of the families values and beliefs (Laird, 1984). And because they happen regularly, small changes in daily family rituals can effect significant changes in family functioning.

In addition to assessment of current functioning and the creation of new family rituals, rituals are used as prescriptions by many family therapists. This technique is often used to promote reflection or change in family members. The prescribed ritual is developed to address the family's specific needs and is either assigned by the therapist or worked on collaboratively (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995). One of the first discussions of the use of rituals as prescriptions in family therapy is by the Milan group in 1977 (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin & Prata, 1977). Their goal was to develop interventions that could challenge the family's rules, myths, and epistemology in order to provoke change without the therapists having to resort to verbal interventions like explanations or criticisms. They explain that

> [f]rom the formal point of view, a family ritual refers to an action or a series of actions, sometimes accompanied by verbal formulas or expressions, that are to be carried out by all members of the family. The ritual is prescribed in every detail: the place in which it must be carried out, the time, any eventual number of repetitions, the persons who are to utter the verbal expressions and in what order, etc. Often these instructions are given in written form. (p. 452)

Once the ritual disrupts the myth, it becomes possible to work on the internal problems that the family is experiencing. However, inventing the ritual requires significant effort. After observing the family, the therapeutic team must create a ritual that is as unique as the particular family's rules and myths. Selvini-Palazzoli, et al. (1977) describe a family that had developed a myth of "all for one and one for all" Aunts, uncles, and cousins has come to act like parents and siblings and children had become unsure who to turn to for support. In their work with one part of this family, whose daughter was suffering from anorexia nervosa, the team challenged the family myth with a ritual that realigned the family boundaries to support the nuclear family, while acknowledging the importance of the extended family. Although they did not describe it in this way, it appears that what the therapeutic team challenged was the family's life theme.

Life Themes

The events of an individual's life can be understood as being structured by a life theme. Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie (1979) contend that over time, an individual's actions reflect a unique theme that unfolds against the a backdrop of historical theme so that both the individual's creativity and cultural influences play a role in the their choice of a life theme. They argue that "personal themes can be recognised in people's lives; that they are crucial for understanding behaviour over time; and that it is possible to study the origins, developments, and effects of such themes . . . " (pp. 47-48). A life theme is either a problem or a set of problems that individuals seek, above all else, to solve. A life theme is the one thing that they

invest the most time and energy on. If the individual's life theme is formulated around a solvable problem, she will progress to an affective and cognitive understanding. If the problem is perceived as not solvable then she will not be able to even attempt to solve it. This understanding of life themes can be expanded to include family themes.

In their 1959 case analysis of five families, *Family Worlds*, Hess and Handel suggest that each family has a theme which is found in the family's understanding of who they are, what they do, and their stance toward the outside world (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990). And although Reiss (1981) does not call it a theme, he argues that each individual family has a unique and distinct reality, a way of interacting with the world. Despite disagreements within the family their common assumptions about the world organise the ways in which individual members and the family as a whole interact with the world. Extrapolating from Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie's argument, it may be that the potential for solving the problem that the family has built it's theme around affects whether they progress or stay stuck. It may be that the prescriptive ritual described by Selvini-Palazzoli, et al. (1977) challenges the problem that defines the life theme and that re-framing the problem to one that is solvable allows the family to move forward.

Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie's suggest that an individual's life theme is a system that they have developed to cope with their world. It can be understood in phenomenological terms as the essence of the person's life-world, what it is that gives her life meaning. Each of the women interviewed for this research has constructed her own life theme through which her life can be interpreted and the

essence revealed. This theme is tied to her family's rituals because both the theme and the rituals define her within the family, depict the family's unique reality, and organise how individual members interact both within the family system and outside its borders. The themes that seem to have emerged from each narrative can perhaps be understood as either a description of, or evidence for, the participant's life theme.

Chapter 6

INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVES

The following three chapters contain the stories of the participants in this research project. These women are long-term members of the playgroup that I participated in as part of my practicum. This groups seeks to support parents as they raise their children in these challenging and changing times. Each one has volunteered with the playgroup in some way and their participation in this research is an extension of their commitment to the group and to their parenting. My studies and this research project had been discussed on various occasions and a number of the group participants were intrigued by the topic and expressed interest in the project. Of those who expressed an interest, these women volunteered to participate.

I was interested in interviewing participants from this group because I have experienced their commitment to parenting, and because I felt that in some ways they are under-represented in research of this kind. The members of the playgroup are mostly stay-at-home Moms with a basic education, a modest view of their own abilities and a wariness of professionals. Often it is those who have more education, more confidence, and who are deemed to be more self reflective and more articulate who are chosen for this type of research. But, I think we miss something important when we only hear the voices of those who are experienced at telling their stories, because we believe that they can provide more data. I believe

that hearing different women's voices is necessary to our understanding of women's experiences within their families.

I am very grateful for the honesty and generosity that each woman showed in sharing their time and stories with me. Although I tried to be thorough in my explanations of what would be required and what I would do with the information that they provided, they could not be sure that I would honour their stories. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to get to know them, first through the playgroup and then through this research project.

I have known these women for less than a year and yet I feel close to each one of them. They are amazing women who want to be the best parent that they can be. Interviewing them, I felt more like a friend asking a friend about a common concern, than an observer of their lives. I was aware, both of my responsibilities as a researcher, and that interviewing is not simply a conversation between friends and I sought to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere that would facilitate the interviews. Also, I am personally involved with this topic. At times in the interview, I shared my stories of daily family rituals. In terms of the data collection, we were co-researchers.

Each story is presented under that pseudonym that the woman chose at the beginning of the first interview. Rather than use pseudonyms for the others in their narratives, I have chosen to use generic terms like husband, daughter, and younger son to protect their anonymity, to ensure that the reader knows who the participant is referring to, and to foreground the woman's participation in her own story. The participants' words are in italics to foreground their voices. The information that is

needed to make sense of the quotes, but are not the participant's own words are placed in square brackets [ ] and are not italicised. My words, spoken either in the interviews or as an aside in the narrative are in rounded brackets ( ) and are also not italicised. I have made these distinctions to facilitate the reading of the narratives, and ensure that the woman's own words are easily identifiable.

In each chapter the women's stories are presented under the heading "Streams" because of the sense of flow that their stories generated. As I introduced the topic, asked questions or probed the meaning within their words, stories flowed from them in streams of consciousness, with only minimal encouragement. The meaning of daily family rituals in their lives is found in these streams of through which they have told their stories. Each chapter then ends with "A Tentative Understanding," an exploration of what their stories say about the nature of daily family rituals as this particular woman experiences them. This is presented in through the sub-themes that emerged through the analysis that are underlined in the text to facilitate appreciation of how the parts and the whole of each narrative are linked.

Chapter 7

GRACE

"My kids run this household. I'm just here to guide it"

Grace is a stay at home mother with three boys, two in elementary school and one who starts kindergarten in the fall. The children are the main focus of the family and the family's rituals and activities revolve around the boys and the things that Grace believes are important about being a family. She describes herself as a non-traditional parent who, with her husband is highly ritualised. Together they have developed rituals for almost every important activity. Grace uses their rituals to smooth out the running of their home, to get the boys to do what she needs them to do, and to ensure that they all have fun doing it.

I believe that her statement from the last part of her second interview: *"My kids run this household. I'm just here to guide it"* captures the essence of her lived experience of family, daily family rituals, and her role in those rituals. It can also be understood as a life theme. The one thing on which Grace spends most of her time, energy, and creativity on is facilitating the family's life so that her children can run the household. The stories in her narrative both explain and are explained by her theme statement. Although not literally true, it does illustrate Grace's approach to parenting and to her family's daily rituals.

In each interview she related detailed stories of what she knows about the family rituals that happen in their home each day. She speaks of how they get

things done by having fun, of her search for a better way of parenting and being a family, of the importance that she places on bonding with one another, and of what it is for her to be a mother. Within her stories is the nature of daily family rituals for Grace, their qualities, and what appears at different times and under different conditions. To understand these is to understand the essence of the phenomenon for her. Thus, the chapter ends with a tentative understanding of the essence of family, rituals, and mothering for Grace.

Streams

Although Grace characterises her rituals as a kind of bribery, through her stories, I experienced them as creative answers to the complexities of parenting.

> *Most of our rituals come from trying to keep things running smoothly absolutely, yeah that's where they come from.*

Grace does not want to follow her parents' example, and lacking an alternative, she relies on rituals to get her children to do what she wants them to do. Whether it is getting them into the house, or into bed, getting them to do their homework, or help with chores, Grace has developed a ritual to ensure that it gets done.

> *I know how my parents got me to do what they wanted me to do, but I don't really know how to get the kids to do what I want and need them to do. So that's how I do it, through rituals. I kind of bribe them. That's how a lot of our rituals have come about . . . Like bed snack for bed time, and getting them up into the bed by playing stinky feet.*

These inventive rituals move her children to where she wants them, when she wants them there, and then to doing what she wants them to do. The boys

comply because they want to. And they want to because these rituals are fun, they are also both predicable and spontaneous at the same time, and they have developed over time into just the way things are done in their family.

> *One that we started was with bed snack and that was because, in the summer time, trying to get the kids to come into the house to go to bed was virtually impossible. So we would bribe them with food, veg trays, it wasn't always junk food, heck a handful of chocolate chips, if that's all we had on hand. "Bed snack" and they came running and then I got them in the house. So then all I had to do was stop them from going back outside.*

And when that became harder they turned it into a game.

> *We would go up and plan a game, and it used to be that* [their Dad] *would wrestle with them. Then when he went on permanent evenings, he's not home at bed times . . . so it turned into, I don't even remember how it started.* [her oldest son] *said something about "Mommy has stinky feet" and I chased after him. And then when he would say "Mommy doesn't have stinky feet" he would get lovings for it and it turned out, now we do this on the bed and they say "Mommy has stinky feet" and I tickle the potatoes out of them and then they say "Mommy doesn't have stinky feet" and they get their lovings. That's a ritual, every night.*

I was impressed by her ability to accomplish sometimes-dreaded tasks by combining her desire for a smooth running family with a sense of fun. Although she does not see it as a strong ritual right now, the boys already enjoy the way that she has structured their homework time.

> *Homework is probably another one. It's not really a strong ritual now. That's usually done while I'm cooking supper. They sit at the kitchen table and we all do it together and it's a real social time, which is not what they recommend, but they're helping each other out with each other's homework. They're laughing about the story that the other one is reading. It takes us probably an hour longer to get the homework done than it would normally because we're quite social when we're doing it . . . If I do it the regular way, the way most people expect it to be done . . . You sit at the kitchen table, your brother sits at a desk.*

You do yours, he does his, they don't want to do it, it's a huge fight . . . It just doesn't work out.

Instead she has made it a social time.

> [her youngest son] *would sit here and draw, colour, throw rice at his brother. So it was all three at the same time while I was getting supper prepared . . . Homework is family time. . . It has to be that way. It has to be that way because the other way it was, they dreaded homework . . . and* [now] *it's working for them.*

There are also rituals that while they were once important, Grace and the boys no longer do. Though, as she finished describing this one, she laughed and wondered if it was time to start it again.

> *We had other rituals that we dropped, like doing the dishes . . . my kids did the dishes, first. And then I had to do them after, but they did the dishes while I vacuumed, and then when they were done it was my turn to do the dishes and it was their turn to do the vacuuming . . . There was water everywhere, and then we mopped the floor. So every day the floor got soaked and mopped . . . house was cleaner, I should probably get back into that one* [she laughs].

As she described their rituals, she also began to consider new rituals that she could develop to deal with some of the new problems that the family is facing as the boys get older. Talking about their rituals has

> *opened up some other things that I can try, like to start some more rituals with them that might make things a little smoother. I had been trying to do something with* [her middle son] *. . . to look at me and count to ten. Well, it's not working. It's just not working . . . Maybe I need to start something funny, as opposed to something serious. Counting to ten is really serious, a very grown up thing to do. Maybe I need to come up with a humourous way to help his get out of that.*

I had the sense that she spends a lot of time considering ways to help her children with whatever they need. An example of this is letting them cook. In the following story, Grace talks about her middle son starting to so some of the cooking.

Mostly because I thought that [his] *problems stemmed from low self-esteem. So that when* [he] *is able to do something, I let him do it . . . There are certain things that* [he] *is good at and we like him to be able to do those things . . . We try to make him feel special for being able to do it . . . I wonder if letting* [him] *do what he can do and encouraging him to do what he does . . . Does it do more than just keep the peace? Sometimes it's harder to let him do that. I'm hoping that it builds up his self esteem, and by building up his self-esteem he'll be easier to deal with . . . . If letting him do things that most people wouldn't let a 7 year old do builds up his self esteem, because he is capable of doing it . . .*

Grace is committed to her children and adapting to what they need. Her childhood was very different from the one she wants for her children. As a result she cannot follow her parent's example and she has to find a better way. For Grace, finding a better way means few rules and plenty of encouraging the qualities and attitudes that she values in her children. She uses rituals, which the boys want to do because they are fun, in place of rules and regulations.

Well, rules and regulations are made to be broken for one . . . that just sets him up. . . But when it's a game and a reward . . . Yeah, they [rituals] *play a huge part. Cause you know what to expect. There's nothing worse than going through not knowing what to expect . . . They know that when this starts, this is going to happen . . . yeah, but fun order, not rigid rules that you've got to . . . I don't want that either. Like I grew up with militarialistic . . . I don't want that for them. I just want it to be just contentment, smooth. I grew up walking on eggshells and I don't want that for them. I want things to be smooth and happy . . .*

There are many things that she wants for her children, but mostly she wants as little conflict as possible. She uses rituals to keep the peace.

I've tried to use rituals to kind . . . I don't really like conflict. I like peace, I like things to just kind of . . . I never had that as a kid growing up per se. So I kind of use it that way.

She does believe that the boys run the household, and she believes that this is how it should be, at least for her family. But she also believes that it is her responsibility to guide it. So, while she does accommodate the boys' needs, and she does try to keep the peace, there are some rules. For Grace an important part of having a better family life is ensuring that it's members do not hurt each other.

> *There are only a couple of rules that we have that are strict. And that is there's no hitting . . . there's none of that. It's zero tolerance on that . . . And the other is, there's no belittling one another. I don't allow it AT All!. Not even one little bit "I'm better at that than you are" . . . None of that. You're good at things, He's good at things. I don't allow that, there's none of that . . . And power trips . . . I don't allow power tripping . . . you don't power trip here. We're all equals in this house . . . This is our home and we all live by the same set of rules . . . Those are our only really strict rules.*

This is very different than the way that she was raised.

> *My father used to say, he still says, and my mother is proud of this quote . . . You'll either fear me or respect me and don't care which it is . . as long as you do as you are told.*

The ways that Grace has chosen to guide her home and family are not traditional. They are not traditional on purpose. However, she expressed a number of times that she feels that she is criticised. Yet she believes that her way does work for her family and that her ways of being a family are helping to create strong bonds. Grace is committed to incorporating those things that she believes will encourage her children to be connected, not just with her and their dad, but with each other as well. She wants them to have

> *connection with each other, a bond, bonding with one another, cause then that'll be something only they did.*

She described two of the rituals that she believes foster this connection, the elaborate handshake they have developed with their dad and nicknames.

> *. . . the high five thing with their father, I don't even know if I can remember it . . . and they add pieces to it . . . started at birth and then . . . It was a high five, a low five and a shake and then it went, when they saw a movie where they did a little, then they added pieces to it. But that's where it is now, slide punch. I don't remember what movie they saw that in, but. . . and I'm sure that in time to come they'll add even more to it, cause it's quite the handshake and they don't do it with me, they do it with their Dad . . . You see I'm the big meany that makes them do everything so I don't really get any of that . . . There's times, times that I feel left out, cause I just don't do that with them. But the majority of the time I think it's just too freakin cute . . .*

This started when they were babies. She smiled as she thought of him doing high fives with them when they were infants, but there is more to this ritual than just saying goodbye to his little boys. Grace describes it as his way of connecting with them even when they get older and will not want to give him hugs and kisses.

> *A lot of the stuff that* [their dad] *does is very symbolic. Like he realized that the kids were going to be embarrassed to say I love you, at some point in the game, and to give him a kiss and stuff. So that's where the high five thing came in, cause he started it very young. And he still gets the kiss goodbye, but then they do the high five this, and eventually when they are ready to drop the kiss. Like* [her oldest son] *won't give him a kiss at school . . . And if he wants to give him a kiss, he's more than willing to . . . And if he wants to say I love you he can . . . if he doesn't they have a code.*

The nicknames are another complex ritual that has evolved over time and is part of the bonding of this family with one another. They are important to Grace because they signal who is family.

> *I don't know, it's just, it's another way of bonding and being, like a group, like no one else calls them that, we just call each other that. [her husband] calls me critter, he's called me that since we've dated, cause I used to say I had to get home to feed the critters. And he*

would give me big "You're my critter" [she laughs]. *So that's where he got that one from, it's critter. And he's been everything from Snookums to Bear to . . . I don't know we've just always been into, [her husband's] family is into that though. As soon as the kids were born they had a nickname. [Her husband's] father calls all the kids by their first initial. Like . . . My kids will answer to anything. If it's one of their pet names they will answer to it . . .*

The list of nicknames is impressive.

They all have nicknames, bonehead is kind of a term of endearment for the whole family . . . is Rugger, Rug Rat . . . is Wigglebut, and . . . is Qtip because his hair used to look like a little Qtip head, so he's Qtip. So they've all got nicknames, several really, cause . . . is also Cubbin, and he's also Tum Tum, so they've all got a bunch of different nicknames . . . We have a lot of pet names here. I always call them pet names . . . he would say Cub's . . . And then I started calling him Cubbin and I'm the only one that does. . . . . people at the pool think his name is Cubbin . . . [His dad] *calls him Cub, his little bear cub . . .Q most of the time . . . [one of the other's is] Wig or Wiggin. . . . [she smiles] you can't call him anything else but Wigglebut.*

It is not the number of nicknames that is important to Grace; it is that they signal that they are family. No one else calls them by these special names, these terms of endearment that she believes promote bonding. Throughout the interviews, I developed the sense that understanding her connection and commitment to her boys is essential to understanding Grace's experience of being a mother. The following quote is her description of waiting for her oldest to be born. Although a skilled storyteller, she had some trouble getting this one out. My sense was that she was transported back to this time of waiting and was re-experiencing the feelings and hopes that she had at that time.

When I was pregnant with [her oldest], *I used to, I had made the, I was very, very anxious to give birth. I wanted him out. I wanted to hold him in my arms. I remember . . . You're just dying to hug this*

kid . . . I had gotten the room done just the way I wanted it to be. And I used to sit in the room when [her husband] was at work and rock.

Grace adores her children. This is certainly evident in this story, but also in the various rituals that she and they have established over the years. Being a close family is important to Grace because she did not have that as a child. The combination of her childhood experiences and her dedication to her children, is reflected in Grace's particular understanding of how to be a mother. She experiences her mothering as quite different from that of most other mothers and she commented a number of times, that she often feels criticised the way she has chosen to raise her boys.

Yeah . . . I don't raise my kids the way most people raise their kids and I don't think they like that . . . My kids run this household. I'm just here to guide it. I'm here to try and clean it. To make the meals that they can't make, 'cause they cook their own meals. And I've had people go oh my god, but they can make macaroni and hot dogs . . . They're fine.

She may not be a traditional parent, but being a mother is the most important part of her life. She describes bedtime is her favourite time of the day with the boys because of the togetherness inherent in the rituals that happen at this time. Not only do they have bed snack, play stinky feet, or wrestle and have songs and stories, Grace sits with the boys until they fall asleep. She began this when they were infants and there is the sense that this, as much as any other ritual, captures the essence of her mothering.

I think most of our rituals are around bed time, pretty much all of them, That's my favourite time of day too . . . It's just quiet, everyone's together, no one's bouncing here, there, and everywhere. . . . and we do the family bed thing. We always go to bed in the same

bed. I, more often, not always, but I do move them during the night, That's just from nursing I think. I always, you know, when you're nursing, you watch then fall asleep and I'm still. [Her oldest] *is 9 and I still watch him fall asleep. That's why we all sleep in the same bed. I have to! . . . I don't fall asleep with them. Well I do sometimes . . . But I'll watch them fall asleep, stay until everyone's asleep . . .*

Grace does not expect that her children will always happy, but she does want them to be able to adapt and change when they need to.

I'd like to say I want them to be happy, but they're not going to be happy their whole life. I just want them to be content and hopeful with what's going on. Then when things aren't going the way they want them to, they'll be comfortable enough to say that things need to change, to be okay with change too.

Her family's rituals, what they accomplish, and how they define family for its members are important to Grace. They appear to emanate from her understanding of herself as a mother, as the family's guide. I asked her what she thought her family's daily rituals say about her as a mother, about her experience of mothering.

Well, I like them for one. I like things to go smooth. And I know I've used rituals . . . that's why I use them. . . . [and] *it's a huge coping skill, and God knows we need more coping skills in the world . . . yeah and I want good memories too and I think rituals help to develop that because I don't really have a lot of memory from being a kid . . . and I kind of hoped that doing this kind of thing the kids would say "You remember when we used to go to bed, we used to do this" I want them to have good memories of that . . . I think it will help to bring good memories, I hope.*

A Tentative Understanding

For Grace, daily family rituals are ways to organise the household, ways to get things done in a manner that builds her children's self-esteem and is very different from the house in which she grew up. Their rituals bond the members of

her family one to another, impart values, and say who they are as a family. Her part in the development, maintenance and performance of her family's daily rituals is as the guide. Using rituals means that she can be a different kind of mother, that her family can do what needs to be done, but have fun doing it.

Unsure of how to get her children to do what she needed them to do, rituals for Grace are ways of getting things done by having fun. *"I really don't know how to get the kids to do what I need them to do. So that's how I do it through rituals."* Grace's has found that things work best when she *"kind of worms around it . . ."* In their house there is order, but *"fun order, not rigid rules."* And she believes in breaking the rituals now and then because *"if you don't it's not a ritual, it's a regime, and I don't want a regime. There's a difference. . . and then it's not fun anymore."*

There are things that need to be done, but speed and efficiency are not important to Grace. Her family's rituals are not about finding the quickest, most efficient, or easiest way to do what has to be done. For example she acknowledges that *"sometimes it's harder to let him"* do the cooking, but she is *"hoping that it builds up his self-esteem."* And when she speaks of homework she says *"It probably takes us an hour longer to get it done . . ."*

Her home revolves around her children. Grace wants the household to run smoothly, to accomplish what needs done, but not at her children's expense. She has committed herself to finding a better way than she experienced as a child because as she described it she *"I grew up with militaristic . . . I don't want that for them. I just want it to be just contentment, smooth. I grew up walking on eggshells*

. . . I want things to be smooth and happy and . . ." In contrast to her own childhood, she wants things like homework or bedtime to work for her children, not just herself. And when she uses rituals they do. Rituals in Grace's home have a casual appearance. They are more about ease than rules, but that does not mean that anything goes, *"there's no hitting . . . there's no belittling one another. I don't allow it AT All! . . . And power trips . . . I don't allow power tripping . . . This is our home and we all live by the same set of rules."*

Thus, Grace works to create a home where power is not used by one member against another. This is very different from how she was raised. *"My father used to say, he still says, and my mother is proud of this quote ... You'll either fear me or respect me and don't care which it is . . as long as you do as you are told."* She has reacted to her own childhood by being intentional about creating a different atmosphere for her own children. She is committed to having a family where all members are equals.

She is also committed to their bonding with one another. This desire for connection began before her oldest son was even born. *"I wanted him out. I wanted to hold him in my arms. I remember . . . just dying to hug this kid."* Rituals like the high five that they do with each their Dad and all the nicknames that they call each other strengthen that bond, now and into the future because *"that'll be something only they did . . . no one else calls them that."*

Grace has incorporated rituals into their family to help things run smoothly, to get things done that have to be done, and in a fun way so that the boys want to

participate. But, in addition to wanting things to go smoothly, she also wants good memories and connection. Although she uses rituals to accomplish these goals, it is not necessarily something that she planned. *"I didn't realize that before hand, I knew it on one level but I've never really kind of analysed it to realize that, that's why I use them."* Instead, it is an expression of how she understands and expresses her mothering. Thus her statement, *"My kids run this household. I'm just here to guide it"* explains how she parents. Grace facilitates her children's lives so that they can run the household and as a result have the life she wants for them. This is the one thing that she spends most of her time, energy, and creativity on, her life theme, the essence of her experience.

Chapter 8

MAXINE

"I never got that growing up, so I make sure I do that a lot"

Maxine is a stay at home mother with a five year old daughter who she is raising on her own. The words for the theme that I believe captures the essence of Maxine's story, come from a portion of the second interview in which Maxine talks about telling her daughter that she loves her. Although the words are embedded in this one ritual, they also speak to Maxine's approach to mothering in general and her family's daily rituals in particular. Throughout the interviewing I gained a sense of how intentional she is as a mother, and how her intentions are directed toward what she wants for her daughter, especially those things that she missed in her own childhood.

Things happen in Maxine's family because she has thought about them and has chosen to make them a part of their lives. Although her stories seem to come out of the circumstances of her own childhood that she does not want for her daughter, they concentrate on what she does want for her, on what she wants to give her. Her focus is on the future and her hopes for her daughter. *"I never got that growing up, so I make sure I do that a lot"* can be interpreted as Maxine's life theme because her main focus is ensuring that her daughter has what Maxine feels that she needs. Her stories suggest that doing things for her daughter is the one

thing that she invests the most time and energy in. It is also seems to be what gives her life meaning.

Maxine's stories describe what she knows about daily family rituals in her family. They illustrate how she wants a better life for her daughter, the importance she attaches to connecting, meeting her daughter's needs, and constructing memories. These are all a part of what it is for Maxine to be a mother. The chapter ends with a tentative understanding of the essence of daily family rituals, their qualities and appearances, and the meaning of mothering for Maxine.

Streams

Maxine wants more for her daughter than she had, and she has made intentional choices to ensure that this happens. This started with choosing to stay at home, at least until her daughter was in school. She wanted to be there, to raise her daughter herself.

> *. . . I've had her first five years though. I wouldn't leave her for the first five years. I wouldn't leave her with someone ... I think kids need their mother until they're old enough to go to school. . . Because I didn't have mine. My mother was full time. My parents both worked full time and we were at sitters a lot . . . So I said that I would never do that to her, never . . . I think all kids need their Mom . . .*

Because of her circumstances, there are things that Maxine thinks are important and would like to give to her daughter that she cannot provide right now. Maxine is determined that one day she will have those things that she feels she missed.

. . . . And there are things that I would like to do that I can't do. But I will . . . I'm going to have a house some day, so that she can have a house. It might not be until she's 20, but I'm going to have it. . . A house and a nice car and buy her all kinds of stuff.

I asked Maxine what she wants for her daughter. She spoke passionately and without hesitation about the hopes and dreams that she has for her.

You know what I want for her? I want her to grow up and go places. I don't want her to have kids young. I want her to wait, go to school, have her fun. I want her to party. I want her to party a lot, so she knows when she decides to have kids, she's going to be a good mother. But I want her to be older, like in her late 20's, after she has the job and the husband and the house and all that's in it. And then I want her to have her kids, so I can have them [she laughs].

Maxine even knows the kind of grandmother that she will be and what she will do for her daughter and with her grandchildren.

'Cause I'm going to be a good grandmother. . . . I'm going to go, pick my grandkid up, give her a break, like for the whole day, pick her up and spend the whole day with her . . .

Maxine's narratives contain little about her own life. Instead, they describe her daughter, their relationship, and the things in that relationship that are important to her. It seems that all that Maxine is doing and hoping for are focussed on her daughter, so that she has a better life than Maxine has had. There is a connection to the future in what she does with her daughter because Maxine hopes that her daughter will be a better mother than she is, that things will improve with each generation.

I think it would say that I want better for her than I had and [she pauses] I think I do it a lot . . . Yeah, and I think it makes her feel good too and hopefully when she's older she'll be even better with her own (so every generation learns) . . . *gets better!*

Maxine is committed to her daughter. When Maxine was about two years old she realised that she was the most important thing in her life and made some changes.

> *I haven't always been this way . . . Well, up until she was 2, I think up until she was 2, I partied a lot. I was out every night, but she never stayed with everyone but my mother . . . Then when she hit 2, ... I was about 20, 21 . . . . I think it was that I didn't think that she was very happy at the time . . . it wasn't that she wasn't happy because she was with my mother. It's just that I'm her mother.*

Maxine makes choices based on what she thinks is best for her daughter and she is proud of the relationship that they have developed as a result.

> *I think when I spend time with her, it's good time . . . I think we have a good relationship . . . She's a good kid . . . I think she respects me . . . I don't think I'm hard on her . . . I just don't want her to be bad. She's a kid, she's my only kid so and a lot of the stuff she does is just little stuff so it doesn't amount to anything big . . .* (She's the most important person in your life?) *Oh yeah for sure. She may not always think so but she is . . . she absolutely is.*

She also hopes that when her daughter is older their relationship will be different than the one she has with her mother. She is doing all she can to make a better life for her child and she expects that to make a difference, she expects her daughter to respect her for the choices she has made.

> *And I think also that, she had better respect me because I didn't respect my mother at all, I still don't at certain times. But I won't make those mistakes and my kid will have to, because there's just no way she can't . . . I respect her* [daughter] *and I think there's a connection . . .*

Maxine also respects her daughter's judgement. For example, she does not force her daughter to give hugs and kisses if she does not want to.

. . . if she doesn't want to hug and kiss anyone I don't force her. She must have a reason.

Maxine has made many choices about what she does with her daughter. One of those choices is to openly express how she feels about her. She intentionally tells her daughter that she loves her. Again, this ritual is something that she does because she has identified it as lacking in her own childhood.

I do it in front of everyone [tell her I love her] *. . . I never got that growing up, so I make sure I do that a lot. I always got a hug and a kiss but I never remember being told "I love you."*

And Maxine is pleased that her daughter hears that she is loved, not just from her, but from her parents as well.

. . . And I know that my mother constantly tells her she loves her and my Dad does too. I like it. Especially when my Dad says "I love you too" because she says "I love you Grampie" and he says "I love you too." So that's really nice and Mom will say it too. And they always hug and kiss her goodbye. So she has that.

Her daughter has developed an interesting ritual around the hugs and kisses that she dispenses to her grandmother when her mother is present. She seems to have a sense of hierarchy, to consider who has first rights to her hugs.

It's funny because if my Mother says give me a hug, she'll look at me. "I'll give Mommy one first" and then she'll give Mom one. . . She'll [Gramma] *say "oh you're foolish, get over here and give me a hug." So then she [Maxine's daughter] will do eeny, meeny, minny, mo, and if it lands on Mom, she'll do it again . . . I think she doesn't want to upset me by not hugging me or kissing me first. It wouldn't be. But I always get that feeling from her . . .*

As a family they have established rituals that support and encourage their relationship. Bedtime is definitely an important part of their day.

I think the most important is the bedtime, when she goes to bed, the story and the hug and the kiss. 'Cause if we've had a bad day . . . at bedtime it's like . . . At bedtime I never want her to go to bed [she pauses] *. . . I would think that she probably goes to sleep knowing that even though I . . . did something, that it doesn't matter . . . I'm not going to say that every night, I'm as nice as pie, because I'm not, but the majority I am, and those are the ones she'll remember because the . . . good ones will outweigh the bad ones . . . by a lot . . .*

Maxine's relationship with her daughter is important to her right now. She also wants them to continue to have a good relationship when her daughter is an adult. She hopes that they will continue to have fun together, to be able to out together, and to have a good time.

And I want her to be able to party with me. I want her to enjoy that. Like if we go out, and we get all dressed up, we're in the car and we get the tunes going, her music of course, cause I would like it. And I want her to be able to say this is my Mom and she's cool. I want to be a cool Mom.

Even now there is the sense that Maxine wants to be a cool Mom. But this does not mean that anything goes. Maxine is firm with her daughter. She sets the rules and she expects them to be followed.

. . . I carried her out of the mall screaming. I only had to do it once.

And while Maxine's home appears to be very organised, and their life together runs very smoothly, it is not regimented. Instead, Maxine adapts their rituals and routines to what she believes her daughter needs and wants, whether it's how her sandwich is cut, or making sure that they watch the same television show together each week.

We go through little phases, like we never stick to anything very long. There will be two weeks when she wants her grilled cheese cut in

nothing but animal shapes, but then after the two weeks she doesn't care. I'll just cut them regular and she won't ask.

[And] *Monday nights, right now it's Buffy the Vampire Slayer, which I do let her watch. We watch it together. We don't miss it on a Monday night. So that's the thing we do and she knows Monday it's Buffy and Tuesday it's Angel. . . . She was right into Buffy [she pauses] and now I'm addicted to it.*

She seems to get into her daughter's world and adapt to her needs. I sensed that these small rituals change as she and her daughter need change. Even when it is Maxine who desires the change, she is sensitive to her daughter's needs. For example, when Maxine found that she could no longer sleep with her daughter, she made gradual changes that resulted in little distress for her daughter.

I used to sleep with her every night . . . but then I found that I was getting up really stressed out because no time for self. So I tried leaving the light on for her and then it gradually went from leaving the light on, to the night light to no light in her room . . . The light was too much so I got her a night light and that lasted three months.

Some things that her daughter needs are harder to provide than animal sandwiches, a favourite television show, and a nightlight.

She really wants to be in Sparks [the first level of Girl Guides] *this year . . . and I'd really like to have a car and be able to afford to put her in it . . . I got the paper on it from school, when they went for their little orientation and . . .she thinks she's going so . . . I do want her to go. She would love it. It would be really good for her . . . it would be just getting her in and getting her there.*

Maxine wants so much for her daughter, and this includes good memories.

And I want her to have these memories . . . I don't remember a lot about my childhood and I don't want that for her. . . I remember bad memories. I don't think she has too many bad ones yet. I'm not saying she's never going to. But I don't think so.

Maxine endeavours to make good memories for her daughter in a variety of ways. Their bedtime storybook has evolved from Maxine reading to her daughter, to her daughter "reading" to her. Her pride is evident as she recounts this story.

> *And usually she reads me the book, which is good. . . . She reads me a book. I read it to her, probably for two nights then she reads it to me. She memorises the pages and then she can read it by looking at the pictures. She'll read it for probably about, well we've been reading this book since [she pauses] a few weeks ago. Gives her a sense of pride . . . The first book she read to me was I'm So Mad, one of the Munch books.* [she pauses] *. . . We were just sitting there one night and she said "I want to read it". So she started reading it and I thought "What the hell, she's reading this book to me." She wasn't reading every word, but she was getting the gist of it. So she read it to me for months. She read it to everyone who came in the house. And this book,* [the one she is reading now] *she actually looks at the words and tells you what they are. She will turn the page and look at the pictures . . .*

They also enjoy their tea parties. Her daughter had fun with a tea set at a friend's home, so Maxine bought her one, and now they have parties together in their home.

> *. . . We started doing tea parties. . . . Actually* [another friend] *started it . . . I used to go over there and she had a tea party set for the kids . . . So I went out and got her one and we started doing it in the mornings . . . when we wake up, have breakfast . . . She's right into bacon and eggs . . . and then she'd have her tea with five teaspoons of sugar in a cup this big . . . She had one today* [a tea party] *and of course I had to have a glass because she made it. And* [a visitor] *had to have a glass. But I think she loaded the sugar dish three times and she had three things of milk because it's mostly milk. . . . But it's real cute. When she has a friend over they can have a tea party. Today it didn't work out so she had one by herself. She enjoys that too.*

Although Maxine enjoys spending time with her daughter this way, what is important to her about these rituals is that her daughter enjoys them and they are making good memories. Another ritual that Maxine has enacted for her daughter is

weekends with her grandparents. She is very connected to her grandparents because until she was 6 months, and then from 13 to 18 months she and Maxine lived with them. Maxine continues to foster the relationship.

> *Every Saturday night and there isn't too many we miss . . . she goes to my mother's. She spends every Saturday night with her grandmother and grandfather . . . She gets to spend time with them. They usually go somewhere. So she usually gets to do something. And then Sunday they usually have like a barbeque and all the kids go over and they all do something.*

Even when she might rather have her at home, Maxine lets her go.

> *If there's a weekend when I say 'I'm not doing anything this weekend Mom" so I can keep her, she still comes and gets her.*

Explaining why she says,

> *. . . I let her go there because she loves it. She looks forward to it. She enjoys going. I do it mostly for her, because she enjoys herself. Even* [when] *me and my Mother argue, which we do a lot, I never hold her back from going, I never, so that* [she pauses] *because it's for her* [she pauses] *I wouldn't make my kid pay for it.*

Maxine is committed to providing her daughter with the things that she missed. It seems to be the cornerstone of her mothering. Although Maxine is not yet the mother that she wants to be, she can describe the kind of mother that she will be. She believes that her daughter will be able to count on her being there no matter what she is doing, that she will be there for both baseball games and ballet. She wants her daughter to know that she is committed to her, and for Maxine, this means being there.

> *Umm, I wouldn't say that I'm the mother that I want to be, but I think I do the best that I can for now. But when she's older I want to be one of those mothers that take my kid, like if she was playing baseball, I wouldn't miss a game. . . That's the kind of mother that I want to be.*

Where if she was in ballet I wouldn't miss a class, even when she was like 20. If she was still in it, I still wouldn't miss a class and I want her to know that.

The being there is important to Maxine because mothering for her is about what her daughter needs and having a mother who is available when you need her. Again this is something that she does because she missed it growing up.

. . . I didn't have mine. My mother was full time. My parents both worked full time and we were at sitters a lot.

It is also about her daughter enjoying herself.

And like I can't remember as a kid ever going to the zoo, or to the circus. I rarely remember the fair, and if I did go to the fair it wasn't with my parents, it was with a friend from school . . . And I never missed a circus with her yet. The fair I take her at least three times. . . .Yeah, I do [do a lot of stuff with her] *and even though I don't have the money I find it. I'll find it somehow. And I've taken her to the zoo once so far [this year]. It's usually like three times I try and take her . . .* (Doing things with her, is it work or enjoyment or both?) *I enjoy it . . . Because she does . . . It doesn't matter . . .*

It appears that her daughter's needs are foremost in this relationship. I asked Maxine what she thought the hugs and kisses that she gives her daughter so freely say about her as a mother. She thought for a moment before answering.

I think it would say that I want better for her than I had and [she pauses] *I, yeah and I think it makes her feel good too, and hopefully when she's older she'll be even better with her own . . . So I'm thinking I'm pretty good with her, she's going to be really good with hers, hopefully anyways. I shouldn't say that, but probably, yeah . . . yeah that's good.*

Although Maxine does not think that she is the mother that she could be, she realises that she is good with her daughter, that what she does with her makes her daughter feel good. And once again here is that glimpse into the future, as she

proclaims her expectation that her daughter will do an even better job when she is a mother.

A Tentative Understanding

Maxine's assertion that *"I never got that growing up, so I make sure I do that a lot"* can be understood as a life theme because Maxine's life appears dedicated to providing her daughter what she did not have. She is an intentional parent, committed to giving her daughter a better life and developing a strong connection between them. She does everything she can to identify and meet her daughters need and ensure that she will have good memories. And she does this because *"It's just that I'm her mother."*

Maxine has made choices about the kind of parent she will be. Over and over Maxine spoke of making sure her daughter has what she did not, of giving her a better life. She knows what she wants for her daughter, all the things that either she did not have or does not have yet. *"But I will . . . I'm going to have a house some day, so that she can have a house."* However it does not seem to be out of a sense of obligation that she takes her to the zoo or the circus or the fair, or lets her go to her grandparents, or buys her a tea set and has tea parties with her, or listens for months as she "reads" the same book over and over. She does all this because her daughter enjoys it.

Her daughter is the most important person in her life and the daily rituals that they have established strengthen their connection. Maxine considers that for their

relationship, *"the most important is the bedtime, when she goes to bed, the story and the hug and the kiss. 'Cause if we've had a bad day . . . I would think that she probably goes to sleep knowing that . . . it doesn't matter . . ."* They spend a lot of time together and *"it's good time . . ."* The result is that Maxine believes that *"we have a good relationship . . . She's a good kid . . . I think she respects me . . ."*

Maxine is committed to meeting her daughter's needs. From small little rituals like how she cuts her sandwiches to helping her adjust to sleeping on her own *"and then it gradually went from leaving the light on, to the night light to no light in her room . . ."* Their rituals, like bedtimes and tea parties may appear to be just a part of their everyday life but when Maxine talks of them I sensed that they were about what she believes her daughter needs. She intentionally tells her daughter that she loves her and she supports the bond that she has with her grandparents because she believes that these are important for her. The weekend ritual of going to Grammie and Grampie's happens because . . . *"She enjoys going. I do it mostly for her because she enjoys herself."* Maxine has even considered how she will expand this ritual to meet her needs when her daughter is a Mom herself. *"I'm going to go, pick my grand kid up, give her a break, like for the whole day."*

A large part of what Maxine does with her daughter is about making memories. She wants her daughter to have good memories because she does not remember a lot about her childhood and she does not want that for her daughter She believes that when her daughter looks back, the *"good ones will outweigh the bad ones . . . by a lot . . ."* She smiled and her voice softened when she talked of

that morning's tea party *"of course I had to have a glass because she made it."* And each night they share a book together each night. Maxine's voice exudes pride when she tells of her daughter "reading" her first book, *"So she read it to me for months. She read it to everyone who came in the house."*

Maxine does all this *"because she enjoys herself . . . because it's for her."* When I asked if it was work to do all these things with her or enjoyment she answered *"I enjoy it . . . Because she does."* Their rituals take time and effort, but Maxine believes that this will make a significant difference in her daughter's life and in the lives of her grandchildren. *"So I'm thinking I'm pretty good with her, she's going to be really good with hers . . ."* She is investing in the future.

It seems that for Maxine, mothering is about being there. She believes that it is important for her to be there for her daughter because *"I think all kids need their Mom . . ."* It is not that Maxine thinks that she is the perfect Mom, but that she does *"the best that [she] can for now."* Their daily rituals are a significant part of what she is doing. She does them because *"she's my only kid . . ."*

The common theme in her words seems to be Maxine's commitment to giving her daughter what she did not have: a better life, a mother who is there for her, connected to her, good memories and teaching parenting skills that will be passed to another generation. Maxine thinks about how what she does affects her daughter. It seems that the essence of Maxine's lived experience of daily family rituals and of being a mother is of making choices based on what is best for her child, what makes her daughter happy. She could have made different choices. She

could have stayed at her parents and continued partying. She could have entrusted her daughter to babysitters and daycare workers as she worked full time or pursued more education. But she did not. She missed her mother when she was a child and she is determined that her daughter will not have the same experience. *"I don't think you should have kids for someone else to raise them."* Maxine has combined determination, commitment to her daughter, and creativity to be the kind of mother she believes her daughter deserves. She expects that her daughter will not have to say *"I never got that growing up, so I make sure I do that a lot."*

Chapter 9

AZELIN

"I know what I have, and I know what I would like to have."

Azelin is a stay at home mother with four young boys. The two older boys, from a previous marriage, are in elementary school and are beginning to have their own interests. The two younger boys are twins and the sons of her current husband. At two years old, they are busy, into everything, and keeping their mother busy as well. She also has three stepchildren from her husband's previous marriage who often visit on weekends.

The theme that I believe captures the essence of Azelin's story may also be understood as her life theme. Her statement: *"I know what I have, and I know what I would like to have"* from the beginning of her third interview seems to capture the essence of her lived experiences with her family, their daily family rituals, her role in those rituals and what they mean to her as a mother. In all three interviews she communicated her frustration with the way things are in her family and sought to describe how she would like them to be. It seems that result of the lack of family rituals in her family results in disconnection and negativity. This then affects her sense of herself as a mother.

Azelin believes that daily family rituals are important. However, there is a sense that she is unable to make changes because she has built her life theme around an unsolvable problem. It is conceivable that when she is able to re-frame

the problem, she will progress toward a solution. As with the other participants' stories, the chapter ends with my tentative understandings of the essence of daily family rituals and mothering for Azelin.

Streams

Azelin is overwhelmed and frustrated by how things are in her family at the moment. The family is experiencing disconnection, stress, negativity, problems coordinating the different ages of the children and a lack of time. She feels

> *squashed . . . defeated . . . disconnected . . . that no one has any individual time . . .* [that there are] *not exactly a lot of happy times here and that's what really bothers me. You know. There's no have supper, go out and play, have a story and go to bed. It's not like that and it's very disturbing because to me that's not what it's supposed to be about . . . there's not really a lot of quality time, the babies have to get it because they have to at their age.*

She seems to have a sense of how she thinks things should be, of how she wants them to be, but is so overwhelmed that she does not know where to start. Over and over, she talked of the stress that both she and her husband were experiencing and how that impacts the family and their rituals.

> *Both of us, there's so much stress on our plates . . . it's constantly a stress and it's very difficult to have supper at 5 o'clock and to be all sitting down at 6 o'clock to watch TV, always so much to be done, we almost feel guilty because there's so much to do. That's our ritual after supper, got to do this, got to do that . . . This family ritual stuff becomes very hard when you are dealing with such a blend [of children], emotions, stress . . . there's always somebody at your heels . . . so you know that I find my family's rituals are a lot to the negative and I think that* [she pauses, and does not finish]. *I'm concerned what my kids are going to grow up thinking.*

The result of all this stress is that she sees

> *a lot of negativity . . . a lot of separation, family separation,* [she pauses] *family separation, even though we're in the same house because there's not enough connection [she pauses again] you know in doing real family things . . . I've just got to discuss it with* [her husband] *and we've just got to put some plans into place that we do this no matter . . .*

She wants to do something to counteract this separation. She decides that she and her husband have to talk, have to plan, have to make some changes. But then she counters this with

> *. . . you don't really know what to do . . . so I think it's really important that there's some kind of connection there too, but it's hard to blend it all in . . . one of the things that I was going to mention about the trouble with family ritual is the, in this household with the kids, 2, 5 and 7, they should all be going to bed at the same time, so it's awfully hard to sit down and read a story to the babies when* [oldest son] *is far above that and visa versa and I also think it's important that* [husband] *as their father and stepfather have that time too.*

And Azelin believes that their plans are contingent on her husband's work schedule.

> *"It's pretty hard to say that every Tuesday night we are going to go to the park, right, because you just don't know and as awkward as it is, his job just has to come first . . ."*

Thus, the plans are lost, as no solutions come to her and she is once again overcome by the problems inherent in her family. It is not clear whether the lack of time is a result of the stress that they are experiencing or the cause. She seems to feel completely overwhelmed by all she has to do. And so it ends up that

> *there's never enough time in the day to sit down with one or the other . . . there's not enough time to do those separate things so even if after supper we could all jump in the van and go to the park then the kids are all playing at the same place with us and they can hopefully remember that . . .*

My sense was that, for Azelin there is just never enough time for the things that she thinks are important. (And there I was sitting in her kitchen, taking time out of her day. I did not know whether I should feel guilty for taking her time or pleased that I could give her a break.)

Azelin values family and has a strong opinion of what family means and she incorporates some rituals in her day that express this. To her, family is

> *being something to someone. When you think of family, you think of husband, wife* [she pauses] *children, Grammie and Grampie, you know. So I suppose I think of it as needing and being needed, being able to give support . . . I think there's no point in trying to fake family togetherness. I think it has to be real to be there . . . because to me the family unit is important and it's important to have a good relationship with my husband. If my relationship with him is not strong . . . when it comes to dealing with the kids, you're not going to be able to deal with it as easy. So it's important to have a good relationship with your partner before you can have and enjoy your rituals or the things you want to do . . . as a family.*

However, despite the stresses and time constraints of her day, she finds time to let her family know that she cares. She does things for her husband because she wants to, not because she has to, and this distinction is extremely important to her.

> *Every night I make coffee for* [her husband] *for the morning, not because I must, but because I want to . . . It's important to me to make that coffee and it's important to me to make supper* [she pauses] . . . *so it's important to me to do that because I want to [she pauses again; she seems to be thinking about why this is so important to her] I suppose it's the looking after him aspect. Not in a mother sense, but what do people get married for? There's no "have to" feeling there. I do it because I want to.*

And each school day since the oldest boy started grade primary she has watched the boys wait at the bus stop until they are safely on the bus. This ritual

has more of a "have to" feeling to it. It seems that it is central to her understanding of herself as a mother.

> *. . . my ritual is to get up, get the kids off to school in the morning. I watch the kids to make sure that* [the younger one] *isn't wrapped around a tree. Yeah. Every morning I go out and watch.* [she pauses] *It's important to me. I think I've done it for so long, I don't feel right if I don't. I stand out there to watch over them and be protective, just something I've done for 2years. I don't think there are too many mornings I may have missed.* (Because?) *They're my little boys and I love them.*

One of the rituals with the twins involves their Dad. He takes them outside, while she cleans up after supper and starts the preparations for the next day, then she joins them.

> *The evening stuff, the bath time has kind of changed because what happens now is the babies want to be outside and [their Dad] wants to be outside . . . when it's warm, getting outside, getting some fresh air, getting out back . . . and* [husband] *has made a chimney for the fireplace out back so we can burn . . . It's kind of cute to see the babies picking up twigs and putting them in the fireplace . . . They like to help that way. I'd rather they go outside and I clean up the dishes and get* [her husbands] *coffee ready.*

So while Azelin expresses a lot of frustration at the way in which her family functions, there are certainly daily times of ritual when she expresses how she feels about family in general and the members of her family in particular. However there are also many things that she would like to see change.

Two of the positive elements of family life that Azelin expresses a desire to have more of in her family came up again and again in her narratives: good memories and family connection. Part of her desire for these comes from memories from her own childhood.

> *. . . I remember going for bike rides, going to the lake, little things like that from my childhood. I also remember the negative times* [she pauses] *. . . It's just so important for me to have this stuff. I remember, I remember every Saturday night when I was a kid* [she pauses again], *beans and wieners and Bugs Bunny. And if you didn't have beans and wieners, Bugs Bunny wasn't on. That's just the way you figured it was going to be. A couple of times it happened that way, so the next week when you had beans and wieners, All Right! Bugs Bunny is on.*

This memory is an excellent example of the repetitive and anticipatory nature of family rituals. When one thing happened, she knew what came next, everyone knew that wieners and beans meant Bugs Bunny. This activity seems to have added order and a sense of knowing how things would be to her life as a child. Azelin would like her own children to have these kinds of memories, but she worries.

> *I don't think they are going to be able to look back on real fond memories of Mom and Dad. You know, really I don't. So I have a problem and that, but I really don't know how to correct it. It's a pretty hard thing to correct unless you want to get yourself up at 3 o'clock. So to me it's a hard thing. I often wonder what my kids are going to be able to look back on their childhood and see . . . I want them to have some happy memories of fun times, but it's hard.*

What she would really like to see is

> *probably a little more fun time, a little more loving time, but [she pauses] there just isn't, there just isn't a lot of special time. I want them to have some happy memories of fun times . . . but it's hard . . . and there's not a lot of money to come and go on, so you can't say what the hell lets go for an ice cream. It's a buck a head.*

Azelin mentioned connecting a number of times in both the first and the second interview, how it was missing in her family, how she felt disconnected, and how she felt that connecting more would be beneficial for the family. However,

when I asked what was important to her about connecting, she was hesitant, as if she was not sure why it was important or maybe even what it would look like.

> *The family unit I guess, feeling needed and cared about. . . So within that unit there's a connection and everyone both feels cared for, both . . . I want* [the older boys] *to feel connected to* [their step father]. *I want them to look to him for guidance. I want them to respect him not fear him* [she pauses] *. . . Right now the babies don't need that kind of thing. They don't. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think they are just as comfortable sitting on the couch with us and watching Barney.*

As Azelin talked of the lack of rituals in her family's life, and how important she feels they are, she also considered what more rituals might mean for her family.

> *Rituals would mean to me almost the fantasy of the white picket fence and the happy family. Of doing things with your family. Give them something to remember and feel good . . . I don't want my everyday rituals to be fighting with the kids. I don't want that to be the kind of ritual. It's going to be there but I'd like to see more of a happy time, a family night* [she pauses] *of sorts . . . something you know you are going to be doing . . . when I think of family rituals I think of the fun times, you know, and we don't have that kind of organisation.*

It appears that Azelin would like there to be more rituals, more fun times, perhaps a family night, but that it would mean making some changes. And while she is well aware that things would have to change, she does not want to do it alone. She states that changing the way things are to how she would like them to be would take

> *. . . some coordination on both our parts. I feel like there are things that I would like to change but it's going to take, you know. I don't want to do it all myself. If I wanted to do it all myself I wouldn't need a partner. OK . . . My choice is to do it with my partner. If my partner doesn't want to do it then I can't do it . . . Now I know that single people have to do it themselves, but I'm not single so . . . I hate the word expect, but I would expect that* [her husband] *would be part of the daily thing . . . unless he's there too, it's hard.*

It seems clear that she does not want to be responsible for this by herself. She has chosen to have a partner so that she would not have to do things by herself. As I listened, I felt that it was more than she should not have to do it herself. I felt that she believes that she can not do it herself. This sense of needing her partner to be part of the changes seems to be connected to her sense of herself as a woman and a mother. It seems that being a mother is both important and difficult for Azelin. She always wanted to be a mother and she would do it again, with a few changes. It's about raising a family and being part of a family unit. But she questions her abilities as a mother

> *Yeah but also . . . I don't feel like I'm a good mother because I don't get the chance to sit down and read books and colour. It's hard, they're now into their own things.*

During the interviews, I felt both her commitment to being a mother and her concern about what she was doing and what she could do. I sensed that she feels overwhelmed by all she has to do. One way that she copes is by taking some time for herself each morning before the babies get up.

> *My just for you time is generally in the morning, boys on the bus and I have my coffee and cigarette and my conversation with whomever I call . . . that's basically my down time . . . Just to wake yourself up and get yourself together . . . another coffee, another cigarette, another coffee, another cigarette* [she pauses] *until* [the babies] *get up . . . a chance to wake up and have that time to yourself as an adult before you take the mother role again . . . I know when I open that door [to the babies room] I'm going to have to clean up all that up, but at least they're defined, and they can't hurt themselves . . . I just like to have 15 minutes to myself because once the babies get up . . .*

Towards the end of the first interview, after hearing about her frustration and discouragement, I asked her what was unique about her family, what happened

specifically during the day that made them who they are. She thought for a moment then said

> *I don't really know the answer to that because I don't really know who that is. There's me as the mother and me as the wife, but as for who I am, I don't know. There's nothing. There's nothing like really special about my day* [she pauses] *Everything is rush, rush, rush, trying to get the place cleaned up, trying to get the kids fed, trying to get the laundry done, and getting it folded and put away and keep up with the peeing on the floor and, and, and. So come 7 o'clock, on the one hand it would be nice to sit down and do story time.* [she pauses] *The kids would rather be outdoors.* [she pauses again]. *Do you insist? [she pauses again] And one wants a story and the other doesn't, and meanwhile the babies are trying to go to sleep. It's pretty hard to identify yourself when you haven't been anybody before . . .*

Again, I had the feeling that she is overwhelmed. I wondered if she felt that she did not have the authority to make the changes on her own, if it was not her place to move ahead on her own. I got the sense that she believes that the husband-and-wife bond is the foundation on which the family is built, and that it must be strong before the family can function effectively.

> *So it's important to have a good relationship with your partner before you can have and enjoy your rituals or the things you want to do as a family . . . so it's really important to me to get that reestablished.*

A Tentative Understanding

I appears that Azelin is aware of what she has. She may not like it, but she has a good sense of the state of her family, and she wants it to change. She wants to have a family unit that is strong and connected. She wants her children to have good memories of fun family times. She wants all this, but she does not seem to know how to get there. She believes that rituals are important, she values them and

what they could bring to her family, but she also seems to consider herself unable to develop and maintain them on her own. It seems that the essence of daily family rituals in Azelin's life world is wishing for something she does not and cannot have, wishing that things would change, but not believing that she can be the author of that change. Her lived experience of daily family rituals is of knowing that something is missing and yet feeling unable to figure out how to fill the void.

Azelin knows what she has. Her feeling is that their family is disorganised, *"there's no have supper, go out and play, have a story and go to bed."* This disturbs her because *"That's not what it's supposed to be about."* Instead their after supper ritual is *"got to do this, got to do that . . ."* Azelin experiences her family's rituals as *"a lot to the negative"* and she is concerned about the effect that this has on her children.

Positive rituals would mean *"doing something with your family. Give them something to remember and feel good . . . "* But she says *"You really don't know what to do . . . in this household with the kids 2, 4, and 7 . . . it's awfully hard."* Her perception is that *"there's never enough time in the day . . . there's not enough time . . ."*

Azelin also knows what she values about family. To her family means "being something to someone" and Azelin believes that the *"family unit is important"* but the sense is that she does not feel that she has these because she says *"There's no point in trying to fake family togetherness."* She wants family togetherness, but she believes that she cannot have that until her relationship with her partner is stronger.

She believes that *"it's important to have a good relationship with your partner before you can have and enjoy your rituals or the things you want to do . . . as a family."*

And she knows what she wants. Azelin believes that rituals could add important elements to family life and she states that it is *"just so important for me to have this stuff."* In the rituals that she described, there are some of the elements that she feels are important. For example, she believes that you should do things because you want to, because they express how you feel about the other person. Each night she makes coffee for her husband to take to work the next day and *"there's no have to feeling there."* She does it because she wants to. And each morning, she watches until the older boys get on the school bus *"to watch over them and be protective"* because *"they are my little boys and I love them."*

She believes that she should be making changes because she does not think that her children are *"going to be able to look back on real fond memories of Mom and Dad,"* but she does not *"know how to correct it."* She would like to have *"a little more fun time, a little more loving time, but . . . it's hard."* When Azelin thinks of family rituals she thinks of the fun times, but her *"choice is to do it with my partner"* because *"unless he's there too it's too hard."* Azelin does not feel that either she can or that she wants to effect changes on her own but is also unsure whether they could do it together because they do not have *"that kind of organisation."*

I believe that this wears away her sense of herself as a mother. She states that *"I don't feel that I am a good mother because I don't get the chance to sit down and read books and colour."* It also seems to affect her sense of her own identity.

"There's me as the mother, me as the wife, but as for who I am, I don't know . . . It's pretty hard to identify yourself when you haven't been anybody before." Azelin seems somewhat lost. She does not have a good sense of herself. She does not believe that she is a good mother. She values family rituals and would like to make changes but feels that she cannot do this on her own.

Azelin's statement *"I know what I have, and I know what I would like to have"* appears to capture the essence of daily family rituals in her family. They have very few rituals that connect members and give them the feeling that we are family. Azelin's experience of daily family rituals is an experience of knowing what is missing and being unable to acquire it. However, towards the end of the last interview, she identified her participation in this research as *"almost like a counselling thing."* She hopes that it will make a difference in what she and her family do together. Perhaps her participation in this research will help her to re-frame her problem and as a result be able to move toward a solution. She finished the last interview by stating *"I just think ritual is important and when I think of ritual I think of the more fun aspect . . . But we don't do anything easy."*

Chapter 10

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

This thesis is an exploration of three mothers' experiences of and with daily family rituals. My goal was to uncover the essences of the phenomenon for these women, through interviews that encouraged the participants to consider their role in their family's rituals, and what these rituals mean to them as mothers. This chapter attempts to complete research that in many ways will remain incomplete. Endings are hard for me, and completing this inquiry has been no different. For me, there is always more to be heard, more meanings to uncover, and a different analysis to be considered. It is in the nature of qualitative research to keep the inquiry going. However, each research project must achieve some sense of closure, at least a tentative resolution, and this chapter attempts to provide that resolution. The discussion explores the narratives in relation to the research. Then, from the narratives and the discussion come recommendations for counselling and for further research. Finally, the chapter and thesis end with a personal reflection on the research process and the impact that it has had on me, as a researcher, as a counsellor and as a mother.

Discussion

The discussion begins with a consideration of the research approach that I adopted in connection to the narratives. It then appraises each woman's story in

relationship to the literature on family rituals and presents some of the implications of the research for family therapists. My intent is to place each woman's story within the context of the literature in hopes that one will inform the other.

Research Approach

I approached this inquiry from a constructivist, existentialist, and feminist perspective. These three approaches framed both my research approach and what I heard. Constructivists emphasise the individual's active participation in their own lives. An example, is how Maxine has chosen to do things differently than her parents, *"So I said that I would never do that to her, never . . ."* Constructivism also considers the interdependence of the person and their environment. This interdependence can be seen in Azelin's struggle to reconcile what she wants with the reality of her family's life: *"So come 7 o'clock, on the one hand it would be nice to sit down and do story time . . . And one wants a story and the other doesn't, and meanwhile the babies are trying to go to sleep . . ."*

An existentialist approach accepts each individual, and her particular experiences as unique and irreplaceable and seeks to grasp the meaning of those experiences. Although these women have much in common - each is a stay-at-home mom, living in the same area, at the moment point in time - their stories illustrate the vast differences that exist in their lives and the meanings that they attach to their experiences. Whether it is preschoolers washing the dishes, or playing stinky feet before bed, Grace has developed a unique approach to

parenting that has unique meaning for her as a mother. *"I kind of hoped that doing this kind of . . . I think it will help to bring good memories, I hope."*

Feminist research considers issues of power and agency within the societal context and the extent to which an individual structures their environment according to the beliefs of the dominant culture. Each of the women in this inquiry lives within a society that delivers strong messages about right and wrong ways to raise children, and right and wrong ways to be a mother. Many of these messages are so ingrained in our culture that they have come to be accepted as natural, as the way that things should be. For example, Azelin says that when *"you think of family, you think of husband, wife* [she pauses] *children, grammie and grampie, you know."* Although this is not her family's configuration, she accepts this cultural definition of family as the norm.

While societal messages may be accepted, rejected or adapted, they subtly influence the choices that individuals believe are available to them. Azelin appears to believe that she cannot make plans that might interfere with her husband's work. *"It's pretty hard to say that every Tuesday night we are going to go to the park, right, because you just don't know and as awkward as it is, his job just has to come first . . ."*

While the influence of these messages should not be discounted, the analysis of a particular person's choices must consider more than just these messages. Maxine does live in a society that specifies that *"all kids need their Mom"* and her choice to stay home with her daughter until she is in school, is consistent

with the messages about women's role as nurturer. However, Maxine's choice is also a reflection of what she feels that she missed as a child because her *"parents both worked full time and we were at sitters a lot . . ."* Her choice is also made as the only parent that her daughter has. So, while, societal messages do affect the choices that Maxine might make, they are not the only influence on these choices.

This is not to diminish the effect of those messages on the individual. Many of the individuals encountered by parents judge them by how their children behave. Most judge that parents are doing a good job when they observe children who do what they are told to do, regardless of how that behaviour is gained or the consequences for the children. In contrast, Grace strives for an equality that was not present in her childhood home. *"We're all equals in this house . . . This is our home and we all live by the same set of rules . . ."* This is a very different approach than her father who says *" You'll either fear me or respect me and don't care which it is . . as long as you do as you are told."* Although she feels criticised for the power and agency that she gives to her children, she is not going to change her approach. It appears to be a deliberate effort to provide a better experience of family for her children.

This research can also be understood as feminist in that it reflects my commitment to the appreciation of women's experiences, beliefs, relationships, actions and history. The focus was on women's particular experiences with their family's daily rituals because this area has received little attention by researchers. It is hoped that in this way it acknowledges what has been overlooked and values

what has been devalued. Each woman's experience is her own and as such it should be respected and I believe, deserves to be heard. Thus the low level of ritualisation in one home is as important to understanding the phenomenon of daily family rituals as is the profusion of them in another.

I have tried to follow the tenets of phenomenology by seeking the meanings and essences inherent in the phenomenon by examining each woman's lived experience of daily family rituals. I believe that the theme for each woman's narrative captures the essence and meaning of rituals in their lives and their mothering that are illustrated in their interviews. For example, within Graces theme: *"My kids run this household. I'm just here to guide it"* is the essence of their rituals and her approach to mothering. Their daily family rituals provide a framework from which the children do get to run the household; as the mother she is not the authority, but the guide.

As well, phenomenology involves intentionality, a bringing to consciousness the meaning of the experience and how it and the self are related. We can see this dawning of understanding in Grace's words, *"I didn't realize that before hand, I knew it on one level but I've never really kind of analysed it to realize that, that's why I use them."* That same sense of sudden understanding was evident when Maxine's asserted that because of the things that she does with her daughter, *"she'll be even better with her own,"* that each generation *"gets better!"*

Grace

Grace identifies herself and her family as highly ritualised and very symbolic. Most of the functions and qualities of rituals that are described by researchers are found in her family's daily rituals. Grace developed many of their rituals to get the boys to do what she needs them to do: come in the house, go to bed, or do their homework (Laird, 1988). My sense is that if it needs to be done, she will create a ritual to make it fun. *"Most of our rituals come from trying to keep things running smoothly . . . absolutely, yeah that's where they come from".* They act as powerful socialisation tools for their family. The family's relationships and boundaries have been defined by rituals, like the myriad of nicknames the family uses (Baxter & Clark, 1996; Fiese, 1997). *"I don't know, it's just, it's another way of bonding and being, like a group, like no one else calls them that, we just call each other that."* Rituals like this strengthen their family bonds and functioning (Baxter & Clark, 1996). So does their bedtime ritual, Grace's favourite. It has a uniqueness that says something about who this family is and what they value (Imber-Black & Roberts, 1998). In addition to playing stinky feet, telling them a story, and singing their special songs, they *"always go to bed in the same bed . . . I'll watch then fall asleep, stay until everyone's asleep . . ."* Grace values connection, making each child feel that he is special, and being there for the boys.

The high-five ritual that the boys conduct with their father has significant meaning for all of them (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Even Grace who is excluded enjoys it. *"There's times, times that I feel left out, cause I just don't do that with*

them. But the majority of the time I think it's just too freakin cute . . ." She believes that it promotes "*connection with each other, a bond, bonding with one another, cause then that'll be something only they did.*"

Grace describes the code that the boys and their father have developed for when they will not want to kiss him in public any more. "*And he still gets the kiss goodbye, but . . . eventually when they are ready to drop the kiss . . .*" they have they code ready. "*Like he realized that the kids were going to be embarrassed to say I love you, at some point in the game, and to give him a kiss and stuff.*" This ritual is planned to develop over time. It's purpose is to help them understand their family's way of being male to figure out who they are supposed to be (Laird, 1988; Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

Grace characterises her family as highly ritualised and it certainly appears that way. Most of the rituals that she describes have the symbolism, the sense of anticipation, and the desire to participate that characterise strong family rituals. This family has a high commitment to ritualisation. However in contrast to the findings of Wolin and Bennett (1984), they do plan for the future, they are disconnected from the past and do not have a hierarchical or rigid approach to family life. Instead "*We're all equals in this house . . .*" This difference may represent Grace's unique approach to family and family rituals or it may reflect bias or flaw in Wolin and Bennett's work.

Maxine

Maxine's story revolves around what she can give to her daughter. She talks of providing a better life, of connecting and making memories. Her rituals demonstrate the characteristics of daily rituals, their involuntary nature, the elements that define them as rituals, and their protective and socialisation functions.

Maxine is devoted to her daughter and although they are a family of two, that family contains the characteristics of intimacy, informality and the particularity of relationships that define a group of individuals as a family (Giele, 1997). This is seen in how she describes their relationship: *"I think when I spend time with her, it's good time . . . I think we have a good relationship . . . She's a good kid . . ."*

Daily rituals tend to be unique to a particular family and say something about who that family is and what they believe. This is evident when Maxine talks of telling her daughter that she loves her *"I do it in front of everyone . . . I never got that growing up, so I make sure I do that a lot."* and when she talks of their tea parties, *". . . and of course I had to have a glass because she made it. . ."* Daily rituals are also the least planned and intentional of the three types of rituals (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). *"There will be two weeks when she wants her grilled cheese cut in nothing but animal shapes, but then after the two weeks she doesn't care."* Things like cutting her sandwich the way she likes it are just something that Maxine does. It hardly even seems like a ritual. Wolin and Bennett (1984) argue that daily rituals can take on an involuntary or automatic quality that can hide them and their meanings within the family structure. The meaning of this ritual is how much Maxine

wants to give her daughter what she did not have, in this case taking the time to cut her sandwich in an animal shape, just because she wants it that way.

Rituals, like letting her daughter read the same book to her night after night for months, contain the six elements that Roberts (1988) suggests identifies them as rituals. This particular ritual is repeated in both form and content and involves not just talking about it. but doing it. It is certainly a special and unusual activity that has a specific order, a beginning, a middle, and an end with the possibility each night that it is time for a new book. Its presentation is evocative and it is a social activity that they do together. *"I read it to her, probably for two nights then she reads it to me. She memorises the pages and then she can read it by looking at the pictures."* There is also a protective element to this ritual (Fiese & Klein, 1993) as it both "gives her a sense of pride . . ." now, and prepares her for school later.

Rituals are powerful tools of socialisation. Through them we learn who we are and what we can be (Laird, 1988). Of the many things that Maxine wants for her daughter - being a mom is one - Maxine knows that *"she's going to be a good mother,"* because she believes that every generation *"gets better!"* Being a mom is not all she wants for her daughter, but it is important. She hopes that the rituals they have started will be passed on to her grandchildren through her daughter.

Azelin

Azelin's narratives portrays a family that has few daily rituals. Her theme and the sub-themes that come out of that theme highlight the effects of this absence on

her family. Her family could therefore be characterised as having a low level of commitment (Wolin & Bennett, 1984) but there is not the sense that they are present oriented or more egalitarian in terms of rules and power. Instead of stories of what they are doing Azelin speaks of what they could or should do in the future, how she would like things to change. *"I feel like there are things that I would like to change but it's going to take, you know."* She speaks of change but things are not changing apparently because she does not feel that she can do it on her own. *"If I wanted to do it all myself I wouldn't need a partner. OK."* It was my sense that she believes that there is a hierarchy in her family and that her husband is at the top.

Rituals work in our families to create and coordinate its social structure, impart a sense of uniqueness, act as a socialising agent and tell us who we are. To differing degrees, these too are missing in Azelin's family. In her family, *"there's not a lot of quality time"* and their rituals are *"a lot to the negative."* The essence of her story is lack, both in terms of rituals and connection. It seems to confirm much that has been written about the function of family rituals. Baxter and Clark (1996) argue that family rituals create and coordinate the family's social structure and shape the identity of the family and its members. And Bush (2000) contends that they impart an understanding of the family as special and unique. In Azelin's stories there is evidence of a lack of social structure, identity, and that sense of "we-ness" that Bush speaks of. She states that *"there's not enough connection . . . you know in doing real family things."* She does not want her *"family rituals to be fighting with the kids"* and yet, that is often the case.

Azelin expresses both a desire for change and a reluctance to move ahead on her own to effect that change. *"I feel like there are things that I would like to change but it's going to take, you know. I don't want to do it all myself."* Perhaps her reluctance can be understood in terms of her understanding of her place in society. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) identify common feelings in women that are implicated in Azelin's story: feeling disconnected, maintaining their place, and having difficulty conceiving of their self as unique and individual. Azelin expresses over and over that she feels disconnected and she also seems to feel that it is not her place to move ahead on her own to make changes that would affect her husband. As well, she does not seem to have a sense of herself as an individual, to know who she is. *"It's pretty hard to identify yourself when you haven't been anybody before . . . "*

We learn who we are in our families (Laird, 1988). Azelin may not have learned who she is, but she has learned that you must *"have a good relationship with your partner before you can have and enjoy your rituals or the things you want to do with your family."* Her story is about what is missing, and what others need to do to change that. She does not believe that she should have to make these changes on her own, so she waits for the relationship to improve. However effective rituals can give families special times to rework their roles, rules and relationships (Laird, 1984). Thus it seems that Azelin is waiting until the relationship is stronger to do something that researchers like Laird argue, would strengthen the relationship.

She states: *"So I have a problem and that, but I really don't know how to correct it."* It seems quite possible that the life problem that Azelin appears to have chosen to solve is unsolvable (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie,1979). And as a result, she and her family are stuck. Selvini-Palazzoli, et al. (1977) argue that identifying and re-framing the problem through the prescription of a family ritual the problem can make a significant difference in family life. It may be a family problem or her husband's problem that needs to be solved. Regardless, it is possible that prescribing a family ritual could re-frame their life theme, and move them toward a stronger family.

Implications

This research demonstrates that discussions about rituals, their place in the family, and how different family members attach meaning to them, can uncover a wealth of information about family functioning. The narratives reveal how, either the presence or lack of daily family rituals can affect individual family members and the family as a whole. This has important implications for family therapists.

Questions about a family's rituals can provide a point of entry for therapeutic conversations about individual family members or the family as a unit that could lead to an assessment of the family based on their rituals. Each of the families in this inquiry could be assessed to ascertain: 1) the modes of family ritualisation (Roberts,1988); 2) the type, processes, and dimensions of a family's rituals (Wolin & Bennett, 1984); 3) the presence of the defining elements of those rituals

(Roberts, 1988); 4) the structure, meaning, and persistence found those rituals (Schuck & Bucy, 1997); 5) the extent and operation of rituals in the family (Wolin & Bennett, 1984); and to identify resources, priorities, and areas of concern (Fiese, 1997; Rogers & Holloway, 1991).

This assessment might then provide a framework for therapy and lead to interventions that encourage families to rework or rebuild their relationships and begin the process of healing. This could include assisting the family to create rituals that are more appropriate to the family's developmental stage, more responsive to individual needs, more reflective of the family's values and beliefs, and address issues of power and agency (Laird, 1984).

In addition to assessment of current functioning and the creation of new family rituals, rituals can be used as prescriptions to promote reflection or change in family members. Prescribed rituals are developed to address the family's specific needs and are either assigned by the therapist or worked on collaboratively (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995; Selvini-Palazzoli, et al., 1977).

Recommendations

Counselling

Many therapists, especially family therapists believe that family rituals have a important role in a therapeutic relationship. They can provide significant tools for therapists who work with both individuals and families, as assessment tools, entry points for discussions about family history and functioning, and as therapeutic interventions. This research suggests that counsellors should:

- utilise discussions of family rituals in assessment
- encourage individuals to consider how the rituals from their family of origin have contributed to their experience the world and about how they might be affecting their present functioning
- encourage families to consider their rituals in relationship to their family dynamics, especially in terms of issues of power, agency, and privilege
- encourage families to evaluate their rituals in terms of developmental stages, individual needs, and the meanings inherent in them and then to make appropriate changes
- design ritual prescriptions that promote reflection, discussion, and change
- utilize narratives of family rituals to assess life themes and identify the problem or a set of problems that the individual or family seeks, above all else, to solve

Future Research

The study of daily family rituals is still quite new in family research and many aspects of family rituals and their place in family's lives are still to be explored. This is a fascinating area and the possibilities are virtually unlimited. When I began this research, I chose to study women's experiences of daily family rituals because I identified a gap in the literature. Although women are central to the family, their experiences had seldom been examined in relationship to their rituals and in turn

their rituals in relationship to their mothering. This research suggests that further research should focus on:

- family rituals in relationship to parenting in general and mothering and fathering in particular
- the essence of individual experiences of family rituals, including those of mothers, fathers and children
- the experiences of their rituals, by different members of a particular family
- the relationship between commitment to ritualisation and family organisation and orientation
- the relationship of the individual's family rituals to both their family of origin and their adult family
- longitudinal examinations of family rituals that include an investigation into changes in the family that result from participation in the research

Reflections

Although it has been frustrating at times, I have enjoyed the research process. I read and read and read and read. I read way past when I needed to. But what fun it was. I learned as much about phenomenology as I could because I wanted to have a strong sense of the approach before I began gathering data. I feel that the choice of phenomenology as a research methodology suited my natural approach to information gathering because it allowed for a tentativeness that I appreciate.

The topic itself engendered much discussion with family, colleagues, and those I met in social situations. Even before I started collecting data, I felt that in a way I was already interviewing. It seemed that everyone I spoke to had a story about their family's rituals. This informed both the conceptualisation of the project and the actual interviewing. I really loved hearing those stories. There were so many of them. When I entered into the interviewing, I enjoyed that too. I felt so privileged to be allowed into the participant's worlds. Even when the stories were difficult, as they all were at points, I felt honoured to be entrusted with this part of their lives.

It was my intention to analyse the data through careful listening, but I found that I lost the sense of what was being said when I could not see the words as well as hear them. Once I stepped back and accepted that I would have to transcribe the tapes, the analysis proceeded more smoothly. During the transcribing, the analysis and the writing, there were times that I felt daunted and almost defeated by the task before me. But there were also times that I was exhilarated by what I was hearing and learning through the process. There were times that I shouted "yes" at the tape machine, my notes or my computer screen, as a particular problem gave way to understanding. There were frustrations, but these were outweighed by the understanding that I gained, about the research process, about women's experiences of daily family rituals and about the uses of rituals in counselling.

C. Day Lewis contends that "we do not write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand" (as cited in Steinem, 1992, p 168). I came to this inquiry wanting to understand the essences of daily family rituals through the

experiences of mothers. I had one understanding when I had finished the interviewing but through the process or writing and rewriting the thesis, that understanding has deepened and developed layers that were otherwise unavailable to me.

There were things about the process that were hard for me. I am uncomfortable telling my own story, especially on paper, so I found the personal narrative difficult to write, just as I find this reflection difficult to write. I would not change them or remove them from the process, because I believe that they are important components of the research; they are just hard. I also found getting to depths of the participants' experiences difficult. This was different with each participant. Some were more comfortable and familiar with telling their story in depth, others were more reticent and I already knew some participants better than others before we began.

Now as I finish, I want to continue. I want to know how participating in this research has changed things for the women individually and in their families. I believe that considering and talking about a topic can produce change. As well, each participant indicated that just participating had made a difference in her life and in how she thought of her family's daily rituals. And during the member checks, one participant indicated that although I had captured what she had said, things had changed. I think it would be interesting to interview the same women in a month, six months, or even two years to ascertain what if anything had changed in the expression of their family's rituals and their understandings of themselves as mothers.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

A Phenomenological Inquiry into Mothers' Experiences of Daily Family Rituals

Research Project: Thesis, Master of Education, Counselling: Acadia University
Researcher: Peigi Beveridge

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, provides a basic idea of the research project and what your participation will involve. Please read it carefully. If you have any questions or require more detail, please feel free to ask me questions at any time.

Rituals can be important components of a family's functioning. The purpose of this inquiry is to explore daily family rituals from the mother's perspective, through a series of interviews that invite participants to deeply explore their own family's daily rituals and their part in those rituals. I expect an image to emerge that of how participants' experience daily rituals in their family.

As we have discussed, I will be conducting a series of interviews, held at your convenience, to explore your family's daily rituals. Your participation will consist of, three to five taped interviews of about two hours each. This is a significant investment of time, however I believe that the interview process will provide you with an understanding the daily rituals in your family that is worth investing the time. You are under no obligation to participate, and although I would appreciate your continued involvement, you may withdraw at anytime without penalty.

I do not expect any part of the research process to be uncomfortable for you, however you do not have to answer any question or participate in any part of the research that makes you uncomfortable. In addition, if you are distressed by the interviews, I will arrange for you to discuss this with a qualified counsellor.

Every effort will be made to protect your identity. You will only be identified by a pseudonym and you will be asked to read passages in which you are mentioned or quoted before the thesis is published. I will change or remove any quotes or comments that make you uncomfortable. As well, all information will be kept strictly confidential. No one other than myself will have access to the tapes or notes. All information will be securely stored by myself for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Your signature indicates that you have understood the information regarding your participation in this research project and have agreed to participate. If you do not understand anything about this form or the interview process please ask now, or contact me later for more information. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask questions throughout the process. If you have any further questions please feel free to contact either:

Myself: Peigi Beveridge, 542-2664, or 039413b@acadiau.ca
Or my thesis supervisor: Dr David MacKinnon, School of Education,
Acadia University, 585 -1394.

_____

Date

_____

Participant's Name (please print)

_____

Participant's Signature

_____

Researcher's Signature