

Journalling through Motherhood:  
a Personal Exploration of the  
Therapeutic and Empowering Potential of Journalling

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Western culture continues to present motherhood as a positive, happy, and thankful time for women and their families; ignoring the feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety and shock women may experience in their transition into motherhood, and upon the realisation that the realities of mothering do not always meet our societal and cultural ideals. Based on my autoethnographic research, my thesis will present the therapeutic and empowering potential of using journalling as an added coping mechanism to the diverse stresses and traumas women may experience in the highly gendered role of mothering. Previous studies on journalling have demonstrated that disclosure through personal writing may produce long-term improvements in mood and an overall sense of well-being, as well as allow individuals to create a coherent explanation of their situation, restore self-efficacy, and find meaning to their particular situation. While these studies have examined a broad range of stressful events such as terminal illness, divorce, or job loss, little research has been conducted on applying methods of journalling or expressive writing to the often difficult, ambiguous and stressful transitions of motherhood. My research will therefore illustrate that journalling has the potential to provide women with a space to voice and process their experiences, opinions and feelings of mothering, as well as challenge societal and cultural ideals regarding the institution of motherhood.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction:**

*An explanation of the research and structure of the thesis*

As anyone who has kept a journal over time knows, it is almost impossible to describe the role it comes to play in one's life. It has clearly been the single most consistent and stable factor in my life, and it largely defines who I am and have become and how I think of myself. If I had to stop writing now for some reason, it would feel like losing a limb. In these 25 years, my journal has been not only the one constant presence in my life (superseding friends, lovers, family and workplace) but also the most sensitive measure of my progress on life's journey. In its pages I have rejoiced, sorrowed, complained, reasoned, raged, argued, celebrated, reflected and thought out loud.

- Marlene A. Schiwy, 1994

I'm not exactly sure what prompted me to start keeping a diary, and I can not say I have ever considered how I would feel if I did not, or could not, continue to journal. It has however, like Schiwy's journal writing, become a consistent source of self-expression and reflection in my life. My journalling has evolved into a place where I can process my thoughts, express myself without fear of judgment, experiment with creative writing through stories and poems, and maintain a voice I may not feel is available outside the pages of my journals. It has become an important outlet for organizing my thoughts and working through stressful times and personal growth. The need to express myself through personal and private writing began when I was a child and has continued through my adult-life. It has become an integral part of my life journey, and has been especially needed through the

transitions I experience in mothering, and the conflicts I face within the Western ideal of motherhood.

The institution of motherhood in Western society has, throughout history, been molded and examined in regard to the cultural and societal expectations that are placed on women. These societal expectations often draw on nostalgic myths of family structure and functionality and ignore the many external factors that influence and shape the role of family and the mother (Coontz 2000; Helterline 1980; Rich 1995; May 1999). Today, women continue to struggle with the balance between public and private spheres; despite their efforts to re-incorporate into the public sphere<sup>1</sup>, their roles in the private sphere have remained an intense and undervalued position (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Delaney & Bell 2008; Hochschild 2003; Rich 1995).

While women's attitudes toward having the right and ability to maintain a career and become mothers have changed immensely, our patriarchal society's attitudes toward the care and responsibility of children have changed very little (Deutsch 2007; Green 2004; Suleiman 1994). This has meant that while women feel they have, and are encouraged to take opportunities to stay within the labour force or public sphere, they also face heavy pressures to remain primary and intensive care-givers to their families (Hochschild 2003; Rich 1995). In order to balance their place in public and private spheres women take on the second shift at home, drop hours at work, accept lower status employment positions that have more flexibility, or eventually withdraw from work entirely. This 'stalled revolution' (Hochschild 2003) has left women within the confines of motherhood as an oppressive institution (Delaney and Bell 2008; Rich 1995). In recent years feminist theorists have focused on how

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<sup>1</sup> I will note that this point pertains mostly to white middle and upper class women, as many women of other classes or cultures have always participated and remained in the public sphere, even as mothers.

women address this oppressive state by the ways in which they find/create/feel empowerment through mothering (Green 2004; Horwitz 2004; O'Reilly 2006).

Personally, journaling provided and continues to provide me with a space to create that sense of self-empowerment and voice during my experiences of transition, isolation, and oppression in motherhood. This is evident in my own entries where I discuss candidly the rejection I have encountered in challenging the ideal that to be a “good mother” I must always experience motherhood as a joyous and happy occasion.

The following excerpt from one of my entries exemplifies this point; however, I should first explain that at times I use ‘Louis’ [Lewis] to address my journal, myself, or the more general ‘infinite beyond’ in my entries. ‘Louis’ was created as a fictional character or pseudonym, over 20 years ago by my friend and I, to be used when writing notes to each other in class. I decided at some point to incorporate this character in my own journaling, and despite feeling this may be an odd characteristic of journal writing, addressing one’s journal by name, or creating fictional characters to whom we write, it is not uncommon in diary keeping (Bunkers 2001; Long 199; Schiwy 1994).

August 10th, 2003,

**What does this all mean? I am a terrible mother for being negative. I should stop expressing myself because people take it the wrong way and no one wants to hear it... I will lie and pretend from now on. I guess I can always express myself to you. I'll always have Louis. Louis doesn't doubt my love for Peanut<sup>2</sup>. Louis understands how it's natural that I am finding it hard**

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<sup>2</sup> Peanut is a pseudonym used for my eldest child. My use of pseudonyms is explained in chapters 3 & 4.

to lose who I was as an individual. Louis understands how it's hard to be a child's primary care provider when the child is a newborn....Louis. Thank god for Louis.

This excerpt also demonstrates the importance and gratitude I held for possessing, and maintaining a space where I could voice experiences and feelings that were often rejected by society and my social community. My personal experience in engaging with journal-writing and its potential for providing voice, validation, reflection and understanding through my life's events, but particularly the transitions through motherhood, has led me to question if journalling could be used as a tool to empower other mothers by providing a safe space for strengthening their voices and increasing their self-efficacy. Does journalling have the potential to be used as a form of therapy or activism for women working through the adjustments of mothering? Would women benefit from such activism? What barriers may need to be addressed when encouraging women to translate their experiences into written language? These are the questions I will consider throughout my thesis.

In order to address these questions, and present my arguments effectively, I have arranged my thesis into five chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction to my research topic and personal analysis of the therapeutic and empowering potential of journalling through motherhood, while also offering an explanation of the structure and arrangement of the thesis.

The second chapter serves both as a literature review and a research strategy. A literature review is a standard requirement within a thesis and its importance lies with the need for a researcher to draw on what has been published on the topic, evaluate this

published literature, and comment on its relevance or identify areas that need further exploration within the research studied<sup>3</sup>. I find, however, that the nature of a literature review is primarily based on conventional academic ways of knowing, and may not sufficiently acknowledge non-academic or scholarly works, or consider personal knowledge as a valid tool within a field of study. My final concern is wanting access to opportunities that will allow me, as a researcher, to intersect with the literature, commenting not only on what has been studied or published regarding my topic, but also my reactions to this literature.

For these reasons, I have chosen to approach my “Literature Review” as if it were a “Reading Response” which is a common feminist method used in academia. Its purpose is to encourage students to critically examine the literature or readings while also engaging with them on a more personal level<sup>4</sup>. This approach also encourages a dialogue to form between the literature and my thoughts or questions surrounding the topics I am examining. This dialogue allows for a more open exploration and analysis surrounding journaling, mothering and my use of empirical-writing methods.

The ‘Reading Response’ will look at the theme of motherhood. It will provide a brief history of the Western institution of motherhood<sup>5</sup>, a contextual analysis of the expectations and realities of motherhood, and the knowledge available regarding the common

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<sup>3</sup> Here are two websites that explain the purpose of a literature review: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review> from the University of Toronto, and <http://www.smu.ca/administration/library/litrev.html> from Saint Mary’s University.

<sup>4</sup> The following website provides a brief description of a reading response: <http://www.centralischool.ca/~bestpractice/response/index.html>. Berry and Black (1993) and Bell (1989) also offer descriptions of academic forms of reading responses.

<sup>5</sup> Within this thesis I am discussing the cultural and social norms of ‘Western’ or ‘Canadian’ mothering, meaning the norms that have been adopted in North America, largely from the white European bourgeoisie (Anderson & Zisser 2000; Badinter 1981; Crawford 1990; Helterline 1980; Trouille 1997).

experiences women share as mothers. My review of the literature focuses on the contexts, intensity and adaptations to motherhood. I question why many women feel so poorly prepared for mothering, and why the adaptation to motherhood is so difficult, while also exploring the origins of the external pressures that women internalize in their transition to motherhood.

The contextual understandings of motherhood provided in the literature and in my responses will then be applied to, and interconnect with, my own journal entries. This will create a supportive web of experience and thought toward the evident need for women to have a voice through motherhood and the potential journaling holds in providing that space for voice.

The reading response therefore provides pertinent information in understanding the contexts of motherhood. However, it also acts as a research strategy in that the knowledge acquired will also be applied to my examination of my own journal entries and personal experiences with motherhood; assisting in their function as empirical evidence, while simultaneously providing further support for the argument that journaling provides a safe space for women to voice their thoughts and experiences of motherhood.

Chapter three presents an explanation of my research strategies: the reading response, journaling, autoethnography, my journal entries, and the use of reflexivity. While this chapter explores these strategies; its main objective is to examine the use of reflexivity within feminist research and how it applies to my own research. Reflexivity is commonly used to explore and expose the politics of representation, to call into question research data, self-location (including gender, race, class etc), and to produce knowledge that questions its own methods, interpretations and constructions. It is also used to reflect on our own

experiences in order to connect or build rapport with those whose experiences we are studying (Berger 2001; Doucet 1998; Oakley 1981; Pillow 2003; Reinharz 1992).

My examination will illustrate how reflexivity is applied to my own research, including the recent challenges of standard uses of reflexivity in favour of more “messy” approaches to research findings and conclusions. This chapter therefore offers an exploration of how my research strategies will be used to address any concerns regarding subjectivity in research; demonstrate common experiences of mothering; and illustrate the processes of reflection, self-awareness, and understanding that journalling creates throughout the constant transitions of motherhood.

Chapter four includes my analysis of my personal journal entries. This is perhaps the most essential aspect of my thesis, as these entries provide empirical evidence supporting the necessity and significance of creating space for women to express what they are feeling and experiencing in motherhood. Each entry will support the knowledge and understandings presented in this thesis regarding the topics of motherhood and journalling. This analysis will clearly substantiate the argument that journalling provides a safe space for women to explore, organize, express and apply reflective understanding to the transitions and emotions of mothering; thus increasing their feelings of self-efficacy, self-validation and self-empowerment.

Chapter five offers a final summary of my research, my conclusions and the need for future research surrounding the positive potential of journalling through motherhood. I also present a discussion on how the information collected on the therapeutic benefits of journalling, and its ability to create space for women’s voices and self-efficacy, could be applied to various programs or organizations that offer support to mothers who are

experiencing postpartum difficulties. Journal workshops, for example, may offer a framework in which women could gather together in order to address any difficulties or challenges they face as mothers, present opportunities to hear common issues, and offer the therapeutic benefits of being heard, drawing strength from their inner voices, and having the opportunity to share personal experiences (Alexander, Bunkers & Muhanji 1989; Larsen et al. 2003; Oakley 1981; Peterson & Jones 2001; Schiwy 1994).

In this thesis, it is not my intent to present journalling as a 'cure-all' for the conflicts, frustrations, anger, or anxiety women may experience throughout motherhood; nor do I believe that the act of journalling alone can address the issues surrounding the varying degrees of postpartum difficulties many women face. I do think, however, that diaries and journals offer a much needed outlet for women to express themselves; reflect on and process their thoughts, emotions and experiences; achieve greater understandings regarding the internalization of the Western ideal of motherhood; and establish an increased sense of self-worth, self-validation, and self-efficacy. Thus, journalling does hold the potential to be utilized as supplementary support for mothers facing the many frustrations and conflicts of motherhood, and this is what requires our examination and our acknowledgement.

## Chapter 2

### **Reading Response:**

#### *An examination and response to the literature on Mothering*

This chapter plays two roles in this thesis. It is both an alternative form of a literature review, conducted in order to gain knowledge and understandings regarding the published research conducted on mothering; and also a method for supporting my arguments and my position regarding the therapeutic potential of journaling through motherhood. I have approached this literature review as a “reading response” in order to apply a more fluid dialogue with the literature, deliberately including my thoughts and my responses surrounding the research discussed. This approach also allows for alternative ways of knowing and the validation of personal knowledge; which is particularly pertinent in situations of writing within the genre or methods of self-writing.

In order to understand and contextualize our present ideal of motherhood, the conflicts that surround it, and women’s personal experiences in it; it is integral to explore the history that led to the social construction and adoption of our Western model of motherhood. This section of my reading response will begin by exploring the norms of motherhood prior to the eighteenth century, and the events that led to the development of the enlightened model of motherhood.

I focus on these time periods for two reasons, one is that the enlightened model of motherhood is what would later become our Western ideal. It is from the enlightened model that many of our societal ideals, perceptions, and beliefs surrounding mothering were formed. The second reason is that by examining the realities of mothering and the societal attitudes toward motherhood prior to the enlightenment, the construction of motherhood

as we know it today becomes clearly evident. The notions of “natural mothering” or “maternal instinct” are dispelled as we examine the evidence of their historical construction.

As I will explore the writings and various responses expressed by women of the time regarding the enlightened model, it is important to mention the limitations in researching these historical themes and events. The information that is available on the experiences of mothers, or the perceptions of enlightened motherhood, are predominantly written by white, mid to upper class women who were literate, and had the resources to engage in writing. Although diaries, letters, and other forms of writing do exist for women of lower classes or from other cultures, these were not always collected, preserved or studied and their importance or validity was often ignored (Etter-Lewis 2000; Long 1999; Steedman 2000). Those letters and diaries of working-class women, or women from diverse cultures, that have been published are, however, mostly those belonging to the “upper” working-class or educated women (Davies 1978; Davies 1975; Etter-Lewis 2000). The oral histories, or personal narratives, collected from members of lower classes or diverse cultures were often recorded, retold, and sometimes appropriated, by other writers who often changed the meaning of the stories, or edited and interpreted the narratives to serve their own goals (Gooze 1992; Long 1999; Steedman 2000; Wong 1992). These gaps or possible misinterpretations therefore limit the historical research or evidence on specific sections of the population. However, in this case the historical sources that are available, such as women’s journals and diaries, do provide us with an insight into the reality of the enlightened or Western model of motherhood (Davies 1978; Davies 1975; Webb 1927).

After providing the contextual analysis surrounding the construction of the Western model of motherhood, I will then continue to discuss my own reactions to the literature,

and the evident links between the common experiences of mothering in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries and those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This discussion will then lead a final review of the prevalent knowledge available in the literature regarding common themes, feelings, and experiences of mothering, and the shared conflicts and realities that exist for women adapting to motherhood.

*Contextual Analysis: Historical Exploration of the Construction of Mothering*

The social expectations of mothering prior to the mid-eighteenth century differ substantially from the societal norms of the past two centuries. For example, many mothers in Western European societies had very little contact with their children. It was common for many classes of parents to send their infants to wet-nurses, most of whom lived in rural areas far from the children's original urban homes. Although the countryside was viewed as a safe and ideal place for children, in reality the poverty, unsanitary conditions, and lack of supervision often resulted in illness, debilitations, or fatalities. If these children survived their time with the wet-nurses they would return to their parents for a short time before being sent out again to other families, schools, or churches to be raised and educated (Badinter 1981; Newall 1990; Fildes 1990). Other children were often left on the doorsteps of churches or hospitals that cared for abandoned infants (Fildes 1990).

These child-rearing practices, as well as women's attitudes and reactions to motherhood in pre-industrial western Europe, have been presented and interpreted in various manners by historians and other scholars. For instance, Elisabeth Badinter (1981) uses many theories and ideologies found in the practices and literature of motherhood during the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries as evidence of maternal indifference. In her endeavour to illustrate the social construction of maternal instinct, Badinter utilizes

historical data to present what she describes as cruel and neglectful attitudes mothers held toward their children. However, other historians have utilized many of their historical findings to demonstrate that mothers did love their children and were not intentionally cruel.

For example Patricia Crawford (1990) argues that descriptions, such as Badinter's, of women being callous and uncaring parents were often unfair and untrue. Crawford supports her arguments with women's personal letters and writings which illustrate the delight women have shown in watching and raising their sons and daughters, but also the grief they experienced in losing their children to illness or other fatalities. Valerie Fildes (1990) also challenges the historical assumptions regarding child abandonment and neglect. In using women's letters and previous records of foundlings, Fildes illustrates that women were not indifferent to their children, as previously thought, but were deeply torn and grieved by having to make the decision to abandon their child(ren). She confirms that most of the women who gave up their sons or daughters were not unwed mothers; but women who had been widowed or deserted by their husbands. As a result, these women suddenly found themselves in an economic crisis that prevented them from being able to provide for their children. Historians, such as Crawford (1990) and Fildes (1990), therefore argue that it was the circumstances and societal attitudes of the time that dictated the type of care mothers provided. They further this argument by stating that the mothers of the past should not be blamed for following the standard societal norms, or be judged through our contemporary perspectives on motherhood.

In response to the literature that examines the pre-industrial norms of motherhood, I was relieved at the apparent lack of natural instinct or fulfillment women experienced as

mothers. It was satisfying knowing that the current ideals regarding these expectations did not always exist and, as I will discuss, were in fact constructed in response to the social and political circumstances of the time. In particular, I found Badinter's (1981) work to be quite strong in offering images of maternal indifference and evidence of the constructed myth of maternal instinct. However, I also found the examples she provided were often extreme and not evenly balanced with the fact that many women, as Crawford (1990) and Fildes (1990) have pointed out, felt conflicted between the normative practices of the time, such as sending their children away, and their desire to keep their children close. Badinter's examination therefore lacks the insight regarding the pressures women faced during the time, and the fact that maternal indifference was also the normative societal standard expected of mothers (Badinter 1981; Crawford 1990; Fildes 1990).

I appreciated Crawford's approach to history in that she interpreted and reassessed the historical evidence from a feminist perspective. In taking the position that women experience a separate history from men, she illustrates that past descriptions of women, their lives, thoughts, and experiences were often incomplete or disregarded as they were investigated or written by men and from a male perspective. She therefore demonstrates the importance of women's personal letters and writings in acquiring an in-depth understanding of women's history (1990). I also feel that the texts *The Way We Never Were* (Coontz 1992) and *Homeward Bound* (May 1999) offer an important, accessible, and more contemporary look at how our present social ideals and expectations of mothers often draw on nostalgic myths of family structure and functionality while ignoring the many external factors that influence and shape the role of family and mother.

For example, historians such as Anna Davin (1978) and Marilyn Helterline (1980) explain that the issues of child neglect and infant mortality became a national concern to many Western European countries from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Britain, for instance, was in desperate need of a healthy population in order to secure and defend the Empire's future. The high infant mortality rate, the impact of war and depression, as well as the perceived high rate of reproduction from lower and 'degenerate' classes, caused severe anxiety regarding the nation's population. This national anxiety was common to many European countries during this time and contributed to the formation of the new ideals of motherhood (Davin 1978).

This shift in focus regarding the well-being of children and 'future generations' led to the enlightened model of 'mother' and was exemplified by the popular work of *Julie* and *Emile* by Jean-Jaques Rousseau. Mary Seidman Trouille (1997) examines Rousseau's work, its impact on the societal theories and expectations of mothers at the time, and the reaction of his writing by his fellow female writers. She explains that Rousseau, like many of his male contemporaries, believed the high infant mortality rates were a result of ignorant or neglectful mothers. These writers pointed to the bourgeois and aristocratic women's shameful desire to follow scholarly interests, partake in salons in France or the Blue Stocking circles in England, and attempt to write and engage in matters that were intended for men. These interests, they argued, assisted in encouraging women to focus on selfish objectives rather than take their rightful place as mothers within the domestic realm, consequently increasing women's ignorance and neglect toward their child-rearing responsibilities. (Anderson & Zinsser 2000; Davin 1978; Trouille 1997).

For instance, John Locke, an English enlightenment philosopher who also frequented the salons in England and France, wrote and believed strongly in the enlightenment's ideal of equal rights to natural freedom. His views, however, were directed exclusively toward men as he believed women and animals were naturally subordinate to man and were therefore exempt from these rights (Anderson & Zinsser 2000).

Rousseau, despite his connections with the salonieres of France, also believed that women were weak and inferior to men, and suggested that women be restricted to the domestic sphere as it was their natural destiny to be mothers and nurturers. He used this position to recommend that the education for girls and women be limited to teaching them the life and moral skills needed to become successful wives and mothers. This proposed education would address the maternal ignorance he, and common society, believed was causing the distress in the nation's population through infant mortality. Rousseau, and the other advocates of the new model of motherhood, promised that in accepting this 'natural' role, women would find the fulfillment, happiness, respect, power and dignity that their sex had been lacking (Trouille 1997).

Anderson and Zinsser (2000) point out that the endorsement of restricting women to a separate sphere from men was influenced by the backlash to women's increasing social and political power gained through the salons. Women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had become increasingly involved in social changes and political activism, and many male philosophers began to criticize women's increased open participation and power in the social and political realms. These male thinkers and writers continued to express their arguments that women were naturally different from men and therefore should be separated from each other. They promoted the belief that women should take their place within the

domestic sphere that promised fulfillment and power as the ruler of the home and men should remain within the public sphere as they were superior in physical and intellectual matters (Anderson & Zinsser 2000; Trouille 1997).

The development and exploration of new concepts in psychological development during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries also contributed to the perception of women's important and exclusive role in the home. As Marilyn Helterline (1980) explains in her contextual analysis of English Women's magazines from this time period, the physical and psychological development of children increasingly gained attention and concern in medical communities, and society as a whole. With this increased focus on the child, and her development, came the expansion of women's responsibility in producing and caring for psychologically and physically healthy children.

The literature and social thought of the time declared that mothers would not only be the sole individuals capable of caring and ensuring the developmental needs of their children, due to a woman's natural maternal instinct, but they would also need to be exposed to expert advice in assisting them with this 'natural' role. While these new concepts became increasingly accepted and adopted by the women of the time; it also caused uncertainty, ambivalence, and self-doubt for women who internalized the contradictory ideal that their role as mothers was both 'natural' and lacking in proper expertise (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Hays 1984; Helterline 1980; Horwitz 2005; Juhasz 2003).

Historian Eileen Janes Yeo (1999) asserts, in her examination of the creation of 'Motherhood', that the economic state of a country also contributed to the new ideals of motherhood and women feeling pressured to adopt these ideals. The economic growth that occurred in Western Europe, especially within England, during the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries increased the standard of living for many working-class or artisan families. Women's involvement in the family business, or their work outside the home, gradually decreased as men's wages and employment opportunities increased. A man's economic security was demonstrated by his ability to have his wife at home rather than out working for wages. This situation made it increasingly possible for many working-class and most middle-class women to adopt the ideals of the enlightenment's model of motherhood (Anderson & Zinsser 2000, Yeo 1999).

Women's shift into the domestic sphere was a gradual process and, although primarily a middle-class phenomenon, it also infiltrated the aristocratic and royal classes. Despite this shift and the promises of fulfillment, power, and respect in their roles as mothers and wives, many women experienced, and continue to experience, the conflicts, ambivalence and dissatisfaction with the exclusive domestic role that has been assigned to them (Anderson & Zinsser 2000; Horwitz 2005; Juhasz 2003; Trouille 1997).

The literature exploring the construction of the enlightened or Western model of mothering offers clear explanations and examples of the external political, social, economical and psychological developments that created and encouraged the ideal of maternal instinct, intensive mothering, and the increased expectations that are placed on this "natural" role. This research also provides examples of how women have internalized the pressures and expectations of our society's new ideals, and also how women were and continue to be tempted by the promises of fulfilment through mothering.

For example, Anderson and Zinsser (2000) and Trouille (1997) establish that while many women of mid to upper classes in the eighteenth century believed in women's rights to education, politics, and social matters, they also felt intrigued by the promises of respect

and fulfillment in the new model of motherhood. Out of concern for their own children, or future generations, these women also supported the developing views on infant care and the need for mothers to be more involved and responsible for their own children.

Helterline's research (1980) also confirms that the external pressures or authoritative voices from the medical or psychological communities were unavoidable for most mothers during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. Mothers were told through books, articles and pamphlets that in order to ensure the healthy well-being of their children they must take responsibility for that child's physical, psychological and emotional development. Mothers, consequently, found it difficult to openly challenge or resist internalizing this complex and exclusive responsibility as it was said to be directly linked to their child's health and well-being.

This conflicting position continues to confront women in today's Western societies; it would therefore be interesting to compare a similar study of twenty-first century texts to that of Helterline's. I think we would find, as many feminist writers have already established, that women continue to be bombarded with the external pressures of exclusive responsibility, and therefore continue to internalize these responsibilities and expectations (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Hays 1984; Helterline 1980; Horwitz 2005; Juhasz 2003). This often unconscious act of internalizing the societal expectations of the 'ideal mother' perpetuates its construction and leaves women to endure the common conflicts and pressures experienced in Western motherhood.

### *The Commonly Expressed Feelings, Themes, and Perceptions of the Realities of Motherhood*

The literature involving research on, or explorations of, Western motherhood offers a varied range of information regarding women's experiences, feelings, perceptions and

thoughts within this model. However, several common themes emerged from the texts and were addressed by study participants, researchers and writers. While I will only focus on a sample of the literature in my review and response, the literature as a whole discussed the following common experiences of motherhood: conflicts between what women expected motherhood to be and the realities of what it really entailed; the negotiations and internalization of these unrealistic expectations; and feeling shock, trauma, isolation, as well as the loss of personal identity and voice through women's transitions into motherhood.

*The Realities vs. The Romance*

The first theme I will review, and perhaps the most discussed, is the conflict women experience in trying to adapt to the realities of motherhood. This conflict arises from the realization that the societal and internalized expectations of motherhood do not coincide with the realities of exhaustion, anger, anxiety and stress that many women feel as they become mothers (Horwitz & Long 2005; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007).

For instance, in a study on women's first transitions into motherhood, Ann Oakley (1979) demonstrates that ninety-one percent of her participants conveyed that motherhood differed from their expectations. Many of her participants also expressed that they were not prepared for the realities of motherhood due to the lack of honest representations of mothers and the experiences of mothering in Western society and the media. These women felt that the media portrayed motherhood as overly romantic ignoring the chaos, disruption or difficulties they actually felt in becoming mothers. One participant stated,

I think people should be told about the hard life it is to be a mother. It's not easy to be a mother. I don't think it is, I think it's very difficult. It takes all your energy out of you... I think they should be *warned* more: because when you go to those classes, they tell you

about your baby and they make it sound so nice, like the adverts on television, they make everything sound so nice. But it's not... [Italics included in original text] 256

Other participants also discussed how they felt the media, medical experts, and their communities in general, did not honestly portray the work that is required in taking care of a baby. They described the restrictions that they faced once they become a mother, and the conflicts women continue to face in negotiating between idealistic expectations of mothers and the realities of feeling exhausted, apathetic, or completely torn (Oakley 1979).

This lack of knowledge regarding the amount of work motherhood involves is also discussed by participants in Frances Grossman et al.'s study *Pregnancy, Birth, and Parenthood: Adaptations of Mothers, Fathers, and Infants*, as well as Myra Leifer's research the *Psychological Effects of Motherhood*. The participants in these studies expressed the conflicts in expecting motherhood to be exciting, joyous, fulfilling, and self-satisfying, when instead they encountered exhaustion, drudgery, restriction, and feelings of anger, insignificance, and depression (Grossman et al. 1980; Leifer 1980).

While the above studies focus primarily on white women and the Western model of motherhood, they do include women from a variety of class backgrounds, and clearly illustrate the issues women face in adapting to a reality that is not at all what they had expected. These studies are now more than twenty years old; however, I find their research on the common conflicts in adapting to motherhood corresponds with what women today continue to face in their own adaptations to motherhood.

For example, Natasha Mauthner (2002) concludes, in her research on postpartum depression, that experiencing difficulties, exhaustion, or disappointment in motherhood was

common to her participants' experiences, whether or not they also experienced postpartum depression. She links these difficulties and feelings of disappointment to the social and cultural pressures placed on women to aspire to the romantic, yet undervalued, ideals of motherhood. Her participants acknowledged the lack of value placed on motherhood from social policies that refuse to recognise mothering as 'work', or from the people in their families and communities. One participant expressed her resentment toward this lack of understanding in stating "[y]ou look for praise and reassurance, but never get it, because 'it's what women were meant to do'." (55).

This contradiction in expecting women to pursue a role that is both unrealistic and undervalued is explored by Sharon Hays in her book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Hays also discusses that the women in her study felt pressured to live up to the 'good mother' image that continues to be trivialized by our Western society, leaving women feeling discredited and ill-prepared to pursue other opportunities outside of intensive mothering. The majority of Hays' participants were willing to accept and attempt to conform to this intensive or self-sacrificing model of motherhood, despite recognizing the impossibilities of meeting this ideal (1984).

It appears from the literature that many women, like those in Hays' study, continue to reinforce the romantic ideals of motherhood despite the availability of lived experiences and the acknowledgment that our social or cultural ideal of mothering is unrealistic. This act of reinforcement may take place, consciously or not, by repressing feelings or experiences that challenge the societal norms of motherhood, or by accepting the responsibilities of intensive mothering or Western ideals of mothering. This concealment, or pressured acceptance, leads many to internalize the romantic notions of the Western model

of motherhood (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Delaney & Bell 2008; Hays 1984; Mauthner 2002; Oakley 1979; Rossi 1968; Suleiman 1994).

*Negotiating and Internalizing the Romance*

Why is it then that, even though research is growing concerning the ways in which women challenge these unrealistic ideals, women continue to perpetuate the same ideal of motherhood in their daily life (Green 2004; Juhasz 2003; O'Reilly 2004; O'Reilly 2006; Rich 1995)? For many women, challenging the social norms surrounding motherhood requires too much energy in their already stretched lives; for others, it is the knowledge and fear of public scrutiny and judgement, as well as feelings of guilt or shame, that holds them within the social conformity of these ideals (Anderson 2005; Boyd 2003; Buskens 2005; Gustafson 2001; Hopkins 2005; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Rich 1995; Smith 2006; Suleiman 1994).

For example, often the women who do challenge the ideal of intensive or self-sacrificing motherhood feel a constant need to explain, legitimate, and validate their decisions, while also defending their position as 'good mothers' (Boyd 2003; Hays 198; Mauthner 2002; Oakley 1979; Roch 1995; Suleiman 1994). Other women may find it difficult to speak out about their difficulties, or their questioning of social norms, especially if these thoughts have previously been rejected by friends and family who continue to believe that motherhood is a joyous, happy and exciting event. The stereotype of the 'good' or 'unconditional' mother is so prevalent in our society that it is often difficult to reconsider its normative status (Buskens 2005; Gustafson 2001; Hays 1984, Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Rich 1995).

For instance, Mauthner (2002) points to a study conducted by Shirley Prendergast and Alan Prout (1980). The study required that the participants, 15 year old girls, describe

motherhood using their own observations of their mothers, other family members, and neighbours, as well as the personal care they provided to younger siblings or through baby-sitting. When the girls described the motherhood they witnessed, they used terms such as exhaustion, isolation, anger, and depression. However, when the girls were asked to describe what they expected for their own experiences as mothers, they used stereotypical ideals, and spoke of being happy and positive about their responsibilities as mothers. Prendergast and Prout conclude that as the societal ideal of motherhood is based on the premise of 'naturalness', it therefore becomes considered normal and is thus accepted and expected; whereas the reality of mothering witnessed is considered abnormal and is therefore rejected by the study participants (1980).

*The Shock of Motherhood as Reality*

Considering the strong normative status of the idealistic notion of mothering, it is no wonder that so many women feel shock or trauma when they become mothers and experience first hand that their romantic ideal is not necessarily their reality (Mauthner 2002; Oakley 1979; Rich 1995; Rossi 1968; Willard 1988).

For example, in *Interviewing Women: a Contradiction in Terms*, Oakley discusses the shock her participants experienced when they felt the substantial discrepancies between the expectations and realities of motherhood. She explains,

A dominant metaphor used by interviewees to describe their reactions to this hiatus was 'shock'. In this sense, a process of emotional recovery is endemic in the normal transition to motherhood and there is a general need for some kind of 'therapeutic listener' that is not met within the usual circle of family and friends. 51

The literature further illustrates this commonality of experiencing shock in the adapting to motherhood. Many women described motherhood as being stressful or traumatic, especially when confronting the clash between what they had expected and what became their reality (Grossman et al. 1980; Oakly 1979; Oakley 1981; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Rich 1995; Rossi 1968).

For instance, Leifer (1980) presents the following conclusion in her research on the psychological effects of first pregnancy and motherhood,

A major finding in this study is that even for women who optimally use their pregnancies to prepare for motherhood and who establish satisfying relationships with their infant, the transition to parenthood is difficult and the role of motherhood creates severe stress. 243

Other researcher's have discussed similar findings of stress, shock or trauma within their research, or their own experiences. For example, Yelizaveta P. Renfro illustrates her own experiences adapting to motherhood in the following segment of *A Letter to My Daughter (To Be Sent in the Future)*,

I waited for the time when I could count your life in weeks, even months. Motherhood was round-the-clock trauma. The feedings and diapers were endless. You cried. No one slept. I cried. I had many questions. How did the human race endure? How did people have more than one child? How did they survive the first one? When was I would I go back to just being *me*? You cried and cried; there was no end in sight. [Italics included in original text]. 257

In recognizing the vast gap between what women are taught, presented, and encouraged to internalize as the image of a 'good mother' and the realities of this highly intensive but devalued role; it is not surprising that so many women do experience stress,

trauma or shock in their transition to motherhood. It has also been suggested, as illustrated by the quote from Oakley (1979), that in facing this shock women convey a need for a therapeutic listener, or a safe method of expressing their thoughts and experiences. Renfro's segment (2008) also speaks of the loss of self, or needing a space in which to find one's self again.

*Isolation, Loss of Identity, and Silence*

The research above, as well as the literature in general, recognizes that the shock experienced in attempting to cope with the often traumatic transitions of motherhood is not only caused by the clash in expectations, but also the sense of losing one's own identity, and feeling isolated and silenced. (Oakley 1979; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Steele 2008; Suleiman 1994; Willard 1988).

Fiona Nelson's (2007) research on lesbian and heterosexual women's transition into motherhood, for example, emphasizes that many women fear a loss of identity, or being perceived as if they have no identity outside their role and societal status of 'Mother'. The fear of losing a separate identity has been explored in other feminist work, such as Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born* and Susan Rubin Suleiman's *Risking Who One Is*.

In both these texts the authors discuss the conflict between a woman balancing her own needs with the needs of her child(ren). In particular they describe the anguish many women feel in negotiating the bad mother/good mother binary, and how the consequences of risking the 'bad mother label' are often too great for women to place their own needs above their children's (Rich 1995; Suleiman 1994). The fear of these consequences is based on legitimate experiences, as women have lost custody of their children, faced social exclusion, and met with severe scrutiny in their private and professional lives due to the bad

mother label. (Anderson 2005; Boyd 2003; Buskens 2003; Buskens 2005; Gustafson 2001; Hopkins 2005; Kielty 2008; Smith 2006).

Due to the high demands and intensive responsibilities expected of mothers in our society, many women feel that they are not supported in maintaining an individual identity separate from their identity as a mother. The societal ideal often continues to expect that a woman will identify fully with the role of the mother and put all other interests and identities on hold (Juhasz 2003; O'Reilly 2004; O'Reilly 2006; Rich 1995; Rossi 1968; Steele 2008; Suleiman 1994; Willard 1988).

Oakley (1979), for instance, explains that many of her participants felt that their own sense of self was being absorbed into the responsibilities and care of their babies; leaving them without a 'separate existence'. As one participant states,

I like her but I don't like looking after her. I don't like the fact that she has to rely on me for everything. I mean you don't *exist* when you have a baby, do you? [Italics included in original text] 252

This experience of losing one's sense of self can lead to feelings of isolation as women continue to feel silenced about their experiences, especially if their experiences do not meet the romantic expectations of motherhood. Mauthner (2002) explains that some of her participants' "fears of rejection and moral condemnation were grounded in reality: they had tried to reveal their feelings to other people and felt silenced and dismissed as a result" (9).

It is difficult for many women to break this silence as Western society's focus on the nuclear family as an ideal expects women to find their support within the closed doors of their homes; rather than looking to external family, neighbours, or larger communities in general. If women do not find support behind these closed doors, or fear looking elsewhere,

they may continue to feel silenced and isolated through the loss of their voice and sense of self (Coontz 2000; Muthner 2002; Oakley 1979; Rossi 1968; Steele 2008; Suleiman 1994; Willard 1988).

The external pressures that are internalized by women and contribute to this silence are explored by Brenda Clews (2001) when she writes,

*What is it* that the mother is saying  
in her speaking of frustration,  
exhaustion, a speaking that always dwindles  
into incoherence and  
silence?

Are there simply massive and  
internalized social controls against  
this speaking? [Italics included in original text] 24

These ‘social controls’ can be interpreted as the ongoing ideals and expectations that Western society has created around mothering. Ann Willard (1988) also discusses this pressure and its role in silencing women’s voices in her study “The Cultural Scripts for Mothering”. She explains that the women in her research risked losing their own voices when they followed the social expectation of the ‘selfless mother script’ (238). These women found it was not necessarily the needs of their child(ren) that drowned their voices, but the expectations originating from other adults, including their partners. These external voices led the participants to question and silence their own thoughts regarding the care of their child(ren) and their roles as mothers in general.

Similarly, Mauthner (2002) finds that the women in her study negotiated between two voices throughout their experiences in mothering. One voice was their own; a voice that

recognized the unrealistic expectations of the Western ideal of motherhood and questioned this ideal. The other; however, was the voice of society, the medical or health community, family, friends, or other adults. It is described as the voice of 'should'; how women 'should' feel toward their child(ren) and motherhood in general, and what they 'should' do within their roles as mothers. While the majority of her participants recognized the romantic and unrealistic ideals of Western society's perceptions of motherhood, they continued to have difficulties challenging what they believed they 'should' be feeling or doing. For instance, one participant explained:

I try not to again to have this obsession, like she's playing there now and I think well, that's fine...But in the past I've thought you now, "God I *should* be sitting down reading a book with her, cuddling her, holding her."...I keep putting this pressure on myself to be *The Intellectual Mother*, to hot-house her...I always have this thing, "Am I giving her enough," but I mean they don't need bombarding twenty-four hours a day, do they?" [Italics my own: Italics in original text] 67

The negotiation between these two voices is difficult and in order for women to challenge the ideals or voices of others, or become more aware of their own voices, women need a safe, non-judgemental space to freely express themselves (Hays 1984; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Oakley 1979; Willard 1988).

In Jane Gordon's (1988) study on women's perspectives of childbirth, for example, participants expressed not having the ability or the space to voice their thoughts, and their experiences, stating that "nobody ever talked to me about my experiences of childbirth before. I could never say anything to anybody about what it was like" (45). Gordon finds that years after their birthing experiences, these women still desired the opportunity to disclose

their birth stories in their own words. She concludes that without the outlet to safely voice their experiences, these women were unable to critically process or reflect on their experiences, and how these experiences may have been shaped or influenced by the medical environment.

Willard (1988) suggests that women need to hear, trust, and be aware of their own voices in order to successfully question and challenge societal ideals of motherhood. She concludes,

A woman who could hear her own voice was less at the mercy of cultural prescriptions about how she ought to think and act and was better able to make choices within the constraints of her particular life situation. 243

Without this ability or space to freely express their own thoughts and experiences, women's voices continue to be drowned by the expectations of our cultural scripts and ideals of motherhood (Gordon 1988; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Oakley 1979; Rich 1995; Steele 2008; Suleiman 1994; Willard 1988). I believe this much needed outlet could be created in journalling. Journalling has the potential to provide a safe, non-judgmental space for expressing, processing and reflecting on one's own thoughts; thereby giving women a place to hear, trust and maintain their own voices (Bell 1989; Pennebaker 1997; Schiwy 1994; Ulrich & Lutgendorf 2002; Willard 1988).

#### *Further Critiques and Responses*

The literature I have discussed above has clearly illustrated the on-going themes and conflicts women face in motherhood. However, the feminist research and literature that focuses on Western ideals of motherhood has often been criticised for being too negative and not acknowledging the positive elements and personal growth many women experience

in motherhood. It has also been criticised for being too exclusive in its participant samples; thereby failing to recognise the diverse perceptions, thoughts and feelings that derive from the various cultures, backgrounds, and women of Western society (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Hays 1984; Middleton 2006; Malacrida 2007; Suleiman 1994).

Oakley (1979) addresses the issue of negativity by disclosing that perhaps to some degree research on mothering is focused too heavily on the negative in order to draw more attention to the work, since “happiness doesn’t hit the headlines..” (6). However, she also explains that her own research was constructed around the conclusions and desires of her participants, mainly that it was important for women to have an honest portrayal of motherhood that challenged Western societies romantic and unrealistic ideals.

In my own experience I have found a similar pattern in my descriptions of motherhood. I often exaggerate or focus on the more bleak elements of mothering in order to challenge the rose-coloured image of motherhood our society so readily displays. Although my descriptions are often provided with humour, I do find that it is important to speak out about the oppressive side of motherhood for the very reasons and themes that the literature here has presented.

Women remain conflicted, pressured, isolated and silenced by the realities of mothering. They continue to internalize the romantic ideals of the Western model of motherhood despite knowing that it is unrealistic and does not coincide with their own lives. Women remain in fear of, and dismissed or silenced by, these unrealistic standards that our Western society has adopted as the norm. In order to break this silence, fight our fears, and challenge the societal norm, women need to speak out and draw attention to the

realities of mothering, the conflicts they experience, the feelings they have, and their honest perceptions of the positive and negative elements of motherhood.

The critiques regarding the lack of variation in research on mothering are often valid, and remains so in this case as the majority of the studies I have included in this work involve participants from mainly white European, Irish or English descent. However, it is important to note that these studies did include members of varying classes, abilities, ages, and sexual orientation; broadening to some degree the perceptions of mothering and those who are influenced by the Western model of motherhood (Ciano-Boyce 2002; Gabb 2004; Green 2004; Horwitz 2004; Malacrida 2007; Mauthner 2002; Nelson 2007; Oakley 1979). It is also of value to consider to what extent class, cultural background, race or sexuality impact women's experiences, or lack of experience, with the themes and conflicts discussed in this research (Leifer 1980; Moore 2008).

For instance, Suleiman (1994) uses texts written by women from varying backgrounds and cultures to demonstrate that the authors of those texts also describe their characters experiencing "ultimate responsibility" or the "inner conflicts" of jealousy, anger and frustration in motherhood (61-62). Suleiman also draws attention to the message put forth by those texts that "motherhood is one experience sharable across racial, ethnic, and class differences" (62) as all women "can share the same joys and frustrations" (63) in motherhood.

While I think it is important to recognise not all women experience or approach mothering the same way, I do agree with Suleiman (1994) that there are common themes that exist in mothering, common joys and common frustrations. The common frustrations or conflicts related to the Western model of motherhood have been adequately addressed by the literature I have reviewed in this text and in my bibliography. This examination of

research on mothering also leads into my next chapter regarding my research strategies and how they assist in supporting my position that journalling has the potential to offer women a space to explore and reflect on the common themes and shared conflicts experienced in motherhood.

## Chapter 3

### **Research Strategies:**

*An exploration of the methods and methodologies used in supporting and engaging with the research*

The object of this chapter is to discuss the tools and theories used to present, analyse and examine my arguments in my thesis. These research strategies include the reading response, journalling, autoethnography, reflexivity, and journal entries. I will first offer a brief synopsis of the reading response and journal entries as these two topics have either been covered previously or will be covered in detail in following chapters. I will then explore the themes of journalling and autoethnography. I end this chapter with a discussion on how I apply reflexivity to my own research, and how I address the issues that exist regarding reflexivity, subjectivity, and self within the autoethnographic research I am presenting.

#### *The Reading Response*

In order to acquire the level of knowledge needed to discuss and analyse mothering in the context of my thesis I reviewed a great deal of literature and took note of my responses to this literature. The complex review and response process is discussed in detail in the previous chapter, and so at this point I am only offering an overview of its purpose and outcomes. For instance, this particular strategy allows for an in-depth understanding of the material and also addresses the questions and gaps that arise from opening a dialogue with the literature. Using such a dialogue creates an awareness surrounding my approaches to the research, discussions and supportive evidence regarding the existence of common experiences of motherhood and the position that journalling provides a safe space for women to express, reflect, and work through the often conflicting responsibilities, desires,

and identities that surround motherhood. It, therefore, is a complex and highly useful research strategy in dealing with the topics and contexts of my work.

### *Journal Entries*

The use of personal journal entries is an essential research strategy to examine the arguments and theories presented in my thesis. This strategy of using my own journal entries provides pragmatic examples of the cognitive and analytical processing that occurs when experience is translated into language; giving voice to the self and the opportunity for self-reflection and self-awareness (Pennebaker 1997; Schiwy 1994; Sparkes 2002). The credibility of using journal entries is also quite compelling; as these entries were written for myself, the degree of deception decreases considerably in comparison to records that may be compiled for someone else. The strategy then allows for a more personal exploration of the importance of creating space for women to express empirically what they are feeling and experiencing in motherhood.

My journal entries, as a research tool, will therefore be used to provide supportive evidence in demonstrating the common experiences of mothering, the difficulties in transitioning through motherhood, and the benefits of journalling as a site of voice and empowerment for women adapting to motherhood. The overview I have presented here offers only a brief explanation of this strategy; however, the use and analysis of my personal journal entries will be thoroughly examined in the following chapter.

### *Journalling*

The previous chapter on mothering demonstrates the common experiences women share within the Western ideal of motherhood. This ideal also includes the constraining expectation that motherhood should be experienced as a positive life event, leaving little

room for acknowledging the shock and trauma many women feel in becoming mothers. The gap between the reality and the social expectations of mothering is a key consideration in this section as well, as the literature I reviewed on journalling also fails to consider motherhood as a traumatic experience or a time of crisis and shock.

In the context of this thesis, I am addressing the common difficulties that women may experience in adjusting to motherhood that do not extend to the severe or pathological. Although journalling could be viewed as a possible outlet for voice and empowerment, it is not my intention to insinuate that it could replace the need and benefits of therapy, or counselling. I will also note that throughout this discussion, and within the context of this thesis, I will use the term 'cognitive processing' to refer to the process of organizing one's thoughts, and the terms 'analysis' or 'analytical processing' to refer to the act of applying reason and reflection to one's experiences, emotions and thoughts. I will use 'expression of emotional experience' to refer to the process of naming and expressing one's emotions and experiences without necessarily taking the time to reflect on those emotions or ask questions surrounding why one would feel or think a certain way. In presenting these terms I will also note, as I discuss at a later point, that I do believe the expression of emotional experience leads to, or is intertwined with, cognitive and analytical processing.

I will begin my exploration of journalling with a brief outline of journal and diary writing; including historical progression, different styles of writing, and whether or not I will make a distinction between the terms 'journal' and 'diary'. I will then move to present the physical, emotional and psychological benefits reported in the literature that have been associated with journalling through times of crisis. I will offer my response to these findings, discuss reasons for the lack of research applying journalling to motherhood, and engage in

the comparisons between writing for the self and writing for an audience. This discussion and response will lead to an examination of whether or not journalling is a private or public function and the consequences or barriers that exist in the presence of an implied or potential audience.

Throughout these discussions and examinations I will include my response to the literature, focussing mainly on a selection from the broader range included in my bibliography, and addressing any concerns, gaps or impressions that exist within the research. I will then conclude this section with the overall belief that despite any barriers discussed here, journalling has the potential to provide therapeutic and empowering space for women who are struggling with the challenges of the Western ideal of motherhood.

### *The Diary and The Journal*

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, journals and diaries were primarily kept by men, and despite our present perception of the diary as being a private form of writing; the pre-nineteenth century diary was often written as a semi-public record of events. The gradual evolution of the diary becoming a private medium, and a more female pursuit, occurred with the separation of the public and private spheres. As women were increasingly pushed within the home, so too was the concept of writing for the self, a concept that was deemed more emotional and thus more female (Anderson 2001; Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985). Although diaries moved to the private sphere they were not all considered private documents; many women kept diaries with the intention of sharing them with future generations. Numerous diaries, for example, were exchanged between various family members, sometimes written by several members simultaneously, other times written by one member from each generation, creating a documented history of family events to be passed down to the next

generations. Other diaries were written as religious or spiritual guides demonstrating the piousness of the writer and the religious intentions of her family (Anderson 2001; Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985).

Historically, the majority of diaries studied in western society have belonged to Euro-American women who had the time and resources of wealth and white privilege to keep diaries; however, a diverse range of women including those from the working-class, middle-class, African-American women, and farming women kept diaries. Not all of these were collected or recognized to hold value, limiting our resources to mainly diaries kept by white, upper-class, privileged women (Bunkers 2001; Davies 1978; Etter-Lewis 2000; Webb 1927). The diaries we can access, however, demonstrate the wide variety that exist, and the diversity of writing styles employed.

For example, many women maintained detailed logs of daily events; other women were more vague and infrequent with their recordings; others, although infrequent, would describe at length their feelings and thoughts regarding life and its various events (Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985). The differences between these styles is sometimes described through the medium of writing. For instance a diary has often been described as a place to record daily events without the process of introspective writing; where as a journal is the medium for exploring the conscious, reflecting on the self and life's events, or expressing feelings (Bernstock 1991; Bunkers 2001).

This distinction between journals and diaries, however, is not so easily sustained. Suzanne Bunkers (2001), for example, began her research of Midwestern girls' and women's diaries believing that there was a difference between journals and diaries; however, she soon discovered such a broad range of diaries that record both events and feelings, it became

evident that the distinction she had made was simply an “artificial distinction” (12). She, as well as other authors, realize that our daily life is eternally connected to our thoughts and emotions, and therefore can not be separated through ‘artificial distinctions’. (Anderson 2001; Bernstock 1991; Bunkers 2001; Larsen et al. 2003; Schiwy 1994).

In their study on a writing group for female cancer patients, Larsen et al. (2003) describe journalling as “writing reflectively on one’s own experience” and use the terms writing therapy, expressive writing or therapeutic writing interchangeably with journalling (280). This demonstrates that journalling, like diary keeping, is not so easily confined to one term or within specific distinctions. When one jots down an event that has occurred in their life, are they not ‘reflecting on their own experience’?

I believe a diary and a journal serve the same purpose in expressing emotions, events, and providing a space for self-reflection. For instance, whether I use a diary or a journal to record a list of daily activities, express how I felt about those activities, or to represent my feelings and experiences through creative writing, I remain in a state of reflection. I create awareness around my thoughts and circumstances, while potentially benefiting from the therapeutic effects of expressing myself through writing. I will therefore use the terms ‘journal’ or ‘diary’ in this thesis to refer to the book(s) I use to express myself through written language. I will also use the terms ‘to journal’ or ‘journalling’ to describe this act of expression. In dealing with the literature I have reviewed I will apply the same terms used by the authors; although, in my response I may use diary or journal interchangeably depending on the style or flow of my writing and theorizing.

### *The Benefits of Journalling*

Numerous studies have researched the benefits of journalling through difficult times, traumatic events or life crises. These studies have examined the emotional, physical and therapeutic benefits of translating experiences into writing. For example, the practical and positive benefits of journalling are clearly illustrated in Spera et al.'s (1994) study examining the effects of expressive writing in coping with job loss. Their findings demonstrate that those participants who journalled through their job loss experiences were more likely to find reemployment and were being rehired at a higher rate than those participants who did not journal. The researchers believe it was not that journalling increased the participants' motivation to conduct job searches, as both groups began and maintained their job searches at the same rate, but that journalling increased the quality of the job search. This heightened level of quality was produced by providing a place for participants to organize their thoughts, reflect on their previous position and employment experiences, and time to process the psychological impact of losing one's job. Journalling allowed these participants space to work through any anger or fear they may have experienced in losing their jobs; thus obtaining closure and achieving a new perspective before moving on to their next employment endeavour.

Other researchers have also discussed the benefits of journalling. Berry and Black's (1993) findings, for example, illustrate that disclosing fears and telling long-held secrets led their participants through a process of self-understanding and self-acceptance. Flemons and Green (2002) conclude that personal writing allows an individual to work through problems, increase their insight, and create greater understandings of the self. Progoff (1975) presents journalling as a way to gain self-knowledge and validation, identify personal resources,

encourage self-reliance and personal growth, and achieve a greater sense of how our lives are linked to larger society. While these authors substantiate the increased levels of self-understanding and validation that occur through journalling, does the literature support the therapeutic potential of journalling?

Pennebaker (1997) writes extensively about the many benefits and value of writing and talking as a therapeutic process. He has found through various studies that discourse surrounding upsetting experiences, although it may be stressful at the time, can produce long-term improvements in mood and reduce feelings of distress by leading to changes in behaviour or other forms of activism. For instance, his studies reveal that students who journal through their stress demonstrate improvements in grades, university staff members who journal exhibit lower absenteeism, and again, those who journalled through unemployment obtain reemployment at higher rates than those who do not. Pennebaker concludes that “writing about emotional experiences clearly influences measures of physical and mental health” (163).

In my examination of the many benefits of expressing our emotional experiences through writing; I also wonder if these same benefits could be gained through other mediums of expression? If we express our feelings through painting or dance, for instance, could we achieve the same therapeutic benefits as writing? Pennebaker (1997) does not believe this is possible. In his comparison between participants disclosing their feelings through writing and body movement, and those participants disclosing only through body movement, he confirms that the group disclosing through body movement reported only short-term improvements in well-being. The group who disclosed their experiences through writing and body movement, however, reported long-term improvements in well-being and

physical health. Pennebaker thus concludes that in order to increase long-term well-being, or benefit from the therapeutic process of disclosure, experience must be translated into language.

Although Pennebaker's conclusion may be substantiated by other researchers, his studies are not without limitations, particularly in considering whether or not cognitive and analytical processing, over expression of emotional experience, needs to occur in order to gain from the therapeutic benefits of disclosing through written language. Pennebaker (1997) believes that the act of writing, for instance, with or without the application of cognitive processing and analysis, increases the healing process of disclosure. However, Smith et al.(2005) challenge this view by studying the effects of writing solely from an emotional approach. In their study involving women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, they illustrate that writing about emotional experience often included a substantial amount of negative emotion in the participants' journals, and that symptoms of anxiety and depression increased in relation to the amount of this expressed negative emotion. Their study then implies that without cognitive and analytical processing those who express their emotions through writing may not be able to reframe and gain the therapeutic benefits normally associated with journalling.

Ulrich and Lutgendorf's (2002) study on journalling through stressful events, also compares the use of expressing emotional experience with that of cognitive processing and analysis. Their findings confirm that engaging cognitive processing and analytical thought is needed in order to experience decreased distress and depression, and an increase in self-reported health and psychological well-being. They discuss how cognitive and analytical processing assisted participants in understanding the relationship between their personal

situations and their larger societal community; leading to the formation of new meanings surrounding the events and situations. Ulrich and Lutgendorf also report that those participants who utilized expression of emotional experience reported little change in their mental or personal health; however, those that engaged emotional, cognitive and analytical processing reported an increase in positive growth over time, and an awareness regarding the value of the events and experiences. The authors therefore conclude that writing about a traumatic event with cognitive and analytical understanding assists the individual in perceiving the event in a more organized and focused way; thus allowing the person to put meaning to her experiences and increase her self-efficacy.

Progoff (1975) also suggests in his journal research that certain individuals need more direction in applying cognitive and analytical understanding to their journaling. His findings verify that without this help an individual's arguments can become cyclical, and no personal understanding or forward movement is gained. Klein's study "Stress, Expressive writing and Working Memory" corroborates that analytical thought is necessary in order for participants to organize and process thoughts surrounding stressful events, address their experiences, and be able to move forward with a greater sense of meaning or understanding.

The majority of these studies present the value of cognitive and analytical processing in addressing the emotions associated with translating experience into language, particularly the negative expression that is often expected when disclosing stressful or traumatic events. King (2002), however, challenges this expectation of negative emotion with her study on positive expression. She addresses the bias that benefiting from writing means having to process or write about 'negative' events or emotions. She believes that individuals can have positive emotions and insight during stressful or traumatic times; and that writing can help

individuals identify the positive aspects in their lives in order to cope with, and adjust to, the specific situation. Her findings confirm that participants were able to reframe past traumas in a positive light and continue to experience the substantial benefits of journaling; demonstrating that translating experience into language does not need to contain negative emotions or expressions.

King's study does provide evidence that there are varying approaches to journaling; illustrating that in order to benefit from journaling one does not always have to express their deepest, darkest, most negative emotions. However, it should be acknowledged that often those who journal *want* to express and address all the emotions and experiences that surround their traumas in order to feel a sense of closure surrounding their situations. For instance, in Stanton and Danoff-Burg's (2002) examination of the benefits of expressive writing through women's experiences with breast cancer, those participants who were told to only express themselves positively felt they could have benefited more from the expressive writing had they been able to discuss all of their feelings; including those they deemed to be negative. Furthermore, the group of participants who demonstrated benefiting the most from the expressive writing were those writing about the full experience or story of having breast cancer.

Davidson et al. (2002) also point out the advantages to expressing negative emotions in their research on the links between expressive writing, blood pressure and anger. Their findings show that writing helped participants process stressful situations by organizing their thoughts and moderating their expression of negative emotions, particularly anger. Those participants who could express how they were feeling in writing were able to form

greater understandings regarding their situations, decrease their anger experience, improve social interactions, and lower their blood pressure.

The major findings from the literature therefore substantiate the argument that it is necessary to possess the cognitive and analytical ability to process and understand one's thoughts in order to fully benefit from the act of writing and disclosing the negative emotions one may experience. Personally, I question if a line between cognitive and analytical processing and expression of emotional experience can be so easily drawn. I feel they all inter-connect in their roles and relevance in translating experience into language. For instance, when I take the time to write down my emotions, or the events of the day, I need to reflect on those experiences and feelings before I can translate them into writing. When I write my feelings, whether it is an angry rant or an insightful list of gratitude, I am organizing my thoughts through the process of writing. The act of writing how I feel, or the attempt to explain my situation, experiences, and thoughts, is therefore a process of expressing emotional experience, applying cognitive and analytical thought, and finally reframing my perspective on the situation.

This cognitive and analytical process can also take place at different times throughout the journaling process, for example, it may occur in the process of writing one entry, or it may be grasped at a deeper level when the last entry is read and then commented on within a new entry. I believe that writing itself encourages cognitive and analytical processing and that, while some individuals may need more direction in moving forward in their processing, it should not be assumed that expressing emotional experience does not lead to analytical outcomes (Klein 2002).

It is also necessary to recognize that not only are there different approaches to journalling (expression of emotional experience and/or cognitive processing and analysis, positive reframing and/or inclusion of all details and emotions); but also that different types of people benefit from these approaches more so than others. For instance, Lumley, Tojek and Macklem (2002) research the effects of written emotional disclosure among individuals that would be considered repressed or alexithymic, meaning they lack emotional awareness and understanding. They put forth that research on the benefits of expressive writing assumes the participants can engage in and recognize stressful events and related emotions. In contrast, the act of journalling becomes very difficult for those who are repressed, unable to recognize having any negative emotions and who lack the cognitive capacity to process their emotions. They conclude that those who benefit the most from written disclosure are those who have the ability to identify and process their emotions and whose expression is hindered by inhibition, such as individuals whose cultural history, social environment, or social context have taught them to suppress certain emotions such as anger, depression, anxiety, or grief.

While I agree that journalling is not suited to everyone, and that an individual has to find the approach or style of journalling that works best for her, Lumley, Tojek and Macklem's (2002) study does illustrate how journalling can fill a strong gap for women, and specifically mothers. Women have been, and continue to be, silenced by the social institutions and contexts in which they exist. Mothers are further hindered by the expectation that they should experience motherhood with happiness and joy and suppress the realities of depression, anxiety, and anger (Belenky et al. 1986; Hays 1984, Mauthner 2002; Oakley 1979).

The above studies have established the broad spectrum of benefits associated with journalling including: organizing thoughts, increasing understanding of one's situation, increasing one's level of self-understanding, self-acceptance, self-validation, and self-reliance, decreasing distress and depression, forming new perspectives, obtaining closures, reporting increased feelings of overall well-being, both physical and psychological, and increasing a person's sense of self-efficacy or empowerment. My responses to these studies have confirmed the benefits of journalling, the debates surrounding the expression of negative and positive emotion, the benefits and limitations of expressing emotional experience, cognitive and analytical processing, as well as the inter-connectedness of these approaches and structures. But how do these benefits and approaches affect women specifically? Do women find distinct advantages in journalling due to their gendered location in our society?

### *Women and the Benefits of Journalling*

The key benefits journalling provides women are safe space and voice. In numerous studies and explorations of women's journals and journalling, these two elements are most often mentioned or weighed heavily compared to other benefits listed. Throughout Western history women have struggled to have a voice in expressing their own experiences and perceptions; the diary became a way for women to express themselves and record their own history or story. It is an outlet for women to describe life from their own eyes, and to recognize, legitimize, and draw strength from their inner knowledge (Long 1999; Peterson & Jones 2001).

Suzanne Bunkers (2001), for instance, points out that the diary met "the need for an outlet of intense emotions like grief and anger, emotions not usually appropriate for public expression, particularly by a female" (16). It also provided a safe space where women could

explore, express, process, and transition through difficult times; often being unable to discuss these experiences publicly, or having experienced their feelings be dismissed as unimportant (Anderson 2001; Bunkers 2001; Schiwy 1994). Judy Long's (1999) research on women's self-writing, for example, also finds that women were often encouraged to journal by other women; in order to keep their sanity through the responsibilities and expectations of domestic roles, such as marriage and motherhood. Journalling offered a safe place for women to write all their thoughts and feelings surrounding these roles, even those they could not discuss with anyone.

It was also the case that societal expectations strongly suggested women use their time to write about things that were deemed more important or valuable than their own personal experiences and emotions (Anderson 2001; Bell 1989). This difference between what women 'should' be writing and what women wanted to write is explained in an entry by 'Mrs. Thrale', from the 18th century, in Linda Anderson's (2001) exploration of writing for the self. Mrs. Thrale writes,

All my friends reproach me with neglecting to write down such things as drop from him [Johnson] almost perpetually, and often say how much I shall some time regret that I have not done't with diligence ever since the commencement of our acquaintance: They say well, but ever since that time I have been the mother of children, and little do these wise men know or feel, that the crying of a young child, or the perverseness of an elder, or the danger however trifling of any one – will soon drive out of a female parent's head a conversation concerning wit, science or sentiment, however she may appear to be impressed by it at the moment. 39

The need for space and voice continues today as women remain restricted by societal pressures and expectations regarding what and how women express themselves. As Belenky et al. (1986) point out, the institutions in which women grow and develop often silence the various alternative ways women feel or experience. They argue that “[i]n everyday and professional life, as well as in the classroom, women often feel unheard even when they believe that they have something important to say” (5).

Schiwy’s (1994) exploration of journal use also explores this silencing and the need for a safe space to define transitions in life, express fears, anxieties and uncertainty, while maintaining personal identity and strength. She explains the potential of the personal journal,

It can provide a safe channel of thinking and creating one’s life beyond the boundaries and terms that society deems appropriate to female selfhood and behaviour in a given historical epoch. It may also serve as a mirror that reflects the radical discrepancies between the “truths” of the public realm (for “truths”, read the prevailing perspectives of those who hold power) and the actual daily experience of everyone else; women and all so-called minorities (a misnomer of course, because in reality it is the privileged perspective that is itself the minority viewpoint). 235

The importance of having voice, and having the space to describe life in one’s own terms is expressed by one participant in Stanton and Danoff-Burg’s study (2002) on expressive writing and cancer. This participant explains how journaling allowed her to “...think in *my own words* about what went on this past year. It also made me think of where my life is and where I want to go. I feel all of these things are difficult but overall a positive experience” (40) [Emphasis mine].

It is this need for voice and space that Belenky et al. (1986) argue is a key concern for women. Their findings illustrate that being silenced or being given the opportunity to speak was integral to their participants' sense of self-worth and validation. They explain,

We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind and self were intricately intertwined. 18

Journalling provides both the space and the voice women need to express themselves, develop self-understanding and self-validation, and increase self-efficacy and the ability to challenge the very societal structures that silence women in the first place. It is a place for agency; it allows women to recognize that their lives are remarkable and that they are worthy of the attention they give themselves (Culley 1985; Long 1999; Schiwy 1994). Schiwy verifies this position when she concludes,

Finally and perhaps most fundamentally, the very process of rendering her experience into language prompts the journal writer to take herself, her life, her experience, and her written voice seriously. Thus, in significant ways, journal writing can empower the writer. 235

The therapeutic potential and benefits of journalling, for all individuals and for women specifically, have been clearly presented in the literature. Research has been completed on applying its potential to various stressful contexts such as cancer and other forms of terminal illness, job loss, divorce, anger management, as well as social and institutional prejudices. However, the therapeutic potential of journalling has not been applied to the context of motherhood. While there has been some exploration regarding the need to write, or engage in the process of creative writing by women who are also mothers

(Susan Rubin Suleiman's *Risking Who One Is* and Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born* are excellent examples of this particular exploration), the focus in these works is directed more toward the conflict women face in motherhood as professional writers.

Suleiman (1994), for example, discusses the ambivalence, guilt, and conflicting obligations confronted when mothers try to balance the care of their children with their need to work creatively and write. She discusses a splitting of identities, where women can not be both writer and mother, but must be either or; placing the women's voice and needs against the child's needs. She continues that with this splitting of identities, and the pressure to follow the unrealistic expectations that accompany the mothering role, a woman's voice is often ignored. This conflict of obligations or splitting of identities, however, not only speaks to 'mother-writers' but could easily be applied to a diverse range of mothers. Suleiman, though, is specifically speaking from a "writer's" perspective, calling for "more interviews, more diaries, more memoirs, essays and reminiscences by writing mothers" (22). Her focus is the relationship between writing and motherhood, the ambivalence and conflict experienced by 'women writers' as they transition through motherhood.

Rich (1995), also discusses her struggles in needing to pursue her career as a writer and feeling suppressed by her obligations as a mother. She clearly describes the ambivalence of mothering: loving a child so passionately while at the same time feeling such anger toward the expectations and responsibilities that are intertwined with the role of mother. She speaks of trying to meet the ideal of the unconditional mother and the realities of wanting to write and work for her 'self'. Rich explains,

And I would feel his want at such a moment as fraudulent, as an attempt moreover to defraud me of living even for fifteen minutes as myself. My anger would rise; I would feel the futility of any attempt to salvage myself, and also the inequality between us: my needs always balanced against those of a child, and always losing. 23

The experience or moment that Rich shares with us is again one that many mothers could identify with in times when they are trying to take a moment for themselves, or more often, when they are not working for the self but working to maintain their home, family, and other responsibilities. However, Rich's situation is again discussed within the context of a 'writing mother'. The 'writing mother' she and Suleiman discuss is not a 'journalling-mother' but a professional writing and working mother.

The distinction I am making here between women journalling and women as "writers", is very important. Journalling is a writing style that is available to all those who can write, and can spare a few moments to jot down their thoughts. It can include creative writing such as poems or stories, or expressions of emotions, feelings or thoughts of the day (Larsen et al. 2003; Schiwy 1994). And while diaries and journals are at times considered within the genre of literature; there is no active intent to have the writing published, or read by the public, at the time the author engages in her writing (Bunkers 2001; Flemons & Green 2002; Schiwy 1994). The writing which is discussed by Suleiman or Rich, I would argue, is a writing that has an intention or expectation to be published.

Furthermore, although Rich does use her personal journal entries to support the experiences and emotions she felt throughout her transitions as a mother, and through her analysis of motherhood as an institution; she does not analyse or examine the role journalling plays her life. Fore example, she shares the following entry from her journal

which exemplifies the various emotions many women feel as mothers, but often cannot claim outwardly due to the constraining ideal of Western motherhood,

My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alteration between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness. Sometimes I seem to myself, in my feelings toward these tiny guiltless beings, a monster of selfishness and intolerance. Their voices wear at my nerves, their constant needs, above all their need for simplicity and patience, fill me with despair at my own failures, despair too at my fate, which is to serve a function for which I was not fitted. And I am weak sometimes from held-in rage.... 21

While Rich's entry demonstrates the potential of journaling for expressing, processing, and reflecting on one's feelings and experiences, particularly those that would be deemed inappropriate to share publicly, she does not discuss the benefits she experienced journaling, or why she journals. The journal is not the subject of her discussion.

For Rich and Suleiman, the underlining discussion of their texts relates to women who write as a profession, or who identify as professional writers. My discussion, however, addresses what is missing: the broader aspect of personal writing that applies to any woman who sits and jots down thoughts, creative pieces, or expresses herself through journaling. It also confronts the gap in research which ignores the specific use of journaling for women working through the often difficult transitions of mothering.

As I have presented through my review of the literature, journaling provides the needed space and voice for women to explore what their cultural and social contexts have often hindered them from outwardly discussing: the ambivalence, shock, and struggles of

motherhood. In their journals women can safely discuss, and provide record of, the external pressures that are placed on women by our Western ideal of motherhood.

The journal also presents a glimpse of how women internalize the societal expectations and ideals of their societies. For instance, Juhasz (2003) comments on how the ideals of motherhood often cause women to split their identities, a matter that is depicted clearly in Rich and Suleiman's work, in which both discuss the either/or of writing and mothering. Through journalling, however, women can process and resolve this splitting by acknowledging, understanding and sustaining their multiple selves and identities through their writing and into their daily lives (Juhasz 2003; Schiwy 1994).

Rich's (1995) analysis of motherhood also illustrates the intertwining of external and internal pressures women feel as mothers. Due to the overwhelming inundation women face at home, school, work and various contexts and institutions, regarding societal expectations and ideals of motherhood, women internalize these pressures, often accepting external expectations and responsibilities as their own despite recognizing the impossibility of fulfilling these expectations. This position is depicted through Rich's eldest son's reaction to the entries she included in her book, and her response to his reaction,

“You seemed to feel you ought to love us all the time. But there *is* no human relationship where you love the other person at every moment.” Yes, I tried to explain to him, but women-above all, mothers-have been supposed to love that way. [Emphasis in original text] 23

While women may find it difficult to challenge both the external and internal pressures of the Western ideals of motherhood, journals certainly offer a space where they can record, reflect, and become aware of these constructed expectations. This examination

and state of reflection can lead to greater self-understanding, self-validation, and self-efficacy, which in turn has the potential for outward agency and advocacy (Long 1999; Peterson & Jones 2001; Schiwy 1994). It becomes apparent then, through the exploration and analysis of the literature on mothering and journalling, that journal writing meets a need for mothers who are silenced through their societal and cultural contexts. The analysis also illustrates that motherhood is a traumatic and stressful event for many women, and therefore should be included in future research regarding the therapeutic benefits of journalling and expressive writing.

Although the literature supports my belief that journalling has the potential to provide mothers with a space to explore and strengthen their voices, I do question the degree of privacy or safety that a journal can provide. A journal is a book that, if found, could easily be read by anyone; illustrating the tenuous ideal of privacy often associated with journalling (Bunkers 2001).

#### *Privacy, Audience, and Other Barriers to Journalling*

The dichotomy between public and private is difficult to maintain in the context of journalling and keeping diaries. As I presented earlier in this section, many diaries and journals were created with the full intention to have them read by future generations, or as a semi-public record of life and/or religious events. It is also common knowledge that a journal can be read at anytime by any individual who dares break the unsaid rule that 'diaries are private'. (Alexander, Bunkers & Muhanji 1989; Anderson 2001; Bunkers 2001; Smith et al. 2005; Larsen et al. 2003; Renfro 2008).

This knowledge of a potential audience, either intended or not, blurs the line between private and public even further; as what is considered as personal prose, or writing

for the 'self', is written with the possibility of public critique. Suzanne Bunkers, for instance, has discovered through her own research and experiences studying women's diaries that there are indicators that support the concept that the writer intended her diary to be read, or felt the pressures of 'potential' readers. These indicators are often presented by self-censorship, changing writing styles, or editing entries; substantiating that often what is not said is just as important as what is said. She explains this in her conversation with Alexander and Muhanji (1989),

I see some of that in diaries when a woman starts writing in formal language that sounds as if it's coming straight out of a prayer or epic poem. It's so different from the other language she's been using in her other diary entries. It's a shock to my system when I'm reading this because the language changes so much, and now the more I see it, I think, "Now here we go; she's going to be careful about what she's saying. She's trying to keep something at a distance. Maybe she's afraid to feel whatever the feelings are." 105

This caution in expressing the self, due to the fear or influence of the potential audience, occurs in many diaries and journals, and is a difficult barrier to overcome. Peterson and Jones (2001) confirm that attitudinal and situational barriers greatly influenced the way their female participants engaged in journalling. Their research illustrates that as many women have been taught to be silent; they had difficulty trusting a space where they were expected to freely express themselves. Other barriers in their findings included poor writing skills, and the potential of 'outside' readers. The participants felt nervous about expressing themselves through a medium that could be read, and in which they may not be available to explain or defend their positions to the reader(s). These barriers caused participants to select their words carefully; removing anything that they would not want others to see.

Other researchers also find that women edit or add comments to their past entries; illustrating the degree in which the influence of a potential audience continues to affect women's journaling for the "self" (Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985; Long 1999)

Personally, I have never intended anyone to read my own journals; however, I have felt the presence of the 'potential audience', the audience of my 'self', the imagined audience, or those who may read my journals without permission or after I die (if I have not destroyed them before that point). This awareness or presence has caused barriers to my own writing, limiting or shaping the way I express myself. These barriers are indicated by apologies, disclaimers, self-censorship, a change in my style of writing, and corrections or additions to past journal entries. They also counter the notion previously discussed that journals are a private space where individuals can express themselves freely. (Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985; Long 1999; Peterson & Jones 2001).

These same indicators, however, can also be used to learn a great deal about the issues, experiences, and topics that the diarist is addressing, or avoiding. They can also disclose pertinent information about how women felt, dealt with various situations, and expressed themselves privately. For instance, styles of writing used can speak volumes about how the writer was feeling; large bold letters that have indented, or even pushed through, the page are tangible signs of anger or frustration (Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985). I know that in my own journal entries my writing style also reflects my state of being as I write; I use bold letters when I express frustration; my writing size increases when I am tired and more careless with my style; I write or print clearly when I want to express a particular point; and the thoughts that I may be afraid to write become small print, or may be scratched out after writing them down.

These types of acts within journalling are not uncommon as individuals continue to be conscious of the gaze of others and the possibility of external judgement (Alexander, Bunkers & Muhanji 1989; Bell 1989; Peterson & Jones 2001). The barriers created by potential readers are difficult to overcome, and at the same time disclose many insights about the writers themselves. These barriers, and the weakened dichotomy between the private and public in journalling, do not outweigh the benefits of writing for the self. If these barriers are accepted, addressed, or challenged, women can continue to benefit from the therapeutic act of translating experience into language.

For instance, Larsen et al. (2003) demonstrate that by supporting each other in their writing, claiming physical space for writing, establishing “writing rituals”, and by “ensuring safe storage for the journal” their participants were able to overcome their initial concerns and limitations surrounding journalling (284). They also describe the risks of not journalling, even in face of outside readers,

We shield our writing from the potentially derisive gaze of others and are thereby robbed of the opportunity to read our own written voice. In leaving life experience unwritten, we lose a potentially rich opportunity to organize, learn from, and witness our experiences, thoughts, and feelings from another more external perspective and to discover the changes that this might make for us. In short, we lose this unique opportunity for a relationship with self. 284

I believe that this position particularly relates to mothers, who are often already robbed of the opportunity to express themselves freely regarding the various realities of motherhood they experience. Mothers, for example, are expected to follow the ideal of Western motherhood, and are readily dismissed when they speak out or challenge its

unrealistic image that it is a time of pure joy and happiness. While journalling may not fulfill its own ideal of privacy, and the risk of potential readers is a reality, the benefits of writing far outweigh the risks of losing a space to claim a voice and translate our experiences into language. Bell (1989), for instance, recognizes the importance for women to write, reflect, and process their experiences and emotions through her work on journal-writing seminars for women. In the face of various barriers, writing styles and structures, she interjects “[b]ut any entry in a journal, however brief and however widely spaced from the previous or subsequent entry, is valuable, both at the moment of composition and ever after” (83).

### *Conclusion & Further Thoughts*

The studies reviewed in this section establish the many positive benefits witnessed when individuals journal through stressful and traumatic times. Journalling also provides the distinct need for voice and space to women who are often silenced by their social and cultural environments and institutions; increasing women’s opportunities to organize their thoughts, reflect on their experiences, and gain a sense of self-validation and strength. It is evident, however, that the literature on journalling has failed to consider motherhood as a potentially traumatic and stressful time for women. This lack of consideration therefore links to the literature's failure in understanding and recognizing the potential positive outcomes in applying journalling to the many experiences and transitions of mothering. My discussion has addressed this gap by presenting journalling as a needed space where women can explore, reflect and process their mothering experiences, gaining voice and self-efficacy. I hope that future research on journalling will take these arguments into account, in order to provide mothers with an easily accessible outlet to voice their own stories.

The existing barriers to writing, and the risk of potential readers, have been presented as concerns that need to be addressed but do not necessarily hinder an individual's attempt or desire to journal. This intertwining dilemma of private/public, safety/risk, and space/voice is clearly evident in journalling; where an author writes for the self but also with the awareness of potential readers. Bunkers (2001), for example, explains that “[a]s a form of life-writing, the diary crosses that often blurred (and sometimes imaginary) border between the public and the private, the literary and the historical” (29). I wonder, however, if this blurring of ‘imaginary’ borders, and intertwining dilemmas of private/public and safety/risk, exist in other forms of personal writing. What is the effect in relation to barriers, self-censorship, and the line between public and private, when the author writes of the self, for the self, and with the awareness of an ‘intended’ audience? Can a line be drawn between journalling and other self- or life-writings such as autobiographies, narratives and autoethnographies? These are questions I will address in the following section of this chapter which examines the literature available on autoethnography and self-writing.

### *Autoethnography*

This section will include a review, reaction and exploration of the literature on autobiographical research as it relates to my use of autobiographical forms within my thesis, such as personal journal entries and, to some degree, memory or re-telling of events. I will include brief contextual and descriptive information on the elements of autobiographical research, as well as consideration toward the linked methods and theories of postcolonialism, and discourse analysis. For instance, researchers and creators of personal narratives and other forms of autobiographies have looked to postcolonialism in order to

understand and provide space to those within minority cultures, thereby creating a dialogue and an awareness between the voices from minority and dominant cultures (Brown 1998; Kremer 2003; McEwan 2001). Discourse analysis also allows for the interpretation and review of oral and written work by raising awareness around the influence of dominant cultures within language as well as the ways in which we use language and the intentions behind written expression (Barker 2001; Mills 1997; Tannen 1994).

My main focus in this section, however, is situated in the functions and debates within autobiographical research, their relevance to mothering and journaling, and the differences between the genres of life-writing. Questions I will consider within this focus, and in examination of autobiographical methods, include: Is autobiographical research self-indulgent, or does it contribute to a broader societal perspective and understanding, through the sharing of personal experiences? How does autobiographical research address the dilemma of being both researcher and participant? How does it address issues of self, truth, and the deceptions that occur within written language? How can we differentiate autobiographical forms, such as autoethnography or personal narratives, from journaling? Where can we draw the line between these various types of personal writings, if a line can be drawn at all? How will these methods apply to my own thesis and use of autobiographical forms?

I will review the literature within these contexts, relying on a selection of readings from the wider range included in the bibliography. It should be noted as well, that although issues of truth and self within autobiographical research will be presented within this section, further examination will take place in the final sections of this chapter dealing with reflexivity and subjectivity.

### *Contexts of Autobiographical Research*

In recent evaluations of the autobiographical canon, postcolonial theorists have revealed the need for new terms regarding autobiographical research. For instance, autobiography can be translated to mean 'self-life-writing' (Wong 1992), but this translation does not necessarily consider the various forms of self story-telling or writing that occur across nations and cultures. Nor does it define the varying concepts of the self that exist outside and within dominant cultures, such as the perceptions of the individual or communal self (Wong 1992). 'Life-writing', for example, may be used to account for diaries, letters, and personal narratives produced by 'ordinary people' (Rak 2005); however, writing remains the primary expression of the 'self', or personal experiences within traditional autobiographical research. Where then do cultures fit in that have traditionally used art, pictographs, and oral histories to narrate their lives and lived experiences (Wong 1992)? In using journal entries to present my personal experiences, for instance, I have also chosen, whether consciously or not, to follow the academic model of valuing written documentation over oral or memory-based stories of knowledge and experience (Alexander, Bunkers & Muhanji 1989).

Autoethnography or 'self-culture-writing' (Wong 1992) also needs to be reconsidered in its concepts of self, and perception of expression through 'writing'. For example, Etherington (2004) examines the description of autoethnography as a combination of ethnography and autobiography, as the writer may integrate her own personal experiences within her writings about others with whom she associates or identifies. Although writing is again the traditional form of expression included here, Etherington's examination of autoethnography through the process of becoming a 'reflexive researcher' demonstrates the

ability to consider the self within a specific or broad frame of reference, thereby placing autoethnography as “both a method and a text” (140).

Autoethnography, having developed and merged with various feminist methodologies and theories, is also linked to the process of using personal experience to contribute to larger social and cultural understandings, and various alternative forms of knowing (Ellis & Bochner 2000; Wall 2006; Wall 2008). Postcolonial theories and methods, further recognise the potential of personal narratives in creating an understanding and awareness regarding the distinct voices, perspectives and experiences of individuals and communities, sometimes over shared experiences, and other times when common ground does not exist (McEwan 2001).

This links strongly to my thesis, in that I am one mother speaking of my own experiences within this role, thereby placing myself and my experiences within the broader con/text of motherhood and journalling. While many forms of autobiography include remembering and telling a story from the past, one that is formed with a beginning and an end, my thesis offers narratives that were written as the events happened, and do not portray my ‘life story’ but moments of my life during a stressful and ambiguous time. For this reason, my research is positioned more closely to autoethnography than autobiography.

#### *The Functions and Debates within Autoethnography and Autobiographical Research*

As I discussed, autoethnography has developed in relation to, and heavily influenced by, feminist theories and processes. Its purpose is to use personal experience to contribute to larger understandings of society and alternative systems of knowing (Ellis & Bochner 2000; Wall 2006). It has also been considered a more contemporary term for a precise form of autobiography that allows readers to connect with the researcher through similar

experiences, self-reflection, and self-awareness (Elis & Bochner 2000; Gooze 1992; Sparkes 2002; Wall 2006). By telling my own story in relation to mothering and journalling I hope to bring awareness to the continued conflicts between the expectations and realities of becoming a mother, and the therapeutic and empowering benefits of journalling through motherhood.

Autoethnographies, as well as autobiographies, offer a look into the private lives of women, thereby making these lives and experiences public (Mezei 2005), or in famous feminist terms, “making the personal political” (Carol Hanisch 1970). This term was included in Carol Hanisch’s (1969) essay response to the accusations that the women’s meetings she was attending at the time were simply ‘therapy’ or ‘personal’ group sessions, and could not be considered as political contributions to the women’s movement. In her response Hanisch describes the impact these meetings made on her perceptions of herself, her life, and the movement,

I believe at this point, and maybe for a long time to come, that these analytical sessions are a form of political action. I do not go to these sessions because I need or want to talk about my “personal problems.” In fact, I would rather not. As a movement woman, I’ve been pressured to be strong, selfless, other-oriented, sacrificing, and in general pretty much in control of my own life....

So the reason I participate in these meetings is not to solve any personal problem. One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution. I went, and I continue to go to these meetings because I have gotten a political understanding

which all my reading, all my “political discussions,” all my “political action,” all my four-odd years in the movement never gave me. I’ve been forced to take off the rose colored glasses and face the awful truth about how grim my life really is as a woman. I am getting a gut understanding of everything as opposed to the esoteric, intellectual understandings and *noblesse oblige* feelings I had in “other people’s” struggles.

Hanisch’s response not only affirms the fact that the personal is political, but also ties into the need to recognise the interconnection of our personal experiences with the broader context of society, culture and ‘other’. My own writings offer a look into the private experiences of one individual, while discussing the public contexts of the gendered ideals of motherhood.

These gendered ideals can also be considered within the context of space and autoethnography, as Mezei (2005) affirms in her examination of the importance and symbolism of gendered spaces and the idea of ‘home’ in autobiographical practices. In her chapter, she reveals the intertwining of constructing identity through writing and the space in which a woman writes. She argues that writing autobiographies as women can blur the lines of public and private spaces, as well as what is valued as legitimate forms of work. For example she states,

...it is important to review domestic spaces as sites of epiphany, revelation, personal interaction, and change, to investigate these “domestic effects,” and to recognize the domestic as monumental rather than merely incidental, ornamental, and marginal in the life writing of both men and women. 82

She also explains that,

...reflections illuminate not only the role of domestic space in the evolution of a writer's identity, but also the imaginative possibilities of ordinary spaces. Narrating the home accordingly offers a convenient and familiar medium for investigating self and subjectivity by means of the intersection of space and time through memory and the histories and generations of the house's inhabitants and of space. 83

As Mezei reveals, the interplay of space and the construction of identity weaves throughout various forms of personal life writing. For example, I often journal in my bedroom, a space I have always considered as a sanctuary. Growing up as the youngest of four, my bedroom was my place to retreat from my siblings or other family activities, and it continues to be a private place for me, with a door that can close. However, in reality, I share this space as a partner and a mother; during the day the bedroom becomes a storage area for clothes needing to be folded, the bed becomes play equipment for climbing and jumping, and at night, a safe haven for children who have had nightmares, or cats who seek a warm place to sleep. The fragmented nature of shared 'private' space, then links to the fragmented nature of constructing identity through writing and sharing segments of this 'private' writing through autobiographical methods, such as autoethnography, or in this case, selections of journal entries (Etherington 2004; Gooze 1992; Mezei 2005; Schiwy 1994).

Despite of, or with, this fragmentation, I will follow other women writers, and use my writing as a form of resistance, a means to take up space, and a way to create meanings that will broaden my own, and I hope other's, sensitivities to the world around us (Buss 2005; Perreault & Kadar 2005). Buss (2005) for instance, examines the way in which agency develops from translating experience into language, in her chapter "Katie.com". Buss

illustrates how discursive acts can lead to more conscious agency and reflexivity within lived life, in her discussion of the ways in which a young girl, Katie, regained a sense of self-efficacy and developed new perspectives and more mature identities through her on-line personal narrative. She points out that Katie was able to develop reflexivity and cognitive processing, that led to a stronger sense of consciousness, resistance and agency within a broader context of life, through preparing to share her own story on-line, a preparation that would involve writing, reworking, rewriting, and reprocessing her story.

This agency, as Buss explains, does not rely on individualistic models, but a learned ability to link together the meaningful perspectives that derive from the dominant and non-dominant discourses that surround us. Posting her personal narrative on-line also allowed Katie to take back the space that had originally caused her victimization, creating resistance, and further supporting her personal agency. Personal narratives, therefore, create and reveal agency or a desire for agency, by showing how people create perspectives and ideals for themselves, how they manage or take charge of these perspectives, and how people participate in the world around them (Buss 2005).

Buss' position supports Sara Mills' (1997) analysis of discourse and the fact that we 'do' discourse rather than 'be' subjected to it. She affirms women's ability to make strong and strategic choices in their self-presentation and interaction with others through discourse and writing. Mills explains that we engage in discourse by creating different meanings or perspectives for ourselves and bringing these meanings forward to others. She continues to explain that this engagement therefore assists women in constructing stronger identities, taking back space, shifting from victimization to awareness, developing insight and creating sites for agency.

It is important to recognise the significance of women's personal writing, whether it is in the form of autoethnography, autobiography, or personal diary entries. As Buss and Mills have demonstrated, taking space, in this case written space, is in itself an act of resistance as women often do not have the same opportunities as men to express themselves. However, resistance also stems from women's active engagement within discourse and their use of language (Buss 2005; Mills 1997). Writing is also a reflexive process, one that I have found helpful in working through emotions, perceptions, and the developing new insights. The inclusion of my journal entries will demonstrate this process, reveal the strategic usages of words, styles, and omissions, and present the creation of, or desire for, agency through personal writing. (Buss 2005; Mills 1997; Perreault & Kadar 2005; Tannen 1994).

Although I have discussed the functions of autoethnography in blurring the lines between the spaces and roles considered to be private, public, or gendered, and its ability in creating agency, reflexivity, and broader cultural understandings, the validity of work involving autoethnography remains contested within the social sciences as well as other academic disciplines, often being called self-indulgent, elitist, or a means of self-therapy (Mykhalovskiy 1997; Sparkes 2002; Flemons & Green 2002).

Researchers Mykhalovskiy (1997) and Sparkes (2002) both address the accusation of self-indulgence through their own reflective pieces. For instance, Mykhalovskiy argues that those who charge autoethnography with being self-indulgent do not recognise the accessibility and opportunity it provides for readers to connect and interject their own stories with the experiences of the author. This accessible space therefore creates insight into personal experience, social experience, and the manners in which we construct

knowledge. He also requests a critical examination of conventional standards of research and knowledge. Through this examination, it becomes evident that the process of conventional academic research, which is largely directed to a small population of other academics with the intention of proving one's level of knowledge, skill, and worth, could also be charged with self-indulgence.

Sparkes (2002), uses his own experiences defending the validity of autoethnography to social scientists and other members of academic fields of study, to comment further that autoethnography is a mix of biography with sociology or social culture. He believes that the accusations of self-indulgence stem from misunderstandings regarding its nature, function and contribution to social and cultural knowledge. He explains that it is a valid form of research as it encourages acts of witnessing, empathy, and connections that extend beyond the self, thereby contributing to social change through sociological understanding.

In returning to Etherington's (2004) chapter on autoethnography, the argument that autoethnography benefits others by providing insight into certain circumstances, situations, or experiences through telling one's personal story is also strongly supported. Telling our own stories, she explains, can also re-affirm or re-educate ourselves regarding past experiences. However, Etherington does not deny the risks and difficulties of conducting autobiographical research and writing. She addresses the concerns of validity, exclusion/inclusion, but also recognizes the personal difficulties in sharing a story that unavoidably involves revealing the experiences of others. Etherington does not attempt to find solutions to these issues, but rather suggests it is a matter of weighing the risk of the outcome with the gain of sharing experiences that may benefit others.

I appreciate the concerns that exist surrounding the validity of using personal experience for research. It is difficult to measure personal experience as scholarship. How can we gauge whether or not it has a broader impact on social and cultural systems and knowledge, or whether or not it inspires activism or creates opportunities for larger-scale social change? Can my experiences influence or be reflective of a larger population?

The researchers I have mentioned in this section are just a handful of the numerous academics who believe personal experience can be used to influence societal change, specifically regarding the lives of under-represented groups such as First Nations, immigrant populations, or the Gay/Lesbian/Queer/Bi/Trans communities (Brown 1998; Comeau 2004; Gabb 2004; Kremer 2003; McEwan 2001). Sharing our stories also assists in advancing our understandings of our present society, creating agency, and revealing the tenuous state of our conventional constructions of knowledge (Buss 2005; Etherington 2004; Mezei 2005; Mykhalovskiy 1997; Perreault & Kadar 2005; Sparkes 2002).

Personally, I too have found that I can connect with the experiences or thoughts presented in autoethnographies, whether or not they are written by people in personally comparable social locations or circumstances. I feel empathy, inspiration to self-reflect, to make changes in my own life, or to become involved in varying types of co-operative activism in reading the personal stories of others. I therefore feel strongly that personal experience is a valid source for research, and while I recognize the need to be aware that personal knowledge is also constructed, I believe it offers a deeper exploration, linking the reader directly to the researcher through emotion and experience. However, writing or conducting autobiographical research does not come without risks. The following section will explore the risks and issues as they pertain directly to my research.

### *Linking Literature to Personal Research*

In reading the various texts included in the autobiographical literature, I was most concerned with finding examples or information that could be effectively applied to my own research. I also took particular interest in the considerations and explanations given to the complex role of 'researcher as participant' that is often included within autobiographical work. For example, I reflected on the following questions throughout my research and review: Can a parallel be drawn between the rapport, responsibility, and reciprocity of feminist interviewing or other qualitative methods, and the considerations a researcher gives herself as participant? Where or how can a researcher draw a line between the roles of researcher and participant, when she is both? What types of ethical questions emerge when the researcher becomes the subject? How can confidentiality be dealt with effectively when the researcher is dealing with highly personal matters, that again, involve other individuals who do not consider themselves 'participants'? How are concepts of 'self' and 'truth' addressed within autobiographical works?

I found that these same questions were posed by most of the researchers dealing with autobiographical research or autoethnographies; however, like Etherington (2004), few attempted to offer solutions to these questions, but rather left the perplexities for readers and other researchers to process through their own work. (Bass 2002; DeVault 1997; Flemons & Green 2002; Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy 1997).

Sarah Wall (2008), for example, examines the many ethical dilemmas of autobiographical writing in her article "Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography". She touches on concerns regarding the validity of self-narrative, and the vulnerability of sharing personal experiences and conducting research that may involve

representing personally involved but non-participating subjects. For instance, she indicates that in sharing our own experiences we place ourselves in vulnerable positions by revealing a personal part of ourselves to known and unknown readers with no possible mechanism for retrieval or rebuttal. Wall also identifies the difficulties she faced in utilizing research that did not just involve her own life, but also her son's. She discusses the challenge in balancing her role as researcher with her responsibilities as a mother, who wanted to protect her son and his privacy. Although she recognizes that biographical research is often justified by arguing that individuals do not exist independently from their social contexts and therefore can be used to further sociological understanding, this same argument also places the researcher within an ethical dilemma of knowing that we cannot share our own story without sharing the stories of others. Wall does not offer answers or solutions to these issues, but does imply that the potential of benefiting others by sharing her story outweighs these risks and concerns.

In sharing my experiences with journalling and mothering, I am in a similar situation to Wall, as these experiences involve the lives of my two sons and my partner. How will I address the fact that my partner, and at some point in the future, my children may take offense to what I write, or what I have selected to share? Part of this discussion will be given more detail in the following chapter; however, I position myself closely to Etherington (2004), Wall (2008), and others, in believing the potential to benefit others outweighs this risk. I also recognize I will need to balance my role as researcher, participant, and mother in representing those with whom I am personally involved. The experiences and entries I choose to share will be selected with care and consideration to effectively support my theories and positions, as well as my family's privacy and well-being.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) discuss circumstances of 'Researcher as Subject' and the intertwining of these roles within autoethnography. They also direct their readers to the reciprocal relationships between researcher and subject within qualitative methods, and how this may be used to work within these two interconnected roles. For example, as researchers, Ellis and Bochner respect the essential position participants play within their research and so suggest inviting participants to actively take part in varying stages of the research by adding, commenting, interpreting, reading and responding to transcripts, and by omitting, rewriting, or changing minds. They also suggest protecting participants privacy by changing names or collapsing information or stories provided so that it is presented in a broader sense.

These suggestions are not new to qualitative research in sociological or feminists studies. Ann Oakley (1981) for example, felt that, as a researcher, it was important to have a more collaborative relationship with her participants than traditional sociological methods provided. She often would engage in her participants' questions or concerns; allow them to change their names and personal information; and recognize their cooperation within the research.

As a researcher and subject, I will attempt to acknowledge and respect these intertwining roles, allowing myself to be pushed when I (the researcher) require more information, and respecting my need to omit, rewrite, or change my mind, when I (the subject) need security in sharing my personal experiences and stories.

In this attempt, however, I also need to ask who the 'I' or 'self' is behind these two roles, and my shared experiences. Autobiographical work relies on "self-writing" but who is the 'self' and can that self be considered a 'true' representation of the individual?

Anderson (2001) dismisses the idea of an “original and authentic self” as “romantic autobiography” (53). Explaining that the autobiographical ‘self’ is looking to perform and to create forms of dramatic effect by re-staging events and experiences, if not, it would simply move forward seeking greater understanding through cognitive processes. Mullen Sands (1997) also supports this view asserting the need for autobiographical narratives to be “understood and appreciated as performances of identity in the present moment” (51).

If, however, one wants to move forward in their understanding, where should they begin? Brosman (2005) presents that in writing autobiography the author strives to restore her perceptions of her own life with her perceptions of her individual ‘self,’ and so in following this position, I believe re-staging is necessary as a starting point for cognitive processing, or any forms of reconciliation. A starting point, although needed, does not answer the question of ‘self,’ and as Brosman continues to point out, the ‘self’ presented needs to be critically examined, as each autobiographer makes choices of emphasis, de-emphasis, omissions, interpretations, judgements, embellishments, misrepresentations, and errors within her text, some intentionally, and some not.

How do we select our starting points? Can we provide a true representation of our ‘self’ or our stories? Perreault and Kadar (2005) state that our voices are constructed of multiple complex forms and elements, and therefore it would be impossible to address every aspect of our ‘selves’; instead we need to select and focus on only a few elements. But the risk in selecting, as I have found in my own research, includes censoring ourselves, which leads again to questions of ‘authentic’ self.

Gullette (2003) believes we begin with ‘ready-made’ stories, and so it is impossible not to auto-censor ourselves, as it is our desire and intent to present the best possible ‘self’.

Etter-Lewis (2000) in her analysis of 'self' in black women's narrative discourse, also discusses the desire for authors to present a positive self-image, multiple selves, or use language deceptively in order to impress the writer's audience. For instance, she illustrates how the author may suppress sensitive material, or use codes, styles and omissions in order to remake the self according to the social ideals and contexts that surround, instruct, and shape the author's perceived sense of self. She continues to explain that the notion of 'self' is constructed by multiple selves that are always evolving and shifting in response to external and internal pressures, such as family, social status, social landscapes, race, and gender.

Wong (1992) also supports this view, warning readers to be careful of concepts such as 'authentic' or 'genuine' as the self is continually shifting and changing. Wong explains that native perceptions of 'self' relate more to a concept of 'self-in-process', as identity is so complex it can not be fixed to a specific truth, event, or story. For instance, she explains that the narrator can not identify with, or express, a completed concept of self as this would be impossible, rather the narrator presents portions of the self, or of a person's life. The narrator is also aware of, and influenced by, the needs and expectations of her audience, an audience that is also shaped by cultural discourses, creating a collaboration between private and public selves.

Warnings of using concepts of 'truth' or 'authenticity' are also stressed in Barker and Galsinski's (2001) examination of discourse and identity. They argue that as audiences actively engage in readings and discourses, they also create their own meanings from those texts, increasing the potential of multiple meanings to be derived from those texts. To say then, that something or someone has not been presented in a "true" manner, is to place a value judgement on that presentation, implying that there is a "better" way to describe it

(18). However, they argue that being presented with a true or objective image of reality is not the aim of knowledge, but rather it is how we cope with knowledge. And so again, we represent the self that will best cope or fit with the context at hand. Mills (1997) also recognizes the diverse meanings brought forward by each individual, asserting her caution not to take discourse at face value, but to recognize how we actively engage with it, making our own perspectives, interpretations and positions.

Despite any efforts I make to freely express my experiences and thoughts, it is inevitable that I will self-censor. As the above researchers have stated, we are taught to and include, self-censoring with every expression, in order for our story to fit within the expectations of our audiences (Anderson 2005; Barker & Galasinski 2001; Etter-Lewis 2000; Gullette 2003; Mills 1997). It is impossible for me to present the full picture of my mothering and journaling experiences within the limited pages of this thesis, instead, I can only provide portions of this picture, portions of my 'self' (Brosman 2005; Perreault & Kadar 2005; Wong 1992). When I am choosing the portions to include, I am also very much aware of my academic audience and the expectations of this audience. I write within this context, and present knowledge that I feel will best fit, support and meet the expectations of this con/text. I, however, also expect that this audience, or any audience, will recognize that we are constructed of multiple, shifting selves, of 'selves-in-process', and so within my research and the pages of this thesis, I am presenting various forms and knowledge of a perceived 'self' (Etter-Lewis 2000; Gooze 1992; Wong 1992).

The 'self' I am presenting here simultaneously takes on the roles of participant and researcher, mother and academic. It also recognizes and utilizes the space that autobiographical and autoethnographic research provides in shifting between writing,

reading, reflecting and telling, a space that I have also found in journalling (Ellis & Bochner 2000; Etter-Lewis 2000; Long 1999; Mills 1997). Similar to the intertwining nature of my role as participant and researcher, the lines between autoethnographic research and journalling also remain ambiguous, at times seeming perpetually connected, and at others distinctly separate.

### *Distinguishing Autoethnographic and Autobiographical Research from Journalling*

Although journal entries have been used as valid sources of support in autobiographical research, such as autoethnography and personal narratives, there has been some debate as to where journalling ends and where autobiography begins. This debate has also been extended to question, along similar lines with accusations of 'self-indulgence', if autoethnography is simply a process of 'self-therapy' (Etter-Lewis 2000; Flemons & Green 2002; Wall 2008). For example, in a published four-part conversation Flemons and Green (2002) discuss the differences between journalling and autoethnography, confession and testimony, therapy and social research with other individuals attending a conference. The conversation raises interesting questions about where to draw lines in personal and social research, or if these lines could or should even be drawn. The conclusion that emerges from this conversation is that autoethnography is "going public" with a personal story that has been changed in order to incorporate theories and methods and recognise that personal experience "has relevance beyond the self" (Flemons & Green 2002: Part 3), whereas, journalling is a private form of writing, free from categories, theories, and methodologies, that lacks the cognitive questioning that autoethnography encourages (Flemons & Green 2002: Part 2).

While I agree with the argument that autoethnography can push and validate personal experience further than journalling, by taking it to a public sphere where it can provide for broader understandings of social or cultural systems, I do not believe that the relationship between autoethnography and journalling can be so easily separated, or that the act of categorizing these methods is necessary. Both journalling and autoethnography provide a space for translating feelings into written language, thereby giving voice to the self and the opportunity for self-reflection and self-awareness (Pennebaker 1997; Schiwy 1994; Sparkes 2002). Journalling is a cognitive process in that a person is constantly reflecting on their personal situation and obtaining insight through the act of expressing themselves and reviewing past entries. In this way journalling is a form of ever-changing autoethnography for the self. Both journalling and autoethnography create feelings of validity, and possibilities of awareness and insight into self, personal and social situations (Buss 2005; Etter-Lewis 2000; Long 1999; Mezei 2005).

In my case, my journal entries are being used as evidence to support and demonstrate the benefits of journalling or writing through experiences of motherhood. However, they also remain personal expressions and commentaries, free from outside critique and judgement, regarding my personal circumstances and experiences. So although I may be 'going public' with my story, it is really a junction of autoethnography and journalling, of private and public, a partial story of self, a place where the line is not so easily drawn.

The importance of the junction of private and public is examined by Long (1999), in her book *Telling Women's Lives*, where she asserts the significance and tension of self-writing for women. She explains that when women conduct autobiographical research they must shift between social ideals of being self-less and silent and their own desires for self-

discovery, voice, and contributing to their social contexts. Long argues that in writing about their daily lives, women bring validity and space to their work, a space that, for many women, has been pushed behind the scenes by the separation of the spheres. She also recognizes that this separation has caused silence and limitations surrounding women's voices, thereby creating feelings of risk or trespassing for those women that are read or heard through autobiographical work.

Journalling, however, can reduce this risk while continuing to provide a space for women to assert, celebrate, and validate themselves (Long 1999; Pennebaker 1997; Schiwy 1994). I make this suggestion in order to draw attention to the fact that although there are many interconnecting relationships between autoethnography and journalling, there are also many differences, some of which I have already discussed in previous sections of this reading response.

Etter-Lewis (2000) for instance, illustrates that personal letters and diaries often provide readers with more knowledge of the author's perceived self, as written correspondence provided a safe place for the author to freely express herself. She also points out that a key difference between traditional autobiography and letters or diaries is that the author of the letters and diaries usually knows her audience personally. For example, an individual writes to family, friends, or her'self', and the author of autobiography writes to an unknown or remote audience.

The arguments made distinguishing autobiographical research from private writings are valid, including the position that autobiography is created with the intent to 'go public' with our personal stories and experiences, while journalling remains within a 'safer' private realm. However, the potential of any audience, intimate or public, continues to influence

how we write, what we choose to disclose, and when we remain silent within our texts and our stories (Etter-Lewis 2000; Flemons & Green; Gooze 1992; Wong 1992). This then maintains the internal link between autoethnography and journalling, a link that can at times seem very remote and distinct and at others seem blurred and intertwining.

In discussing the ethical dilemmas, definitions, functions and debates that arise in autobiographical literature, I have also identified the ambiguity that exists in conducting autobiographical research. My methods in maintaining an awareness of this ambiguity, and addressing the issues mentioned here, as well as those brought up in the literature dealing with motherhood and journalling, will be given more attention in the remainder of this chapter.

#### *Introductions: Subject/Researcher and Reflexivity*

The main point of this chapter is to discuss my use of reflexivity as a research strategy within the contexts of my thesis. However, it is essential that the ingrained nature of subject/researcher in personal narratives be addressed before moving on to the specific qualities of reflexivity in this particular research. While my research may not involve all the characteristics of a personal narrative, using an empirical approach to my research, and including personal experiences and journal entries, places my research within the field of autoethnography. This position therefore provides a more personal approach to the analysis and presentation of the research; allowing for the use of first person narratives, but also creating questions, suspicions, and contradictions in a scholarly setting.

A strong division between researcher and subject has existed in the academic environment; however, in the past few decades feminist research has challenged the view that “objective” research is actually possible or that a researcher can remain personally

disengaged from her research while still considering it ethical and valid (Berger 2001; DeVault 1996; Oakley 1981; Wall 2008). It is quite common now for researchers to acknowledge their personal connections and involvement in the research, as well as collaborate with their participants, granting them opportunities to read, edit, omit, or offer commentary on transcripts of interviews, interpretations of data, and concluding thoughts (Berger 2001; DeVault 1996; Ellis & Bochner 2000; Long 1999; Reinharz 1992).

One method or strategy for dealing with, or encouraging, the collaborative nature of the Subject/Researcher relationship, is the use of reflexivity. Reflexivity is commonly used in feminist research to explore and expose the politics of representation; call into question findings, data, and social-locations (including gender, race, class etc), and produce knowledge or research that challenges its own methods, interpretations and constructions. It is also used to reflect on our own experiences in order to connect and build rapport with those whose lives or circumstances we are studying (Berger 2001; Doucet 1998; Oakley 1981; Pillow 2003; Reinharz 1992).

This collaborative and reflexive approach to research allows both participants and researchers to engage in the work, opening the doors to trusting and confiding in each other. The development of trust and openness also increases the exploration of sensitive topics, improves the credibility of the information acquired, and heightens feelings of connection between those involved (Berger 2001; Oakley 1981; Reinharz 1992). For example, Ellis, Kiessingner and Tillman-Healy's research on eating disorders (1997) uses reflexivity and collaboration to explore and gain understandings of emotionally sensitive experiences. They explain the development of rapport, trust and disclosure that occurs among researchers and participants within this approach, and also the willingness to encourage

participant or collaborator rights. Their research approach demonstrates how the lines and hierarchies between researcher and participant can be willingly blurred.

In embracing a more reflexive or collaborative research process, both researcher and participant can control their own stories by personally selecting what will be disclosed while respecting the other's right to privacy. This often means that researchers, and to a degree participants, must take personal disclosure at face value and be willing to share their own stories (DeVault 1997; Ellis, Kiessingner & Tillman-Healy 1997; Long 1999; Reinharz 1992). For instance, Berger (2001) explains this intertwined approach of collaboration and reflexivity within the ethnographic field when she states,

My goal is to show a process of interaction between me and my participants. The stories I write about my fieldwork put me in conversation with myself as well as with those I am researching. When researchers are open about their own personal stories, participants feel more comfortable sharing information, and the hierarchical gap between researchers and respondents formerly embraced in ethnographic work is closed. 507

I am also engaging in conversation and collaborating with myself through my research; and so I too need to reflect on, and be aware of, the process and willingness to share my own stories while respecting my rights to privacy. The approach of collaboration and reflexivity allows for the flexibility and recognition that both participants and researchers do not disclose all and that it is more important to study the context of our research and accept this reality than to focus our attention in seeking out 'falsehoods', or 'truths' (DeVault 1997; Ellis, Kiessingner & Tillman-Healy 1997; Oakley 1981; Reinharz 1992).

The reality of the calculated decisions made by participants and researchers, regarding disclosure and 'truth', is clearly depicted in the following section of Ellis, Kiessingner and Tillman-Healy's chapter (1997),

[Christine's Story] I began thinking about how much of myself I would reveal to her and what parts of my story I would conceal. I made a conscious decision to hold back certain aspects of my experience. I feared the depths of my own story I'd have to share to get at the emotionality of hers. I knew by revealing I would facilitate a connection between us. I also knew that by concealing certain aspects of my story I could protect myself. For whatever reason, I felt a strong urge to protect myself. 127

This section also presents the strong need we feel as individuals, whether researchers or participants, to protect ourselves and therefore conceal or self-censor particular aspects of our lives. In the process of selecting which journal entries I would use for this thesis, I too felt an urge to protect myself as well as those around me. This urge, however, is also mixed with a strong desire to share my feelings and experiences of motherhood as well as the potential of journalling in assisting with the transitions through those experiences. My story then includes my raw emotions as they were written at the time I felt them, but omits the specific details regarding my partner's, friends' and family's involvement. I made a conscious decision to omit these details in order to shield these people from the feelings and thoughts I had during a difficult and stressful time in my life, but also to protect myself from facing their reactions to these thoughts.

The desire to protect myself and hide specific information may seem to contradict my desire to disclose and share my experiences with journalling and mothering; however, autoethnography encourages researchers to explore "the contradictions they

experience” (Ellis and Bochner 2000:738). As Bass (2002) also points out “[r]eal life is messy and even those who write about the self’s experience change over time” (183). Therefore, as both researcher and participant, I know what I choose to disclose and what details I chose to change within an entry. I address this partially in presenting approaches of reflexivity, rapport, and collaboration within auto/ethnographic and feminist work; but also in explaining the reasons for not disclosing or for changing certain information within my entries.

Protecting myself and my personal relationships is a priority that may outweigh my need to push forward in my research. However, by focusing on the contexts of my research, and taking “my participant’s” disclosure at face value, I will attempt a balance between my desire to advance my research, and the need to protect myself and my family (DeVault 1997; Reinharz 1992). Whether or not this balance can be maintained remains uncertain, as the ‘messiness’ of life and the ‘contradictions of our experiences’ leave scholars and researchers in ambiguous or blurred positions, despite their use of reflexivity and self-reflection (Bass 2002; Berger 2001; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Reinharz 1992). This uncertainty can leave many researchers uncomfortable, as a desire for ‘legitimate’ and ‘tangible’ research is often desired and expected within academia (DeVault 1997; Pillow 2003).

### *Uncomfortable Reflexivity*

Pillow (2003) has called for a broader use and acceptance of uncertainty in research processes and conclusions. She explains that while researchers often rely on forms of reflexivity to vindicate their research goals, findings, or knowledge; in reality it does nothing more than indicate biases and social locations. Pillow is not suggesting that researchers abandon the use of reflexivity, but rather that we interrupt its comfortable use of gathering

'truths' or assumptions surrounding 'existing knowledge' by recognising that knowledge and experience remain indefinite. This "uncomfortable" reflexivity encourages researchers and readers to review reflexivity, successful conclusions, and our usual 'disclaimers' and justifications with an increasingly critical eye.

For instance, when I first decided to use my journal entries I had not given thought to the issues that might arise from using the actual names of my children, family members and friends. Although I want to present a personal story and preserve a level of openness around my experiences, I also need to consider any possible threats or risks that may be involved in divulging the names of those people who share my life. I therefore decided to use pseudonyms for my children, titles such as "my partner" or "a friend", and change particular details in order to maintain a degree of confidentiality for those included in my entries, a commonly used research practice in social and qualitative research (Bass 2002; Ellis & Bochner 2000; Oakley 1981; Reinharz 1992).

However, when I consider how easily readers could detect who I am speaking of, despite the changed details or pseudonyms used, the validity of this practice is certainly challenged. How easily have readers been able to identify the participants or locations discussed in other research projects? Is this process really meeting the standards of confidentiality? Or is it being used to illustrate the efforts of following standard research protocol, and to offer participants or readers a (false) sense of security? Why then do I continue to use this false, but comfortable, process?

I believe the use of this process links to a desire and sense of expectation in providing valid or 'truthful' knowledge in our research. Using specific practices offers a sense of security that what is presented meets certain field standards and therefore will qualify as

credible research. This type of mindset is what many feminist and social researchers are now trying to challenge. For instance, Pillow (2003) explores how the use of reflexivity has become almost synonymous with legitimate or valid research, providing that sense of (false) security regarding successful, rapport building, qualitative research. She explains,

For example, my students often assume if they engage in a series of “reflexive” techniques or a set of methods that are devised for the purpose of exposing the “context” of production of their research and as long as the required techniques are soundly and methodologically carried out, they can be assured that “reflexivity” has occurred and thus that their research is more valid, more truthful, and that they have captured the voice of their subjects. 186

DeVault (1997) also discusses the perception that the use of methods and theorizing automatically legitimizes the research; or as she suggests “ [t]he story is meant to say, “Believe me, because I did it right” (219).

Thus it is this desire to “do it right” that encourages the use and sustainment of comfortable research practices that in reality can be easily challenged within their functions and purposes. The assumption that reflexivity, for instance, will provide ‘valid’ research, capture the ‘voice of participants’ or present an intimate awareness of the self, also perpetuates the idea that a researcher can know their ‘true’ self, or be honest about herself (Bateson 1989; DeVault 1997; Long 1999; Pillow 2003). However, as DeVault (1997) points out “any story of one’s life is a truth that is highly selective and crafted for particular purposes, both conscious and not” (221).

It is this realization that Pillow wishes to highlight in interrupting the standard or familiar uses of reflexivity for an “uncomfortable reflexivity - a reflexivity that seeks to

know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous” (188). She explains the importance of evaluating our research practices, and challenging the comfortable standards or claims of success, in order to represent the realities of qualitative fieldwork and improve its credibility.

She states,

This is not easy or comfortable work and thus should not be situated as such. The qualitative research arena would benefit from more “messy” examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research. 192-193

Reflexivity and uncomfortable reflexivity therefore merge and interconnect as important research strategies in recognizing personal and social locations, building rapport, challenging our assumptions and improving the credibility of qualitative research. These two strategies allow for the exploration of the researcher/participant relationship and the messiness that surrounds autoethnographic work where the two roles intertwine on a more personal and complex level. I use reflexivity to employ the personal awareness needed to recognize my immediate involvement with my topics, and the experiences (both physical and emotional) that are attached to my research. I use uncomfortable reflexivity to challenge any assumptions I have made in relation to my personal involvement with the research, recognize the contradictions that emerge when conducting research as both the participant and researcher, and to accept the impossibility of resolving the subjectivity that exists in (my) research (DeVault 1997; Juhasz 2003; Long 1999; Wong 1992)

*Subjectivity, the Self, and "Who Am I?"*

There are various ways of approaching subjectivity within narrative, autobiographical or autoethnographical writing. Wong (1992), for example, discusses the use of partial self within Native American autobiographies. She explains how Native American self-conceptions are greatly linked to the landscape, and therefore, like the landscape, are never fixed but change over time. She continues to describe Native American autobiographical mediums that often only express a section or event within an individual's life, and how these mediums, like those created by Europeans, are influenced by social and cultural contexts. She affirms that "[t]he autobiographer has a culturally defined audience in mind, and that culture-audience, in part, shapes the autobiographer's self-narrative" (17).

My thesis similarly involves presenting a portion of myself within the context of a transitional time that will continue throughout my adult life. Through my journal entries, thoughts, and theories I am presenting a partial self whose story has been constructed within the confines of the knowledge of my audience, as well as potential audiences. My discretion and disclosure is therefore influenced by the need to meet the actual and perceived expectations of these audiences.

Foucault (1984) also examines the subjectivity of the author and the influence of audience. He explores the various roles, functions and relationships that influence the nature of 'the author' and her discourse, suggesting that,

Perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each. The manner in which they are articulated according to social relationships can be more readily understood, I believe, in the

activity of the author function and in its modifications than in the themes or concepts that discourses set in motion. 117

Foucault also asserts that while it is generally assumed that an author serves or maintains distinct responsibilities and roles, in fact, the 'author function' cannot be split into separate identities or functions as the author employs multiple selves simultaneously (112-113).

In examining approaches to the triad of creative work, subjectivity, and mothering, it appears that ambivalence, guilt and attempts to split the self also become key characteristics (Juhasz 2003; Rich 1995; Suleiman 1994). For example, Juhasz (2003) discusses that women writers often feel the compulsion to split their social identities, as societal and cultural pressures (both external and internal) often dictate that a woman should not hold multiple roles or identities. A woman is therefore taught to believe that she cannot be mother/daughter/friend/lover/writer; but must choose and focus her mind, energy, and time on one single role: mother being preferred. Rather than encouraging this splitting of identities, or having women separate their writing selves from their mothering selves, Juhasz suggests women use writing to claim the ambivalence and interconnectedness surrounding all the roles and identities they possess. She believes that by embracing this ambivalent subjectivity women can write, mother, and challenge the ideals that suppress women's creativity and success.

Suleiman (1994) also recognizes the social pressures that perpetuate ideals regarding a woman's needed ability to separate the mother-self from the writer-self in order to address subjectivity in one's work and have one's work appear valid in comparison to her male counterparts'. This separation is also pushed in order to judge whether a mother's creative

work, and the time committed to that work, is worthwhile in comparison to dedicating herself solely to the needs of her child. Suleiman therefore discusses the guilt and fear associated with the approach of separating identities, and the need for a more inclusive recognition of the many selves that a woman develops and maintains.

It is interesting to contemplate how an individual could possibly separate one/self from her various other selves to address subjectivity or acknowledge validity. It seems an impossible act when our 'selves' are moving, shifting, diverse, and constructed ideals that are intertwined with and based on the contexts, experiences, and interactions we engage with in our daily lives (Etter-Lewis 2000; Perreault & Kadar 2005; Wong 1992). We shape our/selves and self-censor in order to change and move with the processes of our lives and the expectations that are set before us. The very nature of our story shifts and changes with every re-telling; and so one 'true' sense of self, or knowledge of the self, cannot exist without acknowledging that it is only a partial representation, and that subjectivity will inevitably exist and remain interconnected within our various identities (Culley 1985; Etter-Lewis 2000; Flemons & Green 2002; Kremer 2003; Wong 1992).

Long (1999) also discusses the diversity of the self, and the influence of audience on the representations of self. In particular she focuses on women's voices and the impossibility of splitting identities or having one 'authentic' voice. She states,

Equally, "the" authentic voice of women cannot be designated; the diversity of women's voices cannot be reduced to one. The voices women find reflect the language they hear; they are marked by the individual's location in society and history. Women ourselves employ different voices for different messages and different audiences. 57-58

Due to the extent that we, as individuals, feel ‘the gaze’ of our societies and cultures, we often utilize self-censoring as a way to represent what we think may be expected, or advantageous. As I have discussed previously, and as my own entries will demonstrate, even within the private realm of journal writing women continue to self-censor their words, thoughts and expressions (Bunkers 2001; Etter-Lewis 2000; Long 1999). How then, can we assume that a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ self would be possible within the public realm, where external pressures are experienced to a larger extent?

The examination of reflexivity, subjectivity and ‘authentic’ voice, has led me to the uncomfortable conclusion that everything is ever-changing and shifting, and therefore, I can not assume that reflexivity or self-awareness will detect the biases and influences in my life and my writing. This ever-shifting flow of life and experience also means that I cannot answer “who am I?” inside (and outside) of this research as it would be impossible to include all the elements, voices, and events that construct my ideas of who I may be or perceive myself to be. What I can present to you are the thoughts and ideas I held while writing this chapter, and my personal expressions of emotion, experience, and thought during the highly stressful and ambiguous times of motherhood.

#### *Uncertainty, Messiness and Validity of Research?*

Does the recognition that I am self-censoring myself, that internal and external pressures will influence my selection of journal entries, and that I find it impossible to answer ‘who am I?’ diminish the validity and legitimacy of my research? Can it be left in this uncomfortable ‘messy’ state, without the ‘successful’ interpretation, justification, the usual ‘disclaimers’, and analysis of social location and biases?

Long (1999) discusses the importance of posing such questions and expanding our understandings of knowledge within feminist research by “discarding dissociative methods in favour of feminist praxis of connection; embracing “messiness” and abandoning monistic linear narrative” (118). She also explains the significance and validity of ‘embracing this messiness’ when she states,

An open-ended text can reflect feminist epistemology. The narrator leaves the door open to disputability, refusing to cover up the lack of fixity in the reality that is being discussed. Rejecting pretensions to a single right answer, the narrator repudiates the authoritative narratorial voice. 124

In leaving my use and discussion of reflexivity, self, and subjectivity in a state of “messiness” it is also my intent to leave the door open to further discussion, as well as recognize the untidy realities of mothering, journalling and autoethnographical work. While I have read the literature, taken the classes, developed scholarly knowledge on my topic, and hold personal experience with journalling and mothering, I remain an individual who is influenced by her surroundings, who self-censors, and who can not claim to know ‘who she is’, or have ‘the fixed answers’.

I do believe, however, that there are shared experiences of motherhood across borders and cultures: experiences of guilt, loss, joy, wonder, and frustration. I believe that journalling has assisted me in processing, reflecting and moving through these experiences. I also believe that in sharing my experiences and thoughts around mothering, and the therapeutic potential of journalling through motherhood, I can broaden understandings around these topics.

My approach to my research, writing, and analysis therefore embraces the messiness of uncertainty while maintaining some forms of scholarly standards. This contradictory positioning allows for the interconnectedness of ambivalence and contradiction within the use of various forms of qualitative research strategies. In her book *Composing a Life* Bateson (1989), for example, also employs an approach that challenges assumptions of investigative standards and accepts the tenuous nature of research. In regard to research involving forms of personal narrative she asserts,

I have not tried to verify these narratives, beyond attending to issues of internal consistency and checking them against my knowledge of the individuals. The accounts as I heard them are themselves part of the process of composing lives. They are autobiographical, not biographical, shaped by each person's choice and selective memory and by circumstances of our work together. No doubt they are shaped again by my own selections, resonating variously with my own experience. 33

I too accept that my own autoethnographic work is shaped by my experiences, my work, my life, and my engagement with those around me. Beyond what I have presented within my chapters, I offer unverified moments and experiences in the con/text of the research and the time it was written. There will be segments of my research where my personal situation as a mother, partner or friend will outweigh my role as a researcher, places where I am only willing to reveal a partial image, rather than allowing for the full story to be exposed. As I have stated, I do not expect that my use of reflexivity, autoethnography, or the knowledge gained from my other sources of methodology will fully address or alleviate these situations and issues. However, I do know that I can live with the uncomfortable reality of

this “messiness” and continue to consider my research to be valid and beneficial (DeVault 1997; Long 1999; Pillow 2003).

I will use the research strategies discussed in this chapter, as well as the knowledge, understandings, and dialogues explored throughout this thesis, to present and interpret my own journal entries in the following chapter. This interpretation will demonstrate my own experiences with the therapeutic and empowering act of journaling through the many transitions of motherhood.

## Chapter 4

### **Journal Entries:**

*An analysis of my personal journal entries and their significance within the context of my research*

In this chapter I will present and analyse a selection of my own journal entries that support the main arguments discussed in this thesis, mainly that motherhood can be experienced as shock, trauma or stress, and that journalling may be used as a coping mechanism through this stressful or traumatic transition. This analysis will also explore the internalization of external pressures, the influence of 'potential readers' on my journal writing, and the benefits, and interconnected existence, of emotional expression and cognitive processing. My entries function as tangible examples that substantiate the literary findings I have presented regarding the value of journalling as a space for women, and specifically mothers, to claim a voice, reflect on personal experiences, thoughts and feelings, and move forward with an increased sense of self- understanding and efficacy. Each entry I present will involve a reflexive examination that may include questions surrounding how it relates to the research, what position it supports or refutes, why I included it, or if I had any reservations toward its disclosure. I may also offer, where I deem necessary, contextual explanations surrounding the time it was written, and the possible meanings within the entry.

Prior to this analysis, it is important that I explain the pseudonyms used in the entries, and the time frame I chose surrounding the entries selected. I will also provide a brief discussion regarding the broader findings I discovered while reading and examining my journals for this thesis.

*Pseudonyms, Time Frame and Selecting Entries*

As I discussed previously, despite the knowledge that readers could likely detect who I am speaking of, I have decided to use pseudonyms for my children within the entries, my research, and this thesis. I have decided to grant myself, and my partner, this (false) sense of security (Bass 2002; Ellis & Bochner 2000; Oakley 1981; Pillow 2003; Reinharz 1992). My children will therefore be referred to as Peanut (the eldest), and Bug (the youngest). These were the names my partner and I used during my pregnancies, when we were still undecided on what we would call our children once they were born. I will, as I discussed earlier, use ‘my partner’ to refer to their father (my partner) and ‘friend’ or ‘a family member’ to refer to anyone else mentioned in my entries. I will also, as I explained, be changing or omitting certain details in my entries in order to protect the privacy of my family and friends, but also to protect myself from the diverse consequences of disclosing personal information without the mechanisms for retrieval or rebuttal (Ellis & Bochner 2000; Etherington 2004; Oakley 1981; Wall 2008).

The entries I have selected relate directly to my mothering experiences, or offer examples of the issues raised regarding the potential benefits and barriers to journalling. The process of selecting my entries included re-reading entries with particular themes in mind. I wanted to ensure that the entries I chose related to the literature but also clearly demonstrated the difficulties I had experienced in and throughout mothering, as well as the benefits and potential I saw associated with journalling. I therefore looked for entries that could be classified within specific themes such as; feelings of shock, isolation, exhaustion, being silenced, feeling empowered by writing, signs of processing and reflecting on what I was experiencing and also times of emotional expression. This has meant that certain

entries are only segments of a full entry. Selecting only the pertinent information from a given entry was a necessary choice, as any given entry may explore a variety of unrelated issues or events. In order to address any concern that contextual information may be missing when only presenting a fragment of an entry, I will describe the context leading to and surrounding the issue or event discussed.

While it was necessary to establish a procedure for how I would select my entries, it was also pertinent to impose a time frame on which entries I would consider researching and selecting. For example, I had to ask myself where I would begin; would I include the journal entries made during my pregnancy, or even earlier entries that discussed considerations of motherhood? Although pregnancy may be considered a key cultural and social signifier of a woman's journey into motherhood (Nelson 2007), not all mothers experience this transition, and personally, I do not believe pregnancy encompasses the realities of motherhood to the same degree as a physically present child. I therefore chose to include only those entries that were written after my first child was born; disregarding all entries written during my first pregnancy, or earlier. I will, however, be including journal entries during my second pregnancy as at that point I was mothering my eldest child.

In contemplating possible timeframes to impose on my journal-writing research, I realized that the very knowledge that I would be using my own entries in my research would likely affect the way that I wrote or expressed myself in my journals. For instance, the potential audience I have struggled with as a diary keeper, would now become an intended audience of known and unknown readers, possibly leading to further restrictions within my entries regarding disclosure or self-censorship. In order to address this issue I decided not to include any entries dated in or later than August 2009, as this was roughly the period I

started considering this thesis topic. My timeframe for the journal entries included in this thesis therefore consists of a period of six years; June/July 2003 to June/July 2009.

### *General Findings*

Before I begin my examination and analysis of specific journal entries, I feel it is of interest to briefly discuss some general findings uncovered through my research. These findings reveal broader understandings in relation to mothering and journaling. For example, although women face a variety of challenges and responsibilities throughout their mothering experiences, the degree of intensive care a child needs does lessen for those children who are able to grow more independent, and learn to care for themselves. I found in reading my entries that as my intensive mothering responsibilities lessened, so did the amount of stress or trauma surrounding my role as a mother. My entries from 2007 to 2009, for instance, became more focused on personal relationships, individual goals, career and educational paths than on issues I was facing as a mother or in transitioning through motherhood. The external pressures to split identities or follow a 'good mother' script continued; however, the ability to embrace the interconnected roles of mother and multiple selves seemed to increase or became easier in relation to my children's growing independence.

I also noticed that my journals had become a site for empowerment and self-advocacy, not only by giving myself a voice and space to think through the issues I was facing at the time, but through the constant reminders I would write to myself to speak-up for myself, my beliefs and my needs. I would also remind myself to stop, or slow down, and to really contemplate what stressors or pressures, both internal and external, may be causing the feelings I was having. This allowed me to reframe the situation and create an awareness

around what I could do to address the situation effectively. The act of reading my entries for the purpose of this research also provided space to reflect on my past and current situations, take notes in my present journal, and remind myself again of patterns that I may follow, situations that I need to address, or what skills I can use to problem-solve and move forward in my life.

The following section of this chapter provides a more specific analysis of my entries or segments of entries. Each entry or analysis supports the arguments made and positions presented in this thesis. Certain segments may provide clear examples of feeling shock of stress within motherhood, and desperately needing an outlet for voicing those feelings of shock and trauma; others may illustrate the influence of ‘potential’ audience on my writing, or the degree to which cognitive processing was used along side, and intertwined with, emotional expression. There are quite a few entries that demonstrate or support more than one position, I have, however, tried to organize them as logically as possible to preserve some order in relation to the arguments previously made throughout this thesis.

### *Entries and Analysis*

The following entries are presented as tangible examples substantiating my belief that journalling has the potential to offer therapeutic and empowering benefits to women through their many transitions as mothers. I offer an analysis surrounding these entries; however, in truth I feel the entries largely speak for themselves.

For example, the first entries I present here clearly support Ann Oakley (1979,1981), Grossman et al. (1980), Leifer (1980) and Mauthner’s (2002) findings that motherhood can be experienced as shock, trauma, or stress. They also establish the need for women to have a space to express the realities of mothering and challenge the ideal that motherhood is

always a happy and joyous time. Similar to what the participants in the above mentioned studies disclosed, the following entry discusses the shock and ambivalence I felt in becoming a mother, linking the inconsistencies between the external images of motherhood and the internal realities of mother-work.

**June 29,<sup>6</sup> 2003,**

**This is so hard - no one tells you how hard it will be. It really sucks. You don't even go day-by-day with some good and some bad, but by moment. One minute I am positive and happy about my life, Peanut, everything, the next, I think I've made a bad decision and don't know how I will cope for 18 years of parenting!<sup>7</sup> Sometimes I can look forward happily, other times I just want my pre-Peanut life back.**

Another example of the stress and trauma I felt in adjusting to the transitions of motherhood is illustrated in the following segment of an entry.

**Oct 8th, 2003,**

**I love Peanut with all my heart and soul but my god this is so hard. I don't think I'll ever want to do it again- I just don't have the strength to put myself through this much emotional, psychological and physical stress and sacrifice again.**

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<sup>6</sup> Question marks appear as they do in my entries - I often write without knowing the exact day, and so I add a question mark to confirm this uncertainty. This is also a symbol of the influence of an implied or potential audience as I personally would not need to know the exact dates I write, but an outside reader might!

<sup>7</sup> I do understand parenting does not magically end when your child turns of legal age (at the time of writing this entry we lived in Alberta where the legal age is 18). However, that is the age in which I hoped the level of dependency would shift, if it didn't sooner. It also represents an 'end mark' I created long ago to cope through the intensive times of motherhood.

Accompanying these stressful or traumatic experiences is the inner conflict felt in trying to maintain an idea of who you are as an individual and who you have become as a mother. While other cultures may support the interconnection of these two roles, in Western society women are taught to weigh the two against each other, often with external pressures dictating that women should choose their mother role as the priority, or that the mother role will offer women the most fulfillment in their lives (Anderson & Zinsler 2000; Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Coontz 2000; Hays 1984; Rosenberg (Morris & Gordon) 1995).

For example, in this next entry I address the impact of parenthood on my relationship with my partner, but I also discuss the expectations and images of mothers and of motherhood that were presented to me, and that I was waiting to experience. The positive experiences of “loving being a mom”, or “feeling complete” are presented in media, film, advertisements, and also in many women’s personal stories (Grossman 1980; Hays 1984; Leifer 1980; Oakley 1979; Rosenberg 1995), and yet I wasn’t experiencing it. In reality I felt resentful and trapped in this new role.

**August 9, 2003,**

**I miss my partner really. I miss cuddling and being together and being each other’s focus- I miss being best friends. I miss the boys<sup>8</sup> and cuddling with them and them being our babies....**

**They say having a baby changes you as a person - but I still feel like me - only more tired and trapped. When will this**

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<sup>8</sup> Here I am talking about our two cats, who after the children were born became known as ‘our kitty boys’ rather than just ‘the boys’.  
(RIP Groucho)

**new person - the “being a mom is great” person be coming? I keep waiting - to fit into this role - to feel like I am complete and content with my life now - with my family - but I just feel tired, trapped and resentful.**

The inner conflict of mothering ambivalence; of hating the responsibilities or role of mothering while passionately loving your child, is one that some women feel they cannot express outwardly. It is important then that women in this situation have a safe space to express their thoughts honestly and reflect on the cause of their feelings and circumstances (Hays 1984; Leifer 1980; Oakley 1979). In order to demonstrate this need for expression, particularly in face of society’s suppression and rejection of women voicing their conflicted ambivalence, I present three entries.

The first entry is an honest expression of how I felt at a time when I was particularly frustrated with my responsibilities as a mother. It is something I felt I could not say aloud, but the safety of my journal permitted me to express it to myself. It is still something I would not speak of readily, and so it was a difficult decision to include it here; as it now can be read by anyone and I can be judged in many ways by those who may read it, including my son. However, I decided it needed to be included so that the realities of what may be experienced or felt through motherhood were made visible, and also to acknowledge that women should be allowed to express what they are feeling or thinking in a moment without being judged as “bad” or “cruel” mothers for having those thoughts as other researchers have found (Crawford 1990; Fildes 1990; Hays 1984; Mauthner 2002; Willard 1988). I have questioned my decision to have children many times, and likely will continue to question it throughout my life; however, I also know that I could not imagine not ever knowing my

children, not engaging with them, and not being a presence in their lives, or having them be a presence in mine.

**July ?, 2003,**

**I am sick and tired of crying<sup>9</sup>, of my clothes not fitting, of my body not being normal, of not having my life. I would give Anything to have my life back. This was the worst decision of my life.**

The second entry switches to the love I felt for my son and the enjoyment I experienced in mothering him. I included this entry to show the conflict of one day absolutely hating mothering, to another where it brings joy and happiness.

**July 12, 2003,**

**Well today is a good Peanut day. I love him so much. I enjoy it when he is awake- and smiles - and chats! He is so amazing! He gets better and better with age! And now I am wondering what life was like without him!**

The third entry discusses this ambivalence and conflict and brings in reasoning regarding the exhausting responsibilities of mothering in a society that encourages intensive and sole care of a child to one parent, often the mother (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Helterline 1980; Horwitz 2005). It also brings attention to the lack of understanding women may experience when expressing this inner conflict or ambivalence in mothering.

**August 6 ?, 2003,**

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<sup>9</sup> The crying I mention here is likely my son's crying, but could also be referring to my own.

My partner doesn't think I enjoy Peanut very much because he always sees me in the morning when I am tired and annoyed at Peanut's lack of sleep - or well mine really- Peanut seems fine with it. He doesn't realize how I love to play with Peanut, and how I love his smiles and his cuddles all day. I do enjoy Peanut, I just get tired too. Because there is hardly any time to get things done or have me time... I guess he might never know what it's like to be home full-time with a newborn. And to love your child so much but to be so tired at the same time- so you can't always enjoy them all the time.

As I mentioned earlier, the intensity of feeling trauma, shock or ambivalence in mothering has lessened along with the degree of intensive care my children require. However, as the following two segments illustrate, ambivalence is always present to some degree in my struggle to balance mothering with work, in feeling the splitting of identities, and also in my attempts to establish some sort of career path.

Feb 4, 2007,

I'm not happy in work but don't know what to do.

I want to be with my kids but too much time makes me crazy.

I just don't know what is going to make me happy.

Oct 29, 2007,

It's so hard to balance my self as academic and my self as mother. I'm not always good at this. Peanut wants to play but I want to be in my head.

While these entries illustrate the continued ambivalence I experienced toward motherhood, they also demonstrate how easily external pressures or societal scripts can be internalized. For instance, as I have indicated earlier in this thesis, it is impossible to split identities or consider our many roles as independent from each other when, in reality, we are constructed by, and of, many varying, ever-shifting, and interconnected selves (Etter-Lewis 2000; Juhasz 2003; Perreault & Kadar 2005; Wong 1992). Yet, in these entries it is evident that I have felt the Western perceptions that a woman must be either a mother 'or' a professional, but certainly not an intertwining version of the two.

This internalization of external pressures is something many women face in their transitions through motherhood. As Willard (1988) points out, many women lose their own voice to various social scripts of the ideal mother, even when these women recognize that those scripts are unrealistic and may not relate to their personal situations. For example, the following entry demonstrates how I had taken the external societal script "Breast is Best" and internalized it; using it as a comparative tool to measure my abilities (or lack there of) as a mother and finally to classify myself within the "bad mother" model. It is evident in this entry that my decision to go against this social script was overshadowed by the guilt and remorse I felt in 'doing my child wrong'.

**July 13 (3am), 2003,**

**This is a night where I think our baby is evil and I hate him. But it's not his fault. He's probably allergic to the formula and should be having breast milk- but it's too late because I took him off. He kept fighting me but maybe I was too quick to put him on formula, maybe I didn't try hard enough. Now he will always have health problems and will probably always**

cry through every night for the rest of his life. And he'll know it was because I was a terrible mother and should never of had him because he deserves better- but is stuck with me. A terrible woman.

The social scripts we internalize as mothers, are often constructed ideals that have been created to further patriarchal systems and objectives. For instance, as I discussed in the historical context of Western motherhood, Rousseau and other male philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promoted the enlightened model of motherhood to encourage women's decreased participation in the societal and political realms. This model claimed that if a woman simply focused on the home, and ignored all other outside interests or ambitions, she would then feel complete and fulfilled in her life (Anderson & Zinsler 2000; Trouille 1997). Although this ideal was heavily promoted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it appears in my own writing in the twenty-first century.

**June 16, 2006,**

I do want to be a fun mom. I have to just focus on the kids more and let everything else rest. Make my head stop thinking about the million things I want to, should do ect. I just need to stop and enjoy.

**Feb 14, 2009,**

I wish them all away so often - just so I can work, sleep, be - without interruption. But they are my support, my home, and if I just stop to appreciate what I have, I am sure I would feel differently in the moment.

While I do not agree with many of the constructed societal ideals of motherhood, past and present, I continue to internalize these ideals to one degree or another. Challenging this internalization by speaking out against the external pressures we experience as women and mothers can be difficult. I often felt, for example, that my attempts to voice my thoughts or feelings surrounding the social scripts of motherhood were rejected, leaving me with limited space to consider these dilemmas and conflicts. I felt fortunate, however, to continue to have a space for my voice within the pages of my journal.

**Aug 10, 2003,**

**I feel like I can't express myself at all anymore. If I do everyone thinks I don't enjoy, love or want Peanut.**

**Oct 25, 2005,**

**I feel so isolated. I don't feel like I can complain or say anything about my life being hard, or me being tired or anything, as there is always someone there to point out how good I have it- how I just exaggerate how difficult things are. Sure life could be worse, sure I'm lucky to have what I have, but that doesn't mean it's easy.**

This last segment also relates to the guilt I often felt, and other women may feel, in having difficulties through motherhood when I knew I was coming from a privileged place within my societal and cultural location. However, privileged or not, I also believe that it is important for all women to have a voice and the acknowledgement that their thoughts, feelings, and experiences are valid. Journalling can provide the space for this voice. As the

next segments illustrates, journaling became an important and integral outlet for me, providing me with a much needed means of expression and processing in my life.

**Dec 31, 2005,**

**I'm so excited about having a journal again. I think it really helps me to work through my emotional roller coasters by writing things down and by venting. Once I've done it, I feel so much better, and can move on...I have missed having my outlet for all my emotions.**

My need to express myself or to have a voice has been a key factor throughout my experiences as a mother. As Mauthner (2002) and Willard (1988) indicate in their studies, many women feel they lack the opportunity to voice their own thoughts or maintain their own cultural scripts throughout motherhood, but also as women living within the restrictive gender roles and ideals our society constructs and places upon them (Anderson 2001; Belenky et al. 1986; Bunkers 2001; Long 1999; Schiwy 1994). For instance, in one entry I comment on how I felt pressured to abide by social expectations of being 'the good listener' in my personal relationships, yet in turn felt that I was not afforded a voice of my own, **"I'm so sick of listening and never feeling like I get a chance to be heard"** (March 12, 2006). This commentary is important as it links to Belenky et al.'s (1986) findings that women relate confidence and identity directly to voice. Their participants spoke strongly about their needs and desires to be heard. They not only wanted the opportunity to voice their thoughts, but also wanted the sense or recognition that someone had listened to and acknowledged their voice. This relationship between voice and identity is also examined in

my journal-writing, where I analyse a dream and its relation to my life and lack of feeling heard.

**January 23, 2009,**

Last night I dreamt that I had died - but someone decided to keep me on life support. I walked around the house (not sure whose) thinking I was imagining it - until I scared this little white dog - and then I bumped into this guy and he got really scared. Can you hear me I asked - yes - Can you feel me I asked - yes - Can you see me I asked - no - I had become invisible. Everyone was happy I was alive and I was happily reunited with my partner, Peanut and Bug. We all hugged, but they couldn't see me.

~ I wonder if this is a reflection of feeling invisible in my own home and family? I often feel my views, events, work, etc. are not valued or heard, or asked to be heard....

By highlighting how I believed I often lacked a voice within the home, I establish the significance of this key element to my own identity, growth, and existence. I also demonstrate that the one place that did provide me with a space to voice my thoughts, acknowledge and reflect upon them, and have them heard (by 'me' the intended audience) was my diary. As I state in the previous segment, my journal was a place where I could express myself, work through my emotions, and move forward. What these two entries also illustrate is that my journal not only provided a space for expressing emotional experience, but also applying cognitive and analytical processing.

These elements are intricately intertwined within my journaling; I express emotions but then stop to address why I may be feeling that way, or what I might do to improve my situation. For instance, in the last entry I describe my dream, but also link it to what I was experiencing in my daily life, thereby examining its significance in relation to my existing reality. In other entries, after using my journal as an outlet for pure emotional expression, I add an understanding of the other elements that may be contributing to what I was feeling, **“Oh well. I know a lot of these feelings have to do with me being tired, self-conscious [in my role as a mother], and because my partner and I never get quality time together anymore”** (Oct 29, 2003), and much later, **“But I also know that it’s winter, I’m tired, I may be menstruating soon, and so this could all be part of it”** (Feb 22, 2009).

I discovered through my research that there was a common system of using my journal as an outlet for my emotions, as a way to organize my thoughts over a course of a few days (and entries), and finally as a process of applying what I discovered or learned to my life by opening dialogues with those around me and moving toward activism. I noticed that the entries following my highly emotional excerpts usually began with introductions such as **“Well, my partner and I talked...”** or **“I had a big talk with my friend...”** demonstrating how my emotional expression converged with my cognitive and analytical processing, evolving into an outer dialogue, action and obtainable solution. The following example illustrates this point. It was written during a process of re-reading my journals that I began after our move to Halifax.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Periodically I do go back and re-read journals to reflect on past events, thoughts, and experiences, as well as to continue to learn about myself, my traits and patterns, and what issues continue to emerge and may need greater attention.

January 5, 2009,

Another thing I noticed in my journals is our pattern of getting settled and then suddenly pushing ourselves in situations of drastic changes or chaos and stress. I hope, I told my partner today, that we can stop and reflect a bit more so we can enjoy the "settled" experience a bit longer and find other means to satisfy our urges for change or for new challenges - such as local classes, some travelling or something.

While the above entry does not deal with motherhood per se; it does illustrate the analytical elements that exist in keeping a diary. I will note, however, that although writing aided in organizing my thoughts, thereby engaging cognitive processing, the deeper levels of analysing and understanding my situations came from re-reading and reflecting on my entries. This act of regular reflection is something that may need to take place in order to fully benefit from journalling; as writing for the self involves overcoming various barriers in writing, reflecting, and addressing the potential audience.

The fear of a potential audience may stop some individuals from even considering keeping a journal, or it may influence their journalling to such a degree that their 'writing for the self' becomes more of a literary or academic work. My own journalling has not been immune to the presence of the 'potential audience'. Although I usually manage to put any potential readers out of my mind and write for myself, I do find entries that are clearly written for someone other than myself. For instance this next segment demonstrates how I do sometimes write for 'potential readers'.

August 6?, 2003,

And just for the record - yes - of course I love, adore, and enjoy my son- it's just that parenting is not always enjoyable and it is VERY hard - and a hard adjustment. And I am honest about it so I will express myself when I am not enjoying it - but that doesn't mean I don't love my son or that I'm not in love with my son - because I am and he is wonderful!

This statement is not necessarily expressed for my sake, but more likely for any potential readers who may find and read my journal. It is a disclaimer, written for that possible chance that someone may at some point read my journals and think what a terrible mother I was for always complaining about my children and motherhood. This statement is there to declare to the unknown reader that I am a "good mother", that I do love my kids, but, in my defense, there are very real hardships experienced in motherhood. It illustrates the degree to which the potential reader can creep into private writings, even when the author presumes to be writing for herself.

Other barriers that I have experienced in my journalling are the outside expectations of what a journal 'should' look like, how an individual 'should' write, and the perception that negative emotional expression 'should not' be the focus of journalling. While I agree that individuals need to recognise that negative emotional expression requires careful processing, in order to avoid cyclical arguments or positions; I continue to believe, as I stated earlier, that any expression of emotional experience can lead to and interconnect with acts of cognitive processing, organizing thoughts, describing feelings, and analytical applications of

creating accessible opportunities for reflection and reframing. My struggle to maintain my own beliefs surrounding these issues and not to allow the 'shoulds' of journalling to creep into my journal writing, is demonstrated in this next entry.

**Jan 24, 2009,**

**I changed journals and approaches to journalling because I felt my previous one may have been too negative - mostly just me complaining. However, after my experiences looking over my entries I've realized they weren't negative at all. Just honest statements about how I felt at the time.**

A second external expectation that can also act as a barrier to people's journal writing is the element of time. Many people tell me they do not have enough time to write, believing that in order to keep a diary one must write in it every day. However, as diary keepers and those that research journal literature have presented, journalling does not have to follow any rigid schedules, but is simply there for those key times a person needs to express, address or organize their thoughts (Bunkers 2001; Culley 1985; Schiwy 1994). I, for instance, have gone months between entries and then, during more difficult times, may write everyday or several times during a day.

Other examples of writing for a potential audience, or allowing this possibility to influence my writing are illustrated through the many times I have edited my entries by correcting misspelled words, adding to entries already made, clarifying details, or finally, crossing out segments I did not want to admit to thinking. These changes in my writing, however, also offer insight into what I was feeling at the time, and what subjects or thoughts were considered as taboo even within the reasonably private space of my journal.

Despite these barriers, and the awareness of their existence in my journaling, the significant space journaling provides me to think, process, organize, and reflect on my thoughts outweighs the risks and influences of potential readers. Journaling has helped me navigate through the intense transitions of motherhood while also maintaining a feeling of individuality and self-worth. The therapeutic and empowering benefits I encounter through translating my experiences into written language continue to assist me in my daily life and in transitioning through the many stressful or challenging events that occur across my life. For instance, as this next entry reveals, journaling has contributed to my understandings surrounding my adjustments to mothering and the struggles I have faced along the way.

**Nov 30, 2007,**

I have recently discovered that as the women in my class have had to process and make the journey to calling themselves and identifying as feminist I have had to make the same journey as a mother.

I have never doubted my feminist beliefs or thought it was bad to be called a feminist but I have felt that way about being a mother. Mothering has been such a journey for me, somewhat traumatic because it took me by surprise, not being what I thought it would, feeling I lost my freedom, my individuality.

So I didn't want anyone to know I was a mother- didn't want to be judged on that fact alone, didn't want people to see me as a mother first, and then Tanya as myself.

**But I have realized I am a mother and it does impact on my perceptions, thoughts, experiences and who I am as an individual.**

**And it's ok that I chose this. And it's ok that it was different than I thought it would be. And it's ok to struggle.**

**In the end, I love knowing my children and I can work on my parenting relationship so that it looks and feels like what I think it needs to be for myself and my children.**

By granting myself permission to reframe by being aware of how I felt and understanding why I felt that way, I was able to bring awareness and validation to my situation. I was also able to open myself to recognizing what parenting could look like if I followed and supported my own mothering scripts. My journal then, was, and is, used as a place to encourage or push myself to speak up, advocate for myself and to keep myself, my health, and my sanity as a priority through the transitions of life and motherhood. As I state in my Oct 25th, 2005 entry, when dealing with the constraints of motherhood and external gendered ideals, **"I just need to take care of myself and force the issues more"**.

Questioning and challenging societal expectations in my journal also allowed me to advocate for myself by reflecting on my own decisions and recognizing that, although they may go against the present societal norms, they were made to the best of my ability and with my best intentions in taking care of my health and my children's health.

**Dec 31, 2005,**

**I stopped breast feeding Bug at 5 months. He was doing ok at it- which makes me feel even more guilt for stopping - but I just couldn't keep up. He was feeding every 2 hours and I was**

**the only one who could feed him because I couldn't get any milk pumping- so we started giving him formula at night and I breast-fed during the day, but then he wasn't into the breast anymore- so bottle it is. Peanut was fine and is healthy so I know it's ok but still can't help feel the guilt.**

**Why can't our society teach women to just listen to their bodies, their babies, and do what's right for them and feel good about it? Have support for that?**

While this entry illustrates how I still did not escape the guilt of going against the external scripts of "Breast is Best", an issue that was addressed in an earlier entry regarding my older son, it does demonstrate how I positioned myself differently in dealing with my decision the second time around. I recognized the guilt I was feeling, but no longer categorized myself as a "bad" or "terrible" mother for making the decision to stop breast-feeding. Instead, reframing allowed me to question those external scripts, and the lack of validity given to women who listen to their own needs and that of their babies. The questioning I engaged in allowed me to recognize that while I may feel guilty about it, in the end, I made a decision that would positively affect my own self-care, thereby positively affecting my abilities to care for my child, and resulting in a healthier state of being for both myself and my children.

Challenging external scripts, and my internalization of these scripts, in my journals has allowed me to express and organize my emotions, reflect on the roots of these emotions, create awareness surrounding my circumstances, move forward with the realization that I can make changes, and finally, achieve a sense of self-efficacy and empowerment within this

process and in how I apply it to my life. For example, the following piece<sup>11</sup> addresses the conflict I felt between the external ideal of a mother, and my own understandings of successful mothering and the importance of self-care. It illustrates that I do internalize some external ideals, calling myself a ‘bad parent’ or feeling that my partner may also expect or follow these external ideals, but it also shows that I advocate for myself, supporting my interconnection of individualism and mothering, and recognizing that ultimately it is I who “knows best”.

July 21, 2009,

Tanya is a bad parent, or so they will say  
 She doesn't want to play with her children all day.  
 She wants to have her own time, her own interests, her own life,  
 She wants to love them in her own way.  
 Tanya is a bad parent, or so she is judged by her partner  
 With subtle looks, and comments.  
 Because she doesn't rush to get home.  
 Because she cherishes her time, her space, her own mind.  
 Tanya is a bad parent, it seems  
 But Tanya knows that if she doesn't take her time, if she doesn't  
 breathe it in slowly, loving every solitary minute, being in the  
 present moment of her individualism,  
 She is lost.  
 Tanya knows this is the only way she will survive, the only way she  
 can remain with her family, the only way she can love her children,  
 The only way she can be.  
 Tanya is a bad parent, some might say  
 But Tanya knows better.

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<sup>11</sup> This piece was not written in my journal, but on my computer, during a particularly difficult time of trying to defend my space to complete my ‘invisible’ or ‘devalued’ work: reading, writing, and researching; work that appears to be me ‘playing on the computer’ or ‘just sitting’ and does not necessarily provide an income.

The entries I have discussed here demonstrate the stressful and shocking adjustments women may experience in their transitions through motherhood, the necessity for women to have a voice through these transitions, and the cognitive and emotional processing that is interconnected with translating experience into written language. My personal experiences with journalling have also illustrated the degree to which diary keeping can offer a safe space for women to voice their thoughts, learn from their experiences, acquire therapeutic benefits, and achieve a sense of self-efficacy or empowerment. While not every women will identify with the feelings I have expressed here, it is important to remember that many women across various cultures do experience the strain and oppression of heavily restrictive gender roles and responsibilities, as well as their positioning, within a patriarchal system or the private and domestic spheres (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Kitson 2003; Neufeld 2002; Suleiman 1994).

I will also note that the common experiences women share as mothers do not necessarily need to involve struggles but may involve a consciousness of grieving through our children's many transitions, the acknowledgement that our lives, desires, and needs are constantly changing, and a sense of joy and wonder in witnessing our child(ren)'s growth and development. To substantiate this recognition, and also leave a glint of love and hope in motherhood (the ever-present "but I do love them"), I present the following final entries.

**May 29, 2007,**

**No more baby. No more tiny hands and feet.**

**No suckling- on breast or bottle.**

**Soon no diapers**

**Soon no crib.**

Soon a talking voice instead of signs or cries.  
Soon a lean body instead of your stout toddler form.  
Soon no little soft as satin bum.  
No more pregnancies  
no flitting in my belly  
no kicks to my ribs  
No labour- intense sensations stemming from my cervix  
no pushing  
no stretching  
No tiny crying baby in my arms  
I have to say goodbye  
I have to cry and mourn and grieve  
and enjoy you for who you are now and together we move on.  
I love you little Bug  
I love you little Peanut  
You will always be - my little ones, my babies  
No matter what your size,  
or how deep your voice.

Feb 1, 2007.

I am happy to turn my alarm off.  
Tomorrow my children will wake me and I can slowly wake  
while I watch them run, bounce, play as soon as they get up  
- well as soon as Peanut gets up, Bug luckily, still takes his  
own time to wake.  
I am happy about this thought.

3 1/2 years after Peanut's birth and 19 months after Bug's who would have thought- that the thought of being woken by my children and not an alarm- to wake and spend the morning with my kids and not on the bus by myself- would actually make me happy?!<sup>12</sup>

Feb 26, 2009,

Bug is so sweet - right now at bedtime he'll say - "sleep with me a little bit?" and then when I climb into bed he hugs me so tightly. Then in a whisper voice he counts one, two, pee (three), pour (four), pive (five).....and he lifts his arm up and says "go now".

I could eat his little face it is so sweet.

Peanut, who is looking long and lean these days, has the beautiful freckles on his nose and such golden eyes. Eyes that express everything - even though he tries to deny what they show through his body language. I could eat him up too on the days when he is my little Peanut.

These entries, along with all those included in this chapter, illustrate the broad range of emotions, thoughts, and processes that can be experienced throughout motherhood. The purpose of this chapter was to provide empirical evidence substantiating the findings and positions presented in this thesis regarding the therapeutic and empowering potential of

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<sup>12</sup> This was written after I had moved from being the primary caregiver in the home, to the primary bread winner outside the home, hence the need for an alarm, and the comment about taking the bus. When I was the primary caregiver at home, I envied my partner's "alone time" on the bus...I did enjoy it at first when we switched our roles, however, it wasn't long after that I realized "bus/commute time" wasn't necessarily quality "alone time"!

journalling through motherhood. The entries included in this chapter meet this objective; however, they have also been used to illustrate the barriers, limitations, and fears associated with journalling, motherhood, and claiming a voice. This discussion has therefore demonstrated how, in the face of transitioning through motherhood and the associated feelings of oppression, isolation, loss, and ambivalence, journalling became my coping mechanism. It allowed me to address and manage my experiences by providing me with a space to voice my thoughts, advocate for myself, and recognize that I could create my own parental scripts that would work for myself and my family. It was a safe place to challenge the norms of society that surround motherhood and a meaningful source of encouragement for self-efficacy, and personal growth.

While I believe that other women could benefit from the positive and therapeutic experiences of journalling, journalling within the context of this thesis remains an example of a personal or individual coping mechanism. I therefore believe it is also pertinent to discuss possible institutional or societal coping mechanisms that would also challenge current norms, empower women and their families, and bring about changes to the Western ideal of motherhood. These mechanisms will be discussed in my concluding chapter.

## Chapter 5

### **Conclusion:**

#### *Discussion and considerations for future research*

My objective in writing this thesis was to examine the possibility of using journalling as a tool to empower mothers by providing a safe space for strengthening their voices and increasing their self-efficacy. I also wanted to explore its use as a form of personal advocacy for women working through the adjustments of mothering. My approach to meeting this objective has been largely based on a feminist critical analysis of mothering, extensive literature reviews on journalling, mothering and autobiographical methods, and using autoethnography to provide my personal experiences with motherhood and journal writing. At this point, however, I would like to move to a broader approach and address the necessary institutional, social and community mechanisms that would assist in changing the oppressive nature of the institution of motherhood. Expanding my scope in this manner, albeit a brief discussion, is pertinent to this research as the role of family, and the responsibilities of the mother, are largely formed and shaped in relation to external factors such as the economy, politics, public policies, and the perceived well-fare of the nation (Coontz 2000; Helterline 1980; May 1999; Rich 1995).

#### *Institutional & Social Mechanisms of Support.*

The external factors that form our society's dominant ideologies surrounding motherhood, fatherhood and family, such as the economy, politics, capitalist goals, history, myth and nostalgia, all play a part in shaping what our society expects of women and mothers (Chodorow & Contratto 1982; Coontz 2000; Helterline 1980; May 1999; Yeo 1999). As the intersection between these external factors and the family is readily examined,

scholars, researchers and advocates look toward public and national family policies as possible solutions in addressing the inequality, institutional barriers, and oppression that accompany mothering in our society (Adler & Brayfield 2006; Fagnani 2007; Haas 2003; Hochschild 2003).

For instance, many studies have been conducted on the benefits of parental leave policies and child care services to the empowerment of women, and changing cultural and societal attitudes regarding gender, care and employment in our society. Comparative studies often include policies from the United States and Canada and European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, France and Sweden.

Adler and Brayfield (2006), for example, compare family policies and public attitudes regarding gender and care-giving between West Germany, East Germany and the United States. Their findings illustrate how regional political cultures and policies influence public attitudes about women's employment and roles within the private sphere. The authors argue that the egalitarian family policies that existed in East Germany, prior to its union with West Germany, enforced equal gender attitudes among its people and society. Although many of these family policies, including strong state support for parental leave, child-care services for children of all ages, and child benefits, were lost when the East joined with the West, the study findings show that egalitarian family attitudes among the East German population continued. Women from East Germany resisted the 'European male breadwinner model' being promoted in West Germany by using what childcare services were available and by participating in the labour market. The authors conclude that not only did East German women engage in these activities more than women from West Germany, but they, and their male counterparts, also held stronger equal gender attitudes than those in

West Germany. Women and men in West Germany lived with lower state support for parental leave and child-care services and benefits, thereby influencing their attitudes toward domestic responsibilities and gender, and consequently forming societal gender attitudes that would be less equal than those of East Germany. The equal gender attitudes within the United States, for instance, fell even lower than those in West Germany. The authors gather that this was due to poor policy models that have remained in the United States that include non-existent to low support for parental leave and child-care options. Alder and Brayfield's (2006) study therefore reveals the degree to which public policy influences the societal expectations and attitudes toward family, child-care responsibilities and motherhood.

Haas (2003) also looks towards the European Union in her research on the benefits of parental leave and its impact on gender equality. Haas puts forth that in order to change individual and societal attitudes regarding the family and care-giving responsibilities, changes need to be made to public family policies. She calls for mandatory universal, paid parental leave for both parents, and national day-care services that would guarantee places for infants and children ages 0-6, and would be partially to fully subsidized by the government. Haas' 2002 study on men's use of parental leave in Sweden reveals that more men have participated in the full-time care of their children since Sweden revised its family policy. This policy now includes the condition that 2 months of the 12 month parental leave must be taken by the father. While her study indicates that the organizational culture continues to discourage men from taking more than the two months leave, she also reveals progress within many organizations including recognizing the benefits of men taking the leave and gaining valuable skills from the experience of providing full-time care to their

children, promoting more father-friendly policies at work which allow fathers time off to care for sick children, or for child-related appointments.

Research into family policies in European and Scandinavian countries demonstrate that the paid, flexible, and shared parental leaves, as well as having the national child care systems, have encouraged higher percentages of women participating in the work force, more egalitarian attitudes toward domestic tasks at home, and increased commitment to caring values and 'father-friendliness' by companies and industry (Adler & Brayfield 2006; Fagnani 2007; Haas 2002 & 2003; Saxonberg & Sirovatka 2006). However, these policies remain focused on heterosexual, middle to upper-class, nuclear family ideals and circumstances. For example, the high-quality childcare system in France was implemented to reconcile work and family; however, as Fagnani (2007) indicates, the system mainly assisted members of the middle to upper classes. Accessing childcare services remained an issue for women and families in the lower income brackets who could not afford many of the child-care options that the policies made available.

The lack of pay equity within societies also acts as a barrier to the progress family policies may make in encouraging equal gender attitudes regarding family responsibilities. Although family policies may offer equal opportunity for both parents to utilize parental leave options, the fact remains that women are still more likely to take the majority of the parental leave as they tend to find themselves in lower status positions, with lower pay, and lower hours than their male partners (Haas 2003; Misra et al. 2007; Spakes 1989; Williams & Cooper 2004). Pay equity also becomes an issue among lone mothers, or lesbian parents, who struggle to support their families on lower wages and less work. These women have little control over policies that may create limiting conditions on the paid employment they

return to, or the amount of child-care available. Also, in the case where longer parental leaves are encouraged, women who take lengthy leaves may further delay their re-entry into the labour market and thus prevent themselves from maintaining their labour market skills and their opportunities to gain equal labour market value (Misra et al. 2007; Spakes 1989; Williams & Cooper 2004).

It is also necessary to critically examine the national or political agenda behind family policies. For instance, Fagnani (1998) reveals that while changes to the family policies in France were marketed with family-health in mind, such as encouraging longer parental leaves and benefits for parental in-home care for children, these policies were actually propelled by the country's economic situation and rising unemployment. Encouraging parents to leave their positions of employment to stay home to care for their children opened employment opportunities for unemployed workers, thus addressing the country's unemployment issues. These policies also perpetuate the gendered ideal that women should be the primary care-giver within the home, as the wage gap between men and women resulted in primarily women leaving work in order to take the parental leave offered. This in turn has also impacted on women's potential to participate in higher status positions within the labour-force, as companies have become increasingly wary of hiring women who may in the end leave their positions for child-rearing responsibilities (Fagnani 1998 & 2007).

It is evident then, from this brief discussion, that family policies can perpetuate the classist, gendered and oppressive ideals surrounding the societal expectations of family as well as encourage progressions and revisions toward equal gender attitudes, values, and expectations. What is also interesting, and particularly with the research described by Haas (2002), is that while companies progress in their institutional attitudes toward men's

responsibilities within the family, such as creating “father friendly” policies, these same concepts are not applied to women’s responsibilities within the family. In the same light, the developing perception by companies that the skills and experience gained by men who participate in parental leaves can be beneficial and applicable traits for their employees, has failed to be considered in regard to female employees who have taken maternity leaves.

Women’s work within the home and regarding family care-giving continues to be devalued by the societal perception that mothering is ‘natural’ or ‘instinctive’ for women, while the attitudes toward men’s ability to provide care become more strongly endorsed and valued (Boyd 2003; Haas 2002; Hochschild 2003).

National and public family policies can be utilized as mechanisms of support to women transitioning through motherhood by assisting in changing social, institutional and cultural attitudes toward the gendered assumptions of care-giving and women’s role within the family. However, these policies need to be created within a context that acknowledges the diverse forms of family that exist within our society; maintains a clear objective to support and empower women, and encourage equality across lines of gender, sexuality, culture and class; and enforces pay equity in practice as well as in theory. As Spakes (1989) argues, models of family policies have not “offered real promise of addressing the needs of low income, minority and “alternative” families, nor do any of the proposals address the causes of their distress” (618). Only with a more inclusive and critically aware approach to family policies will we be able to break through the oppressive nature of the institution of motherhood, the normative ideals of ‘family’ and move forward with a broader context of the needs of individuals, women, and their diverse families.

Journalling can also offer a link to the diverse needs of women and their families by presenting first hand experiences of mothering and the difficulties that arise in this role. These difficulties could be more easily addressed if policies were created with a focus and understanding of women's well-being from women's own perspectives. Presently many policies continue to perpetuate socially constructed ideals of motherhood by placing women, and valuing women's worth to society, within their potential role as mothers. The shock or judgement many women feel in transitioning to motherhood can therefore be seen in policies that maintain patriarchal structures and idealized attitudes regarding women's 'natural' role as producers of children: the future generations of the nation. Listening to women's own voices, through journal entries for example, can assist in breaking down these patriarchal ideals, and creating policies that do support women's diverse needs.

I explore the community mechanisms available for supporting mothers and their needs, in relation to the use of journalling, in the next section. This discussion will also explore possibilities for future research surrounding the themes presented in this thesis. In moving from the societal and institutional to more individualized processes, I will note that social and institutional mechanisms are necessary in addressing non-egalitarian attitudes and cultural beliefs surrounding societal ideals and expectations of motherhood. Journalling should not, therefore, be seen as a way to replace the benefits and needs of having economic and social policies in place to assist women and mothers. However, in the day to day lives of women coping with the common difficulties of mothering, journalling can offer a place for women to find voice and experience the therapeutic and empowering benefits of translating their experiences into written language, and may also act as a way to inform future social policies.

### *Future Research and Community Application*

The personal nature of the research provided in this thesis is obviously limited by scope and content. While I have directed my findings to numerous scholarly studies, there are still further studies that could be reviewed and considered. Also, the empirical element of this research is based on the experiences of one woman, from a particular background. For instance, my approach to journalling and coping with mothering is based on middle-class ideals surrounding the possession of space, privacy, and the tools in which to write. My White-European background also has taught me to value the written-word over oral expression or art and imagery that may be more strongly valued and respected in the diverse cultures within North America and the Western world. These middle-class ideals are not only applied to my personal approach in using journalling as a coping mechanism through motherhood, but also in my suggestions for its community application. Therefore, my research and conclusions must be considered mindfully within this context. I suggest then, that in order to examine the full potential of journalling as a coping mechanism through the various and often difficult transitions motherhood, it would be beneficial to engage in larger-scale research studies, such as focus groups, or individual interviews with diverse participants. Ideally, it would be valuable to see similar types of psychological and therapeutic journalling studies, as reviewed in this thesis, be applied to motherhood. The results of these larger-scaled studies could then be used to implement journalling into existing supportive programming for mothers.

For example, Larsen et al. (2003) describe how their participants requested that journalling be implemented into their group counselling sessions, despite the norm for journalling to be encouraged as a solitary therapeutic method for patients who can not

access group counselling. Schiwy (1994), similarly, states that journal workshops create a space for women to take time for themselves, and to listen and support one another without feeling the need to “solve each other’s problems” (250). She stresses that “[m]y hope is that the workshop will “empower” the women who participate by encouraging them to find themselves interesting and to take themselves seriously” (250). While Larsen et al. follow a more structured approach of group journalling, implementing specific writing activities “to gently ease participants into the experience of writing” (284), both Larsen et al. and Schiwy clearly communicate to all group members that sharing openly is the intent of participating in workshops and journal groups. Both also reported that participants conveyed positive feedback on group journalling; expressing that they were able to learn from one another, trust in each other, and use the space safely to voice their thoughts, thereby achieving a sense of empowerment through writing and sharing their experiences.

The creation of journal workshops for mothers would therefore be a valuable tool in supporting women through the various stressful and traumatic events they may encounter in motherhood. These could be offered in conjunction with services already provided to women. The implementation of journalling workshops may help in encouraging women to express themselves and share their stories within a group setting, organize their thoughts, and reflect on what has been discussed or shared in previous group meetings, and ultimately create a supportive environment.

Journal workshops also have the potential of being applied to supportive programming for immigrant and “cross-cultural” mothers whose feelings of isolation and loneliness may be heightened by lack of social support, language barriers, and the difficulties negotiating new cultural norms and ideals surrounding mothering in Canada (Neufeld et al.

2002; Sword, Watt & Kruegar 2006; Yax-Fraser 2007). Journal workshops would allow these women a space to gather, reflect on their experiences, and share common struggles and achievements. If workshops were held in various languages, this may also serve as an opportunity for women to meet other mothers who speak their primary language; creating a sense of community that may otherwise be missing.

### *Final Conclusion*

The prospective of studying the positive and empowering benefits of journalling through motherhood is far reaching and highly valuable to our society's and women's overall well-being as it has the potential to be applied to existing and new supportive programming for mothers across a wide range of backgrounds and social positions. Although the research and personal experiences presented here may not bring forth any new revelations regarding motherhood or journalling, I believe it does remind us of the many unresolved issues or expectations that women continue to face in mothering. This research also establishes the potential of using and connecting journal writing with mothering, and the positive effects of giving women a voice during their transitions through the highly stigmatized institution of motherhood. In summary, despite the examined barriers, risks and limitations, this thesis does offer substantial evidence, both empirical and literary, that journalling through motherhood can offer empowering and therapeutic benefits to women by providing a safe space for strengthening our voices and increasing our self-understanding and efficacy.

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